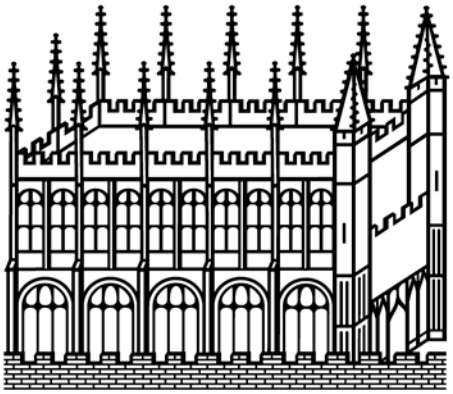
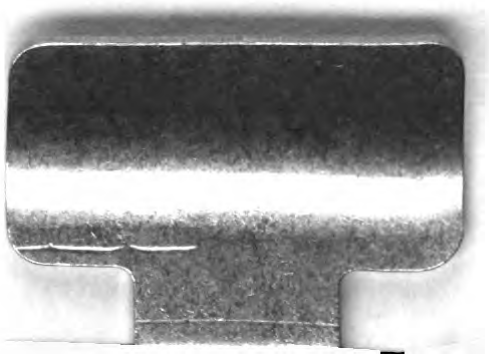


THE GRASSHOPPER AND OTHER STORIES

ANTON CHEKHOV



THE GRASSHOPPER
AND OTHER STORIES

ANTON CHEKHOV

THE GRASSHOPPER

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

Translated with an Introduction by

A. E. CHAMOT

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INTRODUCTION

ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV was born on the 17th of January, 1860, in the city of Taganrog on the Sea of Azov. He was a son of the people, his grandfather and father having been peasant serfs on the estates of the landowner Chertkov, in the Voronezh government. In the year 1841 his grandfather, a very capable and hard-working man, had been able by economy to save sufficient money to buy freedom for himself and his family, for which he paid R.3500, this being R.700 per head, and he received in addition his little daughter Alexandra gratis. On his liberation he went South, and became the bailiff of the estates of Count Platov not far from Taganrog.

Chekhov's father worked at first as clerk in Taganrog where, with the same perseverance that his father had displayed, he saved money until he was able to open a shop of his own. He was a talented man, a lover of music, who sang and played on the violin, and also painted. Anton Chekhov's mother, the daughter of a cloth merchant, with whom she had travelled over nearly the whole of Russia on his business tours, was of a kind and gentle nature, and she had a charming manner of telling her children stories of her travels. In after life Chekhov was wont to say that " they had inherited their talents from their father, but their soul from their mother." The children were brought

up strictly and religiously, and received a fairly good education in the Taganrog gymnasium. Anton Chekhov was a gay and witty youth, full of fun and laughter, and he already showed signs of his future talents by writing stories and plays, arranging private theatricals, or amusing his school-fellows by reading aloud to them stories he found in the library.

In 1876 Anton's father was obliged to give up his business, which was going badly, and the whole family removed to Moscow, with the exception of Anton, who remained in Taganrog to finish his studies at the gymnasium. In the autumn of 1879 Anton joined his family in Moscow, where his father had found employment as clerk in a merchant's office, on a very small salary, and the family were living in great want. Anton entered the Moscow University to study medicine, and at the same time he began to write short stories and sketches of a humorous character for several small newspapers and comic magazines, in order to be able to help towards the support of the family.

In 1884 Anton Chekhov took his degree of doctor of medicine and began to practise, but he soon gave up the medical profession and devoted himself almost entirely to literature. His stories, written under the *nom de plume* of Antosha Tchekhonté, became very popular with the general reader, and soon began to attract the notice of the editors of the more serious newspapers and magazines, who asked him to send stories to them too. In 1886 the old author Grigorovich drew the attention of A. S. Souvorin, the editor of the *Novoe Vremya* (the most influential daily newspaper of the day), to the rising young author, and Souvorin invited him to contribute to his newspaper. Shortly after Chekhov began writing for some of the chief monthly magazines. The first volume of his stories

was published in 1885, under the old *nom de plume* of Antosha Tchekhonté. These were chiefly collected from the humorous stories he had contributed to various periodicals over that name.

However, Chekhov soon deserted the comic vein for a more literary style, and turned his attention to the serious subjects of life, and the volume published in 1887 already showed signs of the works he produced in his maturer years, which made him famous. He studied the deeper and darker sides of life, his thoughts turned upon the manner in which prisoners and convicts were treated, and wishing to be able personally to investigate that subject, he undertook a journey to the island of Sakhalin in 1890–91.

Chekhov's health had never been strong, and in 1886 he had the first symptoms of the malady which eventually carried him off in the prime of life. It was in that year that he had the first attack of hæmorrhage from the lungs, and during the long and difficult journey to Sakhalin he again had an attack on the way. The stress and fatigue of that expedition, which was made before the Trans-Siberian railway was built, probably aggravated his condition, though when he returned he was feeling fairly well. The account of this journey, which he published in his book, *The Sakhalin Island*, produced a great impression on the general public; it also attracted the attention of the government officials, and caused many changes to be made in the conditions under which the convicts had to serve their time.

All these years Chekhov was working hard, and besides stories he began to write for the stage and produced his drama *Ivanov*, and other shorter plays, which at first had but a limited success.

About this time, finding the fatigue of life in town too

much for his state of health which, owing to hard work and the social calls that fame brought with it, was gradually getting worse, Chekhov decided to live in the country, and he bought a small estate called "Milikhovo" in the Moscow government, and removed there with his parents and family, whom during his whole life he had to support. It was in Milikhovo that he was able to study the lives and characters of the peasants and landowners who play so great a part in his works, and it was there, too, that some of his best stories were written, while part of his time he devoted to the practice of his profession of doctor. He only paid occasional visits to Moscow and Petersburg, and made several journeys abroad. Despite these precautions, attacks of hæmorrhage occurred more frequently, and he was ordered by his physicians to live in the South, so he sold Milikhovo, and for several years his life was passed between the South of France and the Crimea, where he bought a villa in Yalta.

In 1895 he wrote *The Seagull*, a play from which he expected very much. But when it was acted for the first time in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Petersburg it proved a complete failure. The best actors of the company took part in it, but they seemed not to understand their rôles, and the audience had expected something comic and could not make anything of the play. Chekhov left the theatre before the end quite disheartened, and he declared he would write no more plays. However, some years later when *The Seagull* was given in the Moscow Art Theatre it was an immense success.

In May, 1901, Chekhov married Olga Leonardovna Knipper, an actress of the Moscow Art Theatre, and immediately after the wedding they left for Ufa, where he was to undergo a koumiss cure. In the autumn of

the same year the state of his health having become worse, he had to remain in Yalta, while his wife went to Moscow to fulfil her engagements at the Art Theatre. In Yalta Chekhov had many visitors. Friends in the literary and artistic world came to see him. Tolstoy, Gorky, Bunin, and Kuprin often stayed in Yalta, and their visits cheered him in what he called his exile in " warm Siberia " ; his heart always yearned for Moscow and the North, where he was only allowed to go for short visits.

His last visit to Moscow was in 1904 to be present at the first performance of *The Cherry Orchard*, which was given at the Moscow Art Theatre on the 17th of January, Chekhov's birthday, and was made the occasion for a celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of his literary career. That night he was greeted by the dramatic companies and the audience with an unprecedented ovation, but, alas ! this triumph was his swan-song. In June of the same year he was ordered abroad, and he and his wife went to Badenweiler in the Black Forest. From there he wrote to his sister he was feeling better, but three weeks later he had another attack and passed away quietly on July 2nd, 1904.

Chekhov was a writer of genius. Both in his short stories and in his dramatic works he shows great originality ; he produced something that had not been known before. Chekhov never wrote a long novel, though there are many of his tales which in Russian come under the generic title of *Povyest* (novelette), such as *The Duel*, *My Life*, etc., or his still untranslated early work, *The Shooting Party*, that might almost be considered novels. His subjects are taken from the life he saw around him, there are no heroic characters ; all his types are the everyday humanity he met among the peasants and the bourgeois classes with whom he

came in contact. They do no great deeds, they have no exalted objects in life, some few try to improve the misery they see around them, mostly without success. He loves to depict the mediocre, the unsuccessful, the oppressed, the poor in spirit, the unhappy, but by the talented portrayal of his pen they are rendered interesting; by a few vivid and characterizing strokes they live and the reader seems to find in them the types that he has met in his everyday life. The public saw at once the power that was so cunningly hidden beneath this simplicity of style, and each new volume that appeared from his pen was hailed as a literary event. The same may be said of his plays, though at first some of them were not successful; their style and subject were too new, both for the actors and the audience, but when they were acted with understanding by the admirable company of the Moscow Art Theatre they became immensely popular.

None of his works have complicated plots or long descriptions of nature or character. They are mostly mere episodes. In a few simple words, that seem sometimes only an enumeration of objects, we have the necessary picture of the scene, the local colour, and by their speech and actions his characters show us what they are, so that no long and detailed analysis of their thoughts and motives is necessary. When Chekhov commenced writing, at the beginning of the 'eighties, Russia was passing through the gloomy years that succeeded the assassination of Alexander II and the accession of Alexander III. The hopes of the nation for reforms and progress were blighted by the retrograde policy adopted by the new Tsar, who gradually and systematically undid much of the work towards political freedom and a higher development in the standards of education and enlightenment that his father had begun

to inaugurate and for which the better elements in the nation thirsted. It is astonishing, living when he did and with his broad and enlightened ideas, that Chekhov was able to keep himself so entirely clear of all political entanglements; and this may be looked upon as a proof of his wisdom, as he could not have done any good by acts or words that would only have brought him into the lists of the suspects. He had his own gospel to preach and he did it in his own way, thereby leaving a more lasting mark on his times than any overt acts could have done; but the time he lived in is doubtless the cause of the greyness and gloom of much of what he wrote, and gave to his stories what his countrymen call the "Chekhov atmosphere."

It is difficult to make a selection of Chekhov's stories, which in general are so equal in merit, for one small volume, and those we offer the reader have been chosen among his best and most characteristic works, to show him in various moods, both gay and sad.

The Rook and the two last stories have not been translated before and they are given as specimens of his early style, which was chiefly of a light and humorous nature—very different from his later works in which, like a skilful doctor, he probes human nature to the very depths of the soul.

A. E. C.

THE GRASSHOPPER

I

ALL her friends and acquaintances were at Olga Ivanovna's wedding.

"Just look at him. Isn't it true there's something about him ?" she said to her friends as she nodded in the direction of her husband, seeming to wish to explain why she had married a plain and very ordinary man, who was not remarkable in any way.

Her husband, Osip Stepanovich Dymov, was a doctor and he had the title of titular councillor. He was on the staffs of two hospitals: in one he was a supernumerary house-surgeon and in the other the dissector. Every day from nine o'clock until midday he was occupied in his ward or in receiving patients, and after midday he went by tram to the other hospital, where he dissected the corpses of those who had died. His private practice was very small, and only produced about five hundred roubles per year. That was all. What else can be said about him ? While Olga Ivanovna and her good friends and acquaintances were in no way quite ordinary people, each of them was remarkable in some manner, and a little famous ; they all had already names, and were considered celebrities, or if they were not as yet celebrities, they all showed brilliant prospects of becoming famous. There was an actor

from the dramatic theatre, a man of great, and long since recognized, talent, an elegant, clever and modest man, an excellent reader, who taught Olga Ivanovna elocution ; a singer from the opera, a fat, good-natured man, who with a sigh told Olga Ivanovna that she was ruining herself : " If she were not so lazy, and only took herself properly in hand, she would become a remarkable singer " ; then there were several painters, headed by Ryabovsky, who painted genre, animal and landscape pictures. He was a very good-looking, fair-haired young man of about twenty-five, who had had success at exhibitions and had sold his last picture for five hundred roubles. He corrected Olga Ivanovna's sketches and said perhaps something could be made of her ; then there was also the violoncellist whose instrument wailed, and who asserted quite openly that of all the women of his acquaintance only Olga Ivanovna knew how to accompany him ; then there was the literary man, who was already well known for the novels, tales and plays he had written. Who was there besides ? Well, yes, there was also Vasily Vasilich, a gentleman-landowner, a dilettante illustrator and maker of vignettes, who felt acutely the ancient Russian style of the Byliny and Epics, and who produced really wonderful things on paper, china and smoked plates. For this group of artistic and free young people—all so spoiled by fate, but who still were delicate and modest, and who only remembered the existence of doctors at the time of illness—the name of Dymov sounded as meaningless as Sidorov or Tarasov. In the midst of this society Dymov himself felt strange, superfluous and small, though he was tall and broad-shouldered. It appeared to them as if he were in another man's dress-coat, and that he had the beard of an office clerk. However, if he had been a writer or an artist, they

would have said that with his beard he reminded them of Zola.

The artist told Olga Ivanovna that with her flaxen hair and her bridal attire she was very like a graceful cherry tree, when in spring it is entirely covered with delicate white blossoms.

"No, just listen!" Olga Ivanovna said, seizing his hand. "How do you think all this happened? Listen, listen! . . . I must tell you that my father worked together with Dymov in the same hospital. When my poor father fell ill, Dymov passed whole days and nights beside his bed. What self-sacrifice! Listen, Ryabovsky. . . . And you, author, listen too, it is quite interesting. Come nearer. What self-sacrifice, what sincere interest! I also did not sleep at night, but sat near father's bed, and suddenly, lo and behold, the good young man was conquered! My Dymov fell over head and ears in love. Truly fate is very strange! Well, after my father's death he came to see me from time to time, we met in the street, and one fine evening suddenly—bang!—he proposed. . . . It was quite unexpected. . . . I cried all night and fell desperately in love. And as you see, I've become a wife. Isn't it true there's something strong, powerful, bearlike in him? Now his face is turned only three-quarters towards us, and it's badly lighted, but when he turns quite this way just notice his forehead. Ryabovsky, what do you think of that forehead? Dymov, we are talking about you!" she called to him. "Come here. Stretch out your honest hand to Ryabovsky. . . . So. Be friends. . . ."

Dymov, smiling good-humouredly and naïvely, held out his hand to Ryabovsky and said:

"Very pleased. A certain Ryabovsky finished his course of study with me. Was he a relation of yours?"

II

Olga Ivanovna was twenty-two years of age, Dymov thirty-one. They began housekeeping splendidly. Olga Ivanovna covered all the walls of the drawing-room with her own and other people's sketches, in frames and without frames, near the piano and the furniture she made all sorts of cosy arrangements with Chinese umbrellas, easels, variegated coloured rags, daggers, little busts, photographs and so on. . . . She glued on the walls of the dining-room all sorts of popular coloured woodcuts, she hung up birch bark shoes and sickles, placed a scythe and a rake in one corner and obtained in that way a dining-room in the Russian style. In order to make the bedroom look like a cavern she draped the ceiling and the walls with dark-coloured cloth, she hung up a Venetian lantern over the bed, and placed a figure with a halberd at the door. Everybody found that the young couple had a very charming nook.

Every day rising about eleven Olga Ivanovna would play on the piano, or if there was sun she would paint something in oils. Then at about twelve she would go to her dressmaker. As she and Dymov had but little money, only just enough, she and her dressmaker were obliged to have recourse to cunning, in order that she might often appear in new dresses and surprise people by her elegance. Very often out of old dyed dresses, out of bits of tulle that cost next to nothing or with the addition of lace, plush or silk a wonderful garment was produced, something quite enchanting—not a dress, but a dream. From her dressmaker's Olga

Ivanovna usually drove to visit some actress of her acquaintance ; to hear the news of the theatre, and at the same time to solicit a ticket for the first performance of a new play, or for some benefit night. From the actress's it was necessary to go to the studio of some artist or to some picture show, then to one or other of the celebrities she knew to invite them to her house, to pay them a visit or simply to gossip. Everywhere she was greeted gaily and cordially, and she was assured that she was pretty, charming and quite uncommon. . . . The people she called celebrities and great received her as one of themselves, as their equal, and everybody with one voice prophesied that with her talents, taste and cleverness, if she did not fritter them away, great things might be expected. She sang, she played on the piano, she painted in oils, she modelled, she took part in amateur theatricals, and all this she did not in an ordinary way, but with talent ; if she made little paper lanterns for illuminations, dressed herself out, or tied somebody's tie—she did it all in an uncommonly artistic manner, gracefully and charmingly. But in nothing were her talents more clearly evident than in her skill in rapidly making acquaintance and soon becoming intimate with famous people. It was only necessary for somebody to become a little famous, and cause himself to be talked about, for her to get acquainted with him, and the same day she would be on quite friendly terms and invite him to her house. To make a new acquaintance was for her a real holiday. She idolized celebrated men, she was proud of them, and dreamed of them every night. She thirsted for them and she was never able to quench her thirst. The old ones left and were forgotten, others came in their place, but she soon became accustomed to these, or became disenchanted with them, and then she began eagerly

to seek out new men, new great men; she found them, and again searched for others. Why?

At five she dined at home with her husband. His simplicity, his good sense and good-nature caused her emotion and delight. She would constantly jump up, embrace his head impetuously and cover it with kisses.

"Dymov, you are a clever, a noble man," she would say; "but you have one very serious deficiency. You take not the slightest interest in art. You have no taste for music and painting."

"I don't understand them," he said meekly. "All my life I've been occupied with natural science and with medicine, and I had no time to interest myself in art."

"But, Dymov, that is terrible!"

"Why? Your friends don't know anything about natural science or medicine, and you don't blame them for it. Every man has his own sphere. I don't understand landscapes and operas, but I think if certain clever people devote their whole lives to them and other clever people pay great sums of money for them, it means that they are necessary. I don't understand them, but not to understand does not mean to reject them."

"Let me press your honest hand!"

After dinner she went to her friends, then to the theatre or to a concert and only returned home after midnight. And so it was every day.

On Wednesdays she gave small evening parties. At these parties the mistress of the house and her guests did not play at cards nor did they dance, but they amused themselves in various artistic ways. The actor from the dramatic theatre recited, the singer sang, the artists drew in the albums, of which Olga Ivanovna had a great number, the violoncellist played and their

hostess herself also drew, modelled, sang and accompanied. In the intervals between the recitations, music and singing, they talked and argued about literature, the theatre and painting. There were never any ladies, because Olga Ivanovna considered that all ladies, with the exception of actresses and her dressmaker, were dull and commonplace. There was never a single party that passed without the mistress of the house having little thrills whenever the bell rang, nor without her saying with a triumphant expression of countenance, "There he is!" meaning by the word "he" some new celebrity she had invited to her house. Dymov never appeared in the drawing-room, and nobody remembered his existence. But exactly at half-past eleven the door that led into the dining-room opened and Dymov appeared in the doorway with his meek goodnatured smile, and rubbing his hands he would say:

"Gentlemen, come to supper, please."

Everybody went into the dining-room and they saw on the table exactly the same things: a dish of oysters, a piece of ham or veal, sardines, cheese, caviar, pickled mushrooms, vodka and two decanters of wine.

"My dear *maître d'hôtel!*" Olga Ivanovna exclaimed, clasping her hands with delight. "You are positively enchanting! Gentlemen, look at his forehead! Dymov, turn so that we can see your profile. Gentlemen, just look: isn't it the face of a Bengal tiger, and the expression is kind and mild as a deer's. Oh, you darling!"

The guests ate, and looking at Dymov they thought: "Indeed, he is a very good fellow!" but they soon forgot him and continued to talk about the theatre, music and painting.

The young couple were happy, and their life flowed

on smoothly, though the third week of their honeymoon was not quite a happy one—it might be called even sad. Dymov caught the erysipelas in the hospital. He was confined to his bed for six days, and was obliged to have his beautiful black locks shaved off. Olga Ivanovna sat by his bedside and cried bitterly, but when he was on the mend she tied a white handkerchief round his shaven head and began to paint him as a Bedouin. And they both were gay. Four days after he had recovered and had resumed his work in the hospital he again had another mishap.

"I have no luck, mama!" he said to her one day at dinner. "To-day I had four dissections, and I cut two of my fingers. And it was only when I got home that I noticed it."

Olga Ivanovna was alarmed. He smiled and said it was a trifle and that he often cut his hands slightly while making dissections.

"I become absorbed in my work, mama, and get absent-minded."

Olga Ivanovna waited with anxiety, fearing that he might get infected by the corpses, and she prayed to God at night, but all passed off well. And again their life flowed on peacefully and happily without sorrow or alarm. The present was beautiful, and to improve it spring was approaching, already smiling from afar and giving promise of a thousand joys. There would be no end to happiness! In April, May and June a country house far away from town—walks, sketches, fishing, nightingales, and then from July to the late autumn an excursion of artists to the Volga, and in this excursion as an indispensable member of the society Olga Ivanovna would naturally take part. She had already had two linen costumes made for the journey, she had bought colours, paint-brushes, canvas and a new palette.

Ryabovsky came almost every day to see what progress she had made in painting. When she showed him her painting he would thrust his hands deep into his pockets, press his lips firmly together, sniff and say :

" So . . . this cloud jumps at you. It is not lighted up as it would be in the evening. The foreground is somewhat muddled, and there is something not quite right, you understand. . . . Your log-hut has been squashed by something and squeaks piteously. . . . You ought to make this corner darker. But in general it's not so bad . . . quite praiseworthy."

And the more unintelligible he was the better Olga Ivanovna was able to understand him.

III

Two days after Whit-Sunday, having had his dinner, Dymov bought various *hors d'œuvres* and sweetmeats, and went to visit his wife in the country. He had not seen her for more than two weeks, and he was very dull without her. While sitting in the railway coach and afterwards when he was looking for his *dacha** in the large wood, he felt hungry and tired and thought how he would have supper quietly with his wife, and then tumble into bed. And he looked gaily at the parcel in which he had caviar, cheese and smoked salmon.

When at last he found his house the sun was already setting. The old maidservant said that her mistress was not at home, but that she would soon come in.

* A country cottage or villa.

The *dacha*, which was uninviting in appearance with low ceilings and walls that had writing-paper glued on them and uneven floors full of chinks, consisted of only three rooms. In one room there was a bed, in another there were canvases, paint-brushes, dirty paper and men's overcoats and hats lying about on the chairs and window-sills, and in the third room Dymov found three unknown men. Two of them were dark-haired and bearded, while the third was clean shaven and fat, evidently an actor. A samovar* was boiling on the table.

"What do you want?" the actor asked in a deep bass voice, looking round at Dymov unsociably. "Do you want to see Olga Ivanovna? Wait, she will be in soon."

Dymov sat down and waited. One of the dark men looking at him sleepily and lazily, poured himself out some tea and asked:

"Perhaps you would like some tea too?"

Dymov wanted both to eat and to drink, but in order not to spoil his appetite he refused the tea. Soon footsteps and a familiar laugh were heard; a door was slammed and Olga Ivanovna entered the room, in a broad-brimmed hat, carrying a box in her hand; she was followed by merry, rosy cheeked Ryabovsky carrying a large umbrella and a camp stool.

"Dymov!" Olga Ivanovna cried, and she blushed with delight. "Dymov!" she repeated, laying her head and both her hands on his breast. "It's you! Why haven't you been for so long? Why? Why?"

"When have I time, mama? I am always occupied, and when I was free it always happened that the trains did not suit."

"How happy I am to see you! I dreamed about

* Russian tea-urn.

you the whole of the night. I was afraid you were ill. Oh, if you only knew how charming you are and how you have come exactly at the right moment! You will be my saviour! You alone can save me! To-morrow there is to be a most original wedding here," she continued, laughing and tying her husband's cravat. "A young telegraphist from the station is getting married, a certain Chikeldéev. A good-looking young fellow; besides he's not stupid, and, you know, he has something in his face strong and bearlike. . . . He'd make a good model for a young Viking. We, *dachniki*,* all take a great interest in him, and we gave him our word of honour to come to his wedding. He's not a rich man, solitary and shy, and, of course, it would be a sin not to stand by him at such a moment. Just imagine, they'll be married after the liturgy, and from church we all go on foot to the bride's house . . . can you understand, through the wood, birds singing, sun spots on the grass, and all of us forming variously coloured patches on a bright green ground—most original, in the style of the French expressionists. But, Dymov, in what am I to go to the wedding?" Olga Ivanovna said, and she looked as if she was going to cry. "I have nothing with me here, literally nothing! No dress, no flowers, no gloves. . . . You must save me. As you have come it's quite clear fate destines you as my saviour. My dear, take these keys, go home and take out of my wardrobe my pink frock. You remember it; it hangs quite in front. . . . Then in the lumber room, to the right, you'll find on the floor two bandboxes. When you open the upper one you'll find tulle, tulle, tulle, and all sorts of scraps and below them flowers. Take all the flowers out very carefully; try, darling, not to crush them. I shall chose

* The inhabitants of the *dacha*.

what I want afterwards . . . and buy me a pair of gloves. . . ."

"All right," Dymov said, "I'll go back to-morrow and send them down."

"To-morrow, how is that possible?" Olga Ivanovna exclaimed, and she looked at him with astonishment, "When will you have time to-morrow? The first train leaves here at nine o'clock and the wedding is at eleven. No, my darling, you must go to-day, positively to-day! If you can't come back to-morrow, send the things by a messenger. Well, or else . . . a passenger train is just due. Don't miss it, darling!"

"All right."

"Oh, how sorry I am to let you go!" Olga Ivanovna said, and tears rose to her eyes. "What a fool I was to promise the telegraphist!"

Dymov hurriedly swallowed a glass of tea, took a couple of cracknels and, smiling, meekly went back to the station. And the caviar, the cheese and the smoked salmon were eaten by the two dark men and the fat actor.

IV

On a calm moonlit July night Olga Ivanovna was standing on the deck of a Volga steamboat looking at the water or at the beautiful banks. Ryabovsky, who stood beside her, was telling her that the black shadows on the water were not shadows, but a dream, and when gazing at those bewitching waters, with their fantastic glitter, when looking at that fathomless sky and those

gloomy pensive banks, which spoke to them of the troubles of life and of the existence of something higher, something eternal and glorious, it would be well to forget oneself—to die—to become a memory. The past was mean and uninteresting, the future was insignificant, but this beautiful night, unique in a lifetime, would soon be over, it would be blended with eternity—why live at all ?

And Olga Ivanovna listened now to Ryabovsky's voice, now to the stillness of the night, and she thought that she too was immortal and would never die. The turquoise-coloured water, such as she had never seen before, the sky, the river's banks, the black shadows and the unaccountable delight that filled her soul, told her that she too would become a great artist, and that somewhere in the distant future, beyond the moonlit night in boundless space, success, fame, the love of the people awaited her. When, without blinking, she looked long into the distance there appeared before her a crowd of people, lights, the solemn sounds of music, shouts of enthusiasm—she herself was in a white dress with flowers, flowers were shed on her from all sides. She also thought that a really great man, a genius, the chosen of God, was standing beside her, leaning over the bulwarks. . . . All that he had created so far was excellent, novel, uncommon, and what he would create in time, when with years his rare talents would increase in strength, and he would become astonishingly, immeasurably great, this could be read in his face, by the way he expressed himself and by his regard for nature. He had quite a special way of talking about shadows, evening tones and brilliant moonlight, in a language quite his own, so that you involuntarily felt the witchery of his power over nature. He himself was very handsome, original, and his life was independent, free,

avoiding anything worldly, it was like the life of a bird.

"It is getting chilly," Olga Ivanovna said, shivering.

Ryabovsky wrapped her up in his cloak, and said sadly:

"I feel I am in your power. I am a slave. Why are you so bewitching to-night?"

The whole time he gazed at her without removing his eyes from her; his eyes were terrible, and she feared to look at him.

"I am madly in love with you . . ." he whispered, breathing upon her cheek. "Say but one word and I will cease to live. I will give up art . . ." he murmured, greatly excited. "Love me, love . . ."

"Don't say such things," Olga Ivanovna said, closing her eyes. "It is terrible. And Dymov?"

"What of Dymov? Why Dymov? What have I to do with Dymov? There's the Volga, the moon, beauty, my love, my rapture, but there's no such thing as Dymov. . . . Oh, I know nothing. . . . I don't want the past, give me but one moment . . . one instant!"

Olga Ivanovna's heart went pit-a-pat. She wanted to think of her husband, but all her past with her wedding, with Dymov and her evening parties, seemed to her small, insignificant, dim, unnecessary and far, far away. Really, what was Dymov? Why Dymov? What was Dymov to her? Does he really exist in nature, or is he merely a dream?

"For him, a common and ordinary man, the happiness he had already had was sufficient," she thought as she covered her face with her hands. "Let them judge me *there*, let them curse me, but I, to spite them all, will just go and perish . . . go and perish. . . . One must try everything in life. Good Lord, how painful, but how nice!" . . .

"Well, what? What?" the artist murmured, putting his arm round her and greedily kissing the hands with which she was feebly trying to push him away. "You love me? Yes? Yes? Oh, what a night! What a glorious night!"

"Yes, what a night!" she whispered, looking into his eyes that were glistening with tears; then having rapidly looked round, she put her arms round him and kissed him passionately on the lips.

"We're arriving at Kineshma," somebody said on the other side of the deck.

Heavy footsteps could be heard. It was one of the waiters who was passing by.

"Listen," Olga Ivanovna said to him, laughing and crying with happiness, "bring us some wine."

The artist, pale with excitement, sat down on a bench and looked at Olga Ivanovna with adoring and grateful eyes, then he closed them and said with a languid smile:

"I am tired!"

And rested his head on the bulwarks.

V

The second of September was a calm and warm but dull day. Early in the morning a light fog had hovered about the Volga, and after nine o'clock it had begun to drizzle. There was no hope of the sky's clearing. At breakfast Ryabovsky had said to Olga Ivanovna that painting was the most ungrateful, the most

tiresome art, that he was no artist, that only fools thought he had talent, and suddenly, without any cause, he seized a knife and scraped out his very best sketch. After breakfast he sat gloomily at the window looking out at the Volga. The Volga was already without brilliancy, dim, dull and cold in appearance. Everything foretold the approach of sad, gloomy autumn. It seemed as if the sumptuous green carpets that were spread on the banks, the reflections of diamond rays, the transparent blue distance and the whole of the elegance of stately nature had been stripped off the Volga and packed away in a trunk till the next spring, and the ravens flew along the Volga mocking her: "Bare! bare!" Ryabovsky listened to their cawing and thought that he was done for, and had lost his talent, that everything in this world was conditional, relative and stupid, and that he ought never to have got entangled with this woman. . . . In a word, he was in a bad humour and in low spirits.

Olga Ivanovna sat behind the partition on her bed passing her beautiful flaxen hair between her fingers, and imagining herself in her own drawing-room, her bedroom or her husband's study; her imagination bore her to the theatre, to her dressmaker's and to her celebrated friends. What were they doing now? Did they remember her? The season had already begun and it was time to think about her little parties. And Dymov? Dear Dymov! How meekly and childishly—complainingly, he begged her in his letters to come home quickly! Every month he sent her seventy-five roubles, and when she wrote to him that she had run into debt to the artists to the amount of one hundred roubles he sent her that too. What a kind, generous man he was! The journey had tired Olga Ivanovna, she felt dull and she wanted to get away as soon as

possible from these peasants, from the smell of the river's damp and to cast off from herself that feeling of physical impurity that she had been experiencing the whole time that she had been living in peasants' huts and wandering from village to village. If Ryabovsky had not given his word of honour to the artists to remain with them until the twentieth of September, it would be quite possible to go away that very day. And how nice that would be!

"Good God!" Ryabovsky sighed. "When will the sun come out again? I can't finish my sunlit landscape without the sun!"

"But you have also a sketch with a cloudy sky," Olga Ivanovna said, coming from behind the partition. "You remember in the right foreground there is a wood and to the left a herd of cows and geese. You could finish it now."

"Eh?" the artist said, frowning. "Finish! Do you really think I am so stupid, that I don't know what I am to do!"

"How changed you are with me!" Olga Ivanovna sighed.

"Well, so much the better!"

Olga Ivanovna's lips trembled as she sat down near the stove and began to cry.

"Yes, we only wanted tears. Stop crying! I have a thousand causes for tears, but I don't cry."

"A thousand causes!" Olga Ivanovna sighed. "The chief cause is you're tired of me. Yes!" she said and began to sob. "In truth you are ashamed of our love. You are always trying that the artists should not notice anything, though it is impossible to conceal it, and it has been known to them all long ago."

"Olga, there's one thing I ask you," the artist said, in an imploring tone, and he pressed his hand to his

heart, "only one thing: don't torment me! That is all I require of you!"

"But swear that you still love me!"

"This is torment!" the artist hissed through his clenched teeth, jumping up from his seat. "It will end by my throwing myself into the Volga or going mad! Leave me in peace!"

"Well then, kill me, kill me!" Olga Ivanovna cried. "Kill me!"

She again began to sob and went behind the partition. The rain continued to spatter on the thatched roof of the log-hut. Ryabovsky, seizing his head in both hands, began to pace up and down, from corner to corner, then with a determined face, looking as if he wanted to prove something to somebody, he pressed his cap on his head and taking his gun over his shoulder he left the house.

For long after he had gone Olga Ivanovna lay on the bed and cried. At first she thought it would be a good thing to take poison, that when he returned Ryabovsky might find her dead; then her thoughts carried her mentally into her own drawing-room, or into her husband's study, and she imagined herself sitting motionless at Dymov's side and enjoying physical peace and cleanliness, or else in the evening sitting in the theatre listening to Masini. And the longing for civilization, for the noise of towns and of celebrated people oppressed her heart. A peasant woman entered the hut and began leisurely to light the stove and prepare dinner. There was a smell of burning and the air became blue with smoke. The artists came in dirty top-boots, and with faces wet with rain; they examined their sketches, and to console themselves said that even in bad weather the Volga had certain charms. The cheap clock on the wall went: "tick-tick-tick." . . . The

flies feeling cold crowded together in the front corner near the icons and buzzed; and the movements of cockroaches could be heard among the thick cardboards beneath the benches. . . .

Ryabovsky only returned home when the sun came out again. He threw his cap on the table, and looking pale and worn out, he sank on to a bench in his dirty boots, and closed his eyes.

"I am tired," and knitting his brows he made an effort to raise his eyelids.

In order to prove that she was not angry, Olga Ivanovna came up to him and silently kissed him, and then caressingly passed a comb through his light hair. She wanted to comb his hair.

"What is it?" he asked, shuddering, as if something cold had touched him, and he opened his eyes. "What is it? Leave me in peace, I beg you."

He pushed her aside with his hand and went away from her, and it appeared to her that the expression on his face was one of aversion and vexation. At that moment the peasant woman brought him a plate of cabbage soup, carrying it in both hands, and Olga Ivanovna saw that both her thumbs were wetted by the soup, and the dirty peasant woman with her large stomach the cabbage soup, which Ryabovsky began to eat quickly, the log-hut and the whole of this life, which she had liked so much at first, for its simplicity and artistic disorder, appeared horrible to her now. She suddenly felt herself insulted, and she said coldly:

"We must separate for some time, or else from sheer dullness we may have a serious quarrel. All this is boring me. I'm going away to-day."

"On what? Ride-a-cock-horse on a walking-stick?"

"To-day is Thursday, and at half-past nine the steamboat will arrive here."

"Eh? Yes, yes. . . . Well, what's to be done, go . . ." Ryabovsky said gently as he wiped his mouth with a towel in lieu of a napkin. "You are dull here, you have nothing to do, and I would be a great egoist to try to keep you here. Go, and after the twentieth we shall meet again."

Olga Ivanovna packed up her things gaily, even her cheeks began to glow with pleasure.

"Was it really possible," she asked herself, "that soon she would be able to write in a drawing-room, to sleep in a bedroom and to dine off a tablecloth?" Her heart was relieved and she was no longer angry with the artists.

"The colours and the paint-brushes I leave you, Ryabovsky," she said. "If anything remains you will bring it. . . . Mind, don't be lazy without me, don't mope, but work. You're my own good boy!"

At ten o'clock Ryabovsky kissed her, to take leave, so as not to kiss her on the boat, she thought, in the presence of the other artists, and then conducted her to the landing-place. The steamer soon arrived and bore her away.

She reached her home on the third day. Without taking off her hat and waterproof and breathing heavily from excitement she passed through the drawing-room into the dining-room. Dymov, without a coat and with his waistcoat unbuttoned, was sitting at the table sharpening a knife against a fork; a partridge was on a dish before him. When Olga Ivanovna entered the flat she was quite certain that it was necessary to hide everything from him, and that she had sufficient skill and strength to do so; but now, when she saw his broad, good-natured, happy smile and his sparkling joyful eyes, she felt to hide anything from this man would be as mean and horrid, and also as impossible and

beyond her strength as it would be to calumniate, to steal or to murder, and in a moment she decided to tell him all that had happened. Having allowed him to embrace and kiss her, she sank on her knees before him and covered her face with her hands.

"What? What is it, mama?" he asked tenderly. "You've been dull?"

She raised her face, red with shame, and looked up at him in a guilty and imploring manner, but fear and shame prevented her from telling him the truth.

"It was nothing," she said. "I only . . ."

"Let's sit down," he said, lifting her up and seating her at the table. "There we are . . . Have some partridge? Poor little thing, you are hungry."

She drew in her native air greedily, and ate the partridge, while he looked at her with affection and laughed joyfully.

VI

Towards the middle of winter it was evident that Dymov began to suspect that he was being deceived. As if his own conscience were not clean, he was no longer able to look his wife straight in the eyes, nor did he smile joyfully when they met and, in order to remain less alone with her, he often brought home to dinner his colleague, Dr. Korostelev, a little closely cropped man with a wrinkled face who, when he talked to Olga Ivanovna, was so confused that he either buttoned and unbuttoned his jacket the whole time, or twirled the left side of his moustache with his right hand. During dinner the two

doctors would talk of the possibility of heart troubles being produced by the displacement of the diaphragm, or that of late large numbers of neurotic complaints had come under their observation, or that on the previous day while making the dissection of a patient, who according to the diagnosis had died of "malignant anæmia," Dymov had discovered a cancer in the pancreas. And it seemed that they both carried on these medical discussions only in order to permit Olga Ivanovna to remain silent, that is, not to lie. After dinner Korostelev would sit down to the piano, and Dymov would say to him with a sigh:

"Ech, brother! Well, well! Play us something sad."

Raising his shoulders, and spreading his fingers wide, Korostelev took several accords and began to sing in a tenor voice: "Show me a single dwelling, where the Russian peasant does not groan," and Dymov, sighing again, rested his head on his fist and sank into meditation.

Of late Olga Ivanovna had been extremely imprudent. Every morning she awoke in the very worst of humours, and with the thought that she no longer loved Ryabovsky, and that all was finished, thank God! But while she drank her coffee she thought that Ryabovsky had taken her husband from her, and that now she remained without her husband and without Ryabovsky; then she remembered that her acquaintances had said that Ryabovsky was preparing for the exhibition something astonishing, a mixture of a landscape and a genre painting, in Polenov's style, and that everybody who had seen it in his studio was enthusiastic about it; but this, she thought, he had created under her influence, and in general, thanks to her influence, he had greatly changed for the better. Her influence

was so beneficial and so essential that if she left him he might possibly perish. And she also remembered that the last time he had come to see her in a grey speckled frock-coat and a new tie and had asked her :

" Am I not handsome ? "

He really was elegant ; with his long curls and blue eyes he looked very handsome, and (or perhaps she had only imagined it) he was very affectionate with her too.

Remembering many things and pondering over them, Olga Ivanovna dressed, and drove to Ryabosvky's studio in great agitation. She found him gay and in raptures with his really magnificent picture ; he jumped about, played the fool and answered serious questions with jokes. Olga Ivanovna was jealous of Ryabovsky's picture and hated it, but out of politeness she stood before it for about five minutes in silence, sighing, as one sighs before a holy shrine, and at last she said in a low voice :

" Yes, you have never painted anything like it. Do you know, it is terrible ! "

Then she began to implore him to love her, not to desert her, to have pity on her, poor unhappy thing. She wept, she kissed his hands, demanded that he should swear he loved her, proved to him that without her good influence he would stray from the right path and perish. And, having spoiled his good-humour and feeling that she had humiliated herself, she drove off to her dressmaker, or to an actress she knew, to try to obtain tickets.

If she did not find him in his studio she would leave a letter in which she swore that unless he came to her that very day she would certainly take poison. He was afraid, went to her and remained to dinner. Unrestrained by the presence of her husband, he was insolent to her,

she returned insolence with insolence. Both felt they were a drag on each other, that they were despots and enemies and were angry, and owing to their anger they never noticed that they were both behaving in an unseemly manner, and that even closely cropped Korostelev understood everything. After dinner Ryabovsky hastily took leave and went away.

"Where are you going?" Olga Ivanovna asked him in the ante-room, and she looked at him with hatred.

Frowning and screwing up his eyes he named one of the ladies of their acquaintance, and it was evident he was laughing at her jealousy and did it on purpose to vex her. She went into her bedroom and lay down on the bed; from jealousy, vexation, a feeling of humiliation and shame she bit the pillow and began to sob aloud. Dymov left Korostelev in the drawing-room, went into the bedroom and quite confused and perplexed he said to her softly:

"Don't cry aloud, mama. . . . Why? One must be silent about it. . . . One must not let people notice it. . . . You know, what's done can't be undone."

Not knowing how she could quell the terrible jealousy she felt within her, which already caused her to have pain in the temples, and thinking she might still improve matters, she washed, powdered her tear-stained face and flew off to the lady of her acquaintance. Not finding Ryabovsky with her, she drove to another and then to a third. . . . At first she was ashamed of driving about in that way; but after a time she became used to it, and it sometimes happened that in one evening she went to all the women she knew, to look for Ryabovsky, and they all understood why she had come.

One day she said to Ryabovsky about her husband:

"That man crushes me with his magnanimity.'

This phrase pleased her so much that whenever she

met the artists who knew of her romance with Ryabovsky she said each time, referring to her husband, and making an energetic gesture with her hand :

" That man crushes me with his magnanimity ! "

The order of their life was the same as in the previous year. On Wednesdays there were small evening parties. The actor recited, the artists drew, the violoncellist played, the singer sang, and invariably at half-past eleven the door that led into the dining-room was opened, and Dymov with a smile on his face said :

" Gentlemen, come to supper, please."

As formerly, Olga Ivanovna looked out for great men, found them, was dissatisfied with them and looked for others. As formerly, she returned home late at night, but now Dymov was not asleep as he used to be the year before, but was sitting in his study working. He never went to bed till about three o'clock and he rose at eight.

One evening when she was preparing to go to the theatre, she was standing before the pier-glass when Dymov, clad in a dress-coat and a white tie, came into her bedroom ; he smiled meekly, and as formerly he looked his wife joyfully straight in the eyes. His face beamed.

" I have just been defending my thesis," he said, sitting down and stroking his knees.

" Defending ? " Olga Ivanovna asked.

" Ogo ! " he laughed, and he stretched his neck in order to see his wife's face in the mirror, as she was still standing before it with her back towards him arranging her hair. " Ogo ! " he repeated. " Do you know it is very probable I shall be offered the post of professor's substitute on general pathology. It looks very like it."

It was evident by his delight and his beaming face

that if Olga Ivanovna had shared his happiness and triumph he would have forgiven her everything, the present and the future, and he would have forgotten everything, but she did not understand what the post of professor's substitute or general pathology meant; besides, she was afraid of being too late for the theatre and said nothing.

He sat for two minutes, smiled culpably and then left the room.

VII

It was a most agitating day.

Dymov had a very bad headache; in the morning he would not have any breakfast and he did not go to the hospital, but passed the whole day in his study lying on the Turkish divan. At one o'clock Olga Ivanovna went as usual to Ryabovsky's, in order to show him her new sketch of still-life, and to ask him why he had not been to see her on the previous day. The sketch appeared to her insignificant, and she had only painted it in order to have an extra excuse for going to the artist's.

She entered the house without ringing, and while she was taking off her galoshes in the ante-room it seemed to her as if somebody had run quietly across the studio with a womanlike rustle of skirts, and when she hastened to look into the studio she saw for a moment a bit of a brown petticoat disappearing behind a large picture that, as well as the easel on which it stood, was covered with a long black linen that reached to the floor. She

could not doubt that it was a woman. How often had Olga Ivanovna herself found a hiding-place behind that picture! Ryabovsky, evidently very much confused and seeming to be surprised at her arrival, held out both his hands to her and said with a forced smile:

"Ah, ah, ah, ah! So pleased to see you. What good news do you bring me?"

Olga Ivanovna's eyes filled with tears. She felt shame and bitterness, and not for a million could she have spoken in the presence of that strange woman, that rival, that liar, who was now standing behind the picture, and was probably giggling malevolently.

"I have brought you a sketch . . ." she said timidly, in a faltering voice and her lips trembled—"a nature morte."

"Ah, ah, ah! a sketch?"

The artist took the sketch into his hand and while examining it he went as if mechanically into the next room.

Olga Ivanovna followed him submissively.

"Nature morte . . . first class," he muttered, as if he was searching for rhymes "sport . . . port kurort. . . ."

Hasty steps and the rustle of a dress were heard in the studio. That meant *she* had gone away. Olga Ivanovna wanted to scream, to hit the artist with something heavy across the head and then go away, but she could see nothing through her tears; she was crushed by her shame and she felt not like Olga Ivanovna, the artist, but like a small insect.

"I am tired . . ." the artist said languidly, looking at the sketch, and he shook his head in order to conquer his drowsiness. "This is pretty, of course, but to-day it is a sketch, and last year it was a sketch, and in a month's time it will be a sketch. . . . Doesn't it bore

you ? In your place I would chuck painting and give up my whole time to music or something else. Why, you are no painter but a musician. If you only knew how tired I am ! I'll go and order tea. . . . Eh ? "

He left the room, and Olga Ivanovna heard him give some order to his man-servant. So as not to take leave, not to have an explanation, but chiefly not to begin sobbing, she hastened into the ante-room, put on her galoshes before Ryabovsky returned and ran into the street. Here she sighed lightly and felt she was for ever free, not only from Ryabovsky, but from painting, and from the great shame that had weighed on her so heavily in the studio. All was finished !

She drove to her dressmaker's and then called on Barnay (the famous German tragedian), who had only arrived the day before, then to a music shop, and the whole time she was thinking how she was to write to Ryabovsky a cold, severe letter full of dignity, and then how in the spring or the summer she would go with Dymov to the Crimea, where she would free herself entirely from all the past and would begin quite a new life.

When she returned home late at night she did not redress, but sat down in the drawing-room to write her letter. Ryabovsky had told her she was not an artist, and she, to revenge herself on him, would write that every year he painted the same thing over and over again, and every day he said the same thing, that he was stagnating and that he would do nothing better than what he had already produced. She wanted to write that he owed much to her good influence, and if he acted badly it was only because her influence was paralysed by various equivocal individuals, like the one who that day had hidden behind the picture.

"Mama!" Dymov called to her from his study without opening the door. "Mama!"

"What do you want?"

"Mama, don't come in here, but only come to the door. This is what has happened. . . . Three days ago I was infected with diphtheria in the hospital . . . and now I am feeling queer. Send quickly for Korostelev."

Olga Ivanovna called her husband like all her other male friends by their family names; his name Osip did not please her, because it reminded her of Gogol's Osip. Now she called out:

"Osip, this cannot be!"

"Send. I'm feeling bad," Dymov said behind the closed door, and she heard him go to the divan and lie down. "Send," his voice came to her hoarsely.

"What can this be?" Olga Ivanovna thought, and she grew cold with terror. "Why, it is dangerous!"

Without any necessity for doing it, she took up a candle and went into her bedroom, and there while thinking what she ought to do, she unintentionally looked at herself in the pier-glass. In her pale, frightened face, in the jacket with long sleeves and yellow frills at the throat and the striped skirt made in an unusual fashion, she appeared to be frightful—to be bad. Suddenly she became painfully sorry for Dymov, his unbounded love for her, his young life and even his widowed bed, on which for long he had not slept, and she remembered his usual meek, submissive smile. She began to cry bitterly, and wrote an imploring letter to Korostelev. It was two o'clock in the night.

VIII

At past seven o'clock next morning, when Olga Ivanovna came out of her bedroom with a head heavy from want of sleep, unkempt and unbeautiful, and with a guilty expression on her face, an unknown gentleman with a black beard (probably a doctor) passed her and went into the lobby. There was a smell of medicine about the house. Korostelev was standing near the door that led into the study, twirling the left side of his moustache with his right hand.

"Excuse me, I cannot let you go to him," he said gloomily to Olga Ivanovna. "You might catch the infection. And really, why should you? And all the same it would do no good, as he is delirious."

"Has he the real diphtheria?" Olga Ivanovna asked in a whisper.

"People who rush into danger ought really to be prosecuted," Korostelev continued without replying to Olga Ivanovna's question. "Do you know how he caught the infection? Last Tuesday he sucked the diphtheria membrane out of a boy's throat through a glass tube. What good could that do? It was stupid . . . sheer folly. . . ."

"Is there danger? Is there much danger?" Olga Ivanovna asked.

"Yes. They say it's a bad form. One ought really to send for Shrek."

First a little red-haired man with a long nose and a Jewish accent came, then a tall, stooping man with long dishevelled hair, who looked like an archdeacon, took his place; he was followed by a very stout young man

in spectacles with a red face. They were doctors, who came to watch at their colleague's bedside. Korostelev, though he had finished his time of watching, remained in the house and wandered about the rooms like a ghost. The housemaid served tea to the doctor on duty, and she had often to run to the chemist's, so there was nobody to do out the rooms. The house was quiet and dreary.

Olga Ivanovna sat in her bedroom and thought that God was punishing her for being unfaithful to her husband. A silent, resigned creature, depersonalized by his own meekness, characterless and weak from a superfluity of goodness, was dully suffering there on his sofa, and did not complain. And had he complained, even if it had been in his delirium, the doctors, who were attending on him, would know that it was not alone the diphtheria that was to blame. If they asked Korostelev . . . he knew everything, and it was not without cause that he looked on his friend's wife with those eyes that seemed to say she was the chief and the real miscreant, and that the diphtheria was only her accomplice. She no longer remembered the moonlit night on the Volga, nor the declaration of love, nor the poetical life in the *isba*; she only remembered that from idle caprice, from mere indulgence she had soiled herself entirely—body, legs and arms—in something dirty, something sticky, which she could never again wash off. . . .

"Oh, how terribly I lied!" she thought when she remembered the troubled love she had had with Ryabovsky. "May it all be accursed! . . ."

At four o'clock she dined with Korostelev. He ate nothing, he only drank claret and scowled. She also ate nothing. At times she prayed mentally and vowed to God that if Dymov only recovered she would love him again and be his faithful wife. At others, forgetting herself for a moment, she would look at Korostelev and

think: "How tiresome it must be to be an ordinary, in no way remarkable, and quite an unknown man, with such a wrinkled face and such bad manners too!" Then again she thought, that at that very moment God would kill her because she, fearing the infection, had not once been in her husband's study. And in general she had a dull dejected feeling and a conviction that her life was spoilt and there was no way of mending it.

After dinner darkness came on. When Olga Ivanovna went into the drawing-room she found Korostelev asleep on the couch with a gold embroidered silk cushion under his head. "Kri-pua," he snored, "Kri-pua."

The doctors, who came to watch at his bedside and went away again, did not notice this disorder. They did not notice that a strange man was asleep in the drawing-room and snoring, nor that there were sketches on the walls, nor that the room was furnished fantastically, nor that the mistress of the house was unkempt and slovenly—all this did not arouse the slightest interest now. One of the doctors suddenly laughed at something, and this laugh sounded strange and timid and it produced a weird effect.

Shortly after, when Olga Ivanovna went into the drawing-room again, Korostelev was no longer asleep. He was sitting up smoking.

"He has the diphtheria of the nasal cavity," he said in a whisper. "The heart is also not working well. It's really a bad job."

"Have you sent for Shrek?" Olga Ivanovna asked.

"He has been already. He noticed that the diphtheria had attacked the nose. Eh, after all, who is Shrek? There's nothing really special about Shrek. He's Shrek and I'm Korostelev—that's all."

Time went on terribly slowly. Olga Ivanovna lay on her bed, which had not been made since the morning,

and dozed. It appeared to her that from floor to ceiling the whole house was filled with a huge piece of iron, and that it was only necessary to carry the iron out for everybody to become gay and relieved again. Awaking she remembered that this iron was Dymov's illness.

"Nature morte—port," she thought, sinking into drowsiness again, ". . . sport . . . Kurort. . . . And how is Shrek . . . trek . . . wreck. . . . Where are my friends now? Do they know that we are in trouble? Lord save us . . . remove it . . . Shrek—trek. . . ."

And again there was the iron weight. . . . Time dragged on slowly and the clocks in the lower story struck very often. There was constant ringing of the door bell . . . doctors kept coming. . . . The housemaid came into the room with an empty glass on a tray and asked:

"Madam, do you wish me to make the bed?"

Receiving no answer she went out again. The clock below struck the hour. She dreamed of rain on the Volga, and then again somebody came into the bedroom. It appeared to be a stranger. Olga Ivanovna jumped up hnd recognized Korostelev.

"What o'clock is it?" she asked.

"About three."

"Well, how is he?"

"How, indeed! I have come to say he is passing away . . ."

He sobbed and sat down on the bed next to her, brushing away his tears with his sleeve. At first she did not understand, but she felt cold all over and began to cross herself slowly.

"Passing away . . ." he repeated in a shrill voice, and he sobbed again. "Dying, because he has sacrificed himself. . . . What a loss for science!" he said bitterly. "He was a great, an extraordinary man. . . .

None of us can be compared with him. What gifts! What hopes we all had of him!" Korostelev continued, wringing his hands. "My God, my God, what a man of science the world has lost; we shall never see his like again. Osip Dymov, Osip Dymov, what have you done? Oh! oh! My God! My God!"

Korostelev buried his face in his hands and rocked to and fro.

"And what moral force!" he continued, becoming more and more incensed with someone. "A kind, honest, loving soul, not a man, but glass! He served science and he died for science. He worked like an ox—day and night—nobody spared him; a young scientist, a future professor, he had to look out for private practice—to work all night at translations in order to pay for these . . . wretched rags!"

Korostelev looked with hatred at Olga Ivanovna, and he seized the sheet with both hands and shook it angrily as if it were in fault.

"He did not spare himself and he was not spared by others. But what is the use of talking now!"

"Yes, he was a rare man!" somebody with a deep bass voice said in the drawing-room.

Olga Ivanovna remembered all her past life with him, from the beginning to the end, with all its details, and she suddenly understood that he really was a rare, an uncommon man who, compared with all those she knew, was really a great man. And remembering how her late father and all his colleagues had treated him, she understood that they all looked upon him as a future celebrity. The walls, the ceiling, the lamp and the carpet on the floor winked at her mockingly, as if they wanted to say: "Lost your chance, lost your chance!" With a cry she fled from the bedroom, rushed through the drawing-room, passing some strange

man, and ran into her husband's study. He was lying motionless on the Turkish divan, covered up to the waist with a quilt. His face was sunken and terribly emaciated, and it had the greyish yellow colour that is never seen in the living. It was only by his forehead, by his dark eyebrows, and by his well-known smile that it was possible to recognize Dymov. Olga Ivanovna hastily felt his breast, his forehead and his hands. His breast was still warm, but his forehead and his hands were unpleasantly cold, and the half-open eyes did not look at Olga Ivanovna, but at the quilt.

"Dymov," she called to him in a loud voice. "Dymov!"

She wanted to explain to him that all had been a mistake, that not everything was lost, that life could yet be beautiful and happy, that he was an exceptional, an extraordinary, a great man, and that for her whole life she would revere him, pray to him and feel a sacred veneration for him.

"Dymov," she called aloud, shaking him by the shoulder, not being able to believe that he would never awaken again. "Dymov, Dymov, listen!"

At the same time Korostelev was saying to the housemaid:

"What is the use of asking? Go to the Church beadle and ask him where the old women live; they will wash and lay out the body—they will do all that is necessary."

THE ROOK

THE rooks had arrived and swarmed in great circles around the Russian corn-fields. I singled out the most important-looking I could find, and began to talk to him. Unfortunately I hit upon a rook who was a moralist and a great reasoner; consequently our conversation was a dull one.

This is what we talked about:

I. "It's said that you rooks live to a great age. The naturalists cite you and the pike as the chief examples of longevity. How old are you?"

The Rook. "I am three hundred and seventy-six years old."

I. "Well I never! You've lived precious long! In your place, old bird, the devil only knows how many articles I could have written for the *Russian Antiquarian* and the *Historical Journal.* If I had lived three hundred and seventy-six years I can't imagine how many novels, stories, plays, scenes and other trifles I should have written. What numbers of fees I should have pocketed! Now, what have you, old rook, done during all these years?"

The Rook. "Nothing, Mr. Man. I have only eaten, drunk, slept and multiplied."

I. "Shame! I really feel shame for you, silly old bird. You have lived in the world three hundred and seventy-six years, and you are as stupid to-day as you

were three hundred years ago. Not a ha'p'orth of progress."

The Rook. "Wisdom, Mr. Man, comes not from age, but from education and learning. Look at China—she has existed much longer than I have, and she is still as great a simpleton to-day as she was a thousand years ago."

I (with astonishment). "Three hundred and seventy-six years! What do you call that? An eternity! During that time I should have been able to attend lectures in every faculty; I could have been married twenty times; tried every profession and employment; attained the devil only knows what high rank, and, no doubt, have died a Rothschild. Just think of it, you fool, one rouble placed in a bank at five per cent compound interest becomes in two hundred and eighty-three years a million. Just calculate. That means, if you had placed one rouble on interest two hundred and eighty-three years ago, you would have had a million roubles to-day. Ah, you fool, you fool! Are you not ashamed, don't you feel a fool to be so stupid?"

The Rook. "Not at all. We are stupid; but we can comfort ourselves with the thought that during the four hundred years of our life we do fewer foolish things than man does during his forty years. Yes, Mr. Man, I have lived three hundred and seventy-six years, and I have never once seen rooks make war on one another, or kill one another, and you can't remember a single year without war. We do not rob one another, or open savings banks or schools for modern languages; we do not bear false witness or blackmail; we do not write bad novels and bad verse, or edit blasphemous newspapers. . . . I have lived three hundred and seventy-six years and I have never seen that our mates have been unfaithful to, or have injured their husbands . . .

and with you, Mr. Man, how is it ? We have no flunkeys, no back-biters, no sycophants, no swindlers, no panders, no hypocrites . . ."

At that moment this talker was called by his companions, and flew away over the fields before he had time to finish his sentence.

THE BLACK MONK

I

ANDREY VASIL'ICH KOVRIN, a Master of Arts, was overworked and his nerves were unstrung. He was not having any sort of treatment, but one day while sitting with a doctor over a bottle of wine he happened casually to speak about his health, and his friend advised him to pass the spring and summer in the country. Quite opportunely about the same time he received a long letter from Tanya Pesotski, inviting him to come and stay with them in Borisovka. He decided that he really required a change.

First—it was April—he went to his family estate of Kovrinka, where he remained in solitude for three weeks ; then, the roads being at last good, he started on wheels to go to visit his former guardian and tutor, Pesotski, who was known in the whole of Russia as a great horticulturist. From Kovrinka to Borisovka, where the Pesotskis lived, it was only seventy versts,* and to drive there on the soft spring roads in a comfortable easy calash was a real enjoyment.

Egor Semenyeh Pesotski's house was huge, with columns and lions, from which the plaster was beginning to crumble ; with a liveried footman at the front door. The old park, severe and gloomy, laid out in the English

* A Russian measure of distance, about two-thirds of a mile.

style, extended for nearly a verst from the house to the river, and finished in abruptly precipitous clayey banks, on which there grew old pines with bare roots that looked like shaggy paws; down below the water glittered unsociably, and snipe flitted along its surface with plaintive cries. When there you always had the feeling that you must sit down and write a ballad. However, near the house, in the courtyard and in the fruit orchard, which together with the nurseries covered about thirty acres, it was gay and cheerful even in bad weather. Such wonderful roses, lilies and camellias, such tulips of all imaginable hues, beginning with brilliant white and finishing with tints as black as soot, such a wealth of flowers as Pesotski possessed Kovrin had never seen in any other place. It was only the beginning of spring, and the real luxuriance of the flower-beds was still hidden in the hot-houses; but even those which blossomed in the borders along the walks and here and there on the flower-beds were sufficient to make you feel, when you passed through the garden, that you were in the kingdom of delicate tints, especially in the early morning, when a dewdrop glistened brightly on each petal.

The decorative part of the garden, which Pesotski called contemptuously a mere trifle, had greatly impressed Kovrin in his childhood. What wonderful whimsicalities were to be found there, what far-fetched monstrosities and mockeries of nature! There were espaliers of fruit trees, pear trees that had the form of pyramidal poplars, oaks and limes shaped like balls, an umbrella made of an apple tree, arches, monograms, candelabra and even 1862 formed by a plum tree; this date denoted the year when Pesotski first began to occupy himself with horticulture. There you also found pretty graceful trees with straight strong stems like

palms, and only when you examined them closely you saw that they were gooseberries and currants. But what chiefly made the garden gay and produced an animated appearance was the constant movement in it. From early morning till evening people with wheelbarrows, shovels and watering-pots swarmed like ants round the trees, bushes, avenues and flower-beds.

Kovrin arrived at the Pesotskis' in the evening, at past nine o'clock. He found Tania and her father in a very anxious mood. The clear starlit sky and the falling thermometer foretold a morning frost; the head gardener, Ivan Karlych, had gone to town, and there was nobody who could be relied on. During supper nothing but morning frost was talked of, and they settled that Tania was not to go to bed, but walk through the gardens and see if all was in order after midnight, and that her father would get up at three or probably earlier.

Kovrin sat up with Tania, and after midnight he went with her into the orchard. It was very cold. In the yard there was a strong smell of burning. In the large orchard, which was called the commercial orchard and brought Egor Semenych a clear yearly profit of several thousand roubles, a thick, black, biting smoke spread along the earth, and by enveloping the trees saved those thousands from the frost. The trees were planted here in regular rows like the squares of a chess-board, and they looked like ranks of soldiers, this strictly pedantical regularity together with the exact size and similarity of the stems and crowns of the trees made the picture monotonous and dull. Kovrin and Tania passed along the rows, where bonfires of manure, straw and all sorts of refuse were smouldering, and occasionally they met workmen, who were wandering about in the smoke like shadows. Only plums, cherries and some sorts of apple

trees were in full blossom, but the whole orchard was smothered in smoke, and it was only when they reached the nurseries that Kovrin could draw a long breath.

"From my childhood the smoke here has made me sneeze," he said, shrugging his shoulders; "but I still do not understand how this smoke can protect the trees from frost."

"The smoke takes the place of clouds, when they are absent . . ." Tania answered.

"Why are clouds necessary?"

"In dull and cloudy weather there is never night frost."

"Really?"

He laughed and took her hand. Her broad, serious, cold face, with its finely marked black eyebrows, the high turned-up collar of her coat, which prevented her from moving her head with ease, her whole thin, *svelte* figure, with skirts well tucked up to protect them from the dew, affected him.

"Good Lord, she's already grown up!" he said. "When I last drove away from here, five years ago, you were still quite a child. You were a thin, long-legged, bare-headed girl in short petticoats, and I teazed you and called you the heron. . . . What time does!"

"Yes, five years!" Tania sighed. "Much water has flowed away since then. Tell me, Andryusha, quite candidly," she said rapidly, looking into his face, "have we become strangers to you? But, why should I ask? You're a man, you are now living your own interesting life, you are great. . . . Estrangement is so natural! But, however it may be, Andryusha, I want you to consider us as your own people. We have that right."

"Of course you have, Tania!"

"Honour bright?"

"Yes, honour bright."

"You were surprised to-day to see we had so many of your portraits. You know my father adores you. Sometimes I think that he loves you more than he does me. He is proud of you. You are a scholar, an extraordinary man, you have made a brilliant career, and he is convinced that you have become all that because he brought you up. I do not prevent him from thinking this. Let him."

The day began to break; this was chiefly to be noticed by the distinctness with which the clouds of smoke were perceptible in the air, and the bark of the trees became visible. Nightingales were singing and the cry of the quail was borne from the fields.

"It's time to go to bed now," Tania said. "How cold it is!" She took his arm. "Thank you, Andryusha, for coming. We have but few acquaintances here, and they are not interesting. We have nothing but the garden, the garden, the garden—nothing but that. Standard, half-standard," she laughed, "pippins, rennets, codlins, grafting, budding. . . . All, all our life has gone into the garden—I never dream of anything but apples and pears. Of course, all this is good and useful, but sometimes I wish for something else for variety. I remember when you used to come for the holidays or simply on a visit the house seemed to grow fresher and lighter; it was as if the covers had been taken off the lustres and the chairs. I was a child then, still I understood."

She talked for a long time and with great feeling. Suddenly the idea entered his head that in the course of the summer he might become attached to this little, weak, loquacious creature, he might be carried away and fall in love—in their position it was so possible and so natural! This thought amused and moved him; he

bent over her charming troubled face and began to sing in a low voice :

"Onegin, I'll not hide from you
I love Tatiana madly . . ."

When they reached the house, Egor Semenych was already up. Kovrin did not want to sleep ; he began to talk with the old man and he returned with him to the garden. Egor Semenych was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a large stomach ; he suffered from breathlessness, but he always walked so fast that it was difficult to keep up with him. He always had an extremely worried look, and he was always hurrying somewhere, with an expression that seemed to say if he were too late by one minute even, all would be lost !

" Here's a strange thing, my dear fellow," he said, stopping to take breath. " It's freezing on the ground, as you see, but if you raise the thermometer on a stick about fourteen feet above earth it's warm there. . . . Why is it ? "

" I really don't know," Kovrin said, laughing.

" Hm. . . . Of course, one can't know everything. . . . However vast a man's understanding may be it can't comprehend everything. You've chiefly gone in for philosophy ? "

" Yes. I lecture on psychology, but I study philosophy in general."

" And it does not bore you ? "

" On the contrary, it's my very existence."

" Well, may God prosper your work . . ." Egor Semenych exclaimed, and he stroked his grey whiskers reflectively. " God prosper you ! . . . I'm very glad for you. . . . Very glad, indeed, my boy. . . ."

Suddenly he seemed to listen, an expression of anger passed over his face and he ran off to one side and was

soon lost to sight among the trees in the clouds of smoke.

"Who has tethered a horse to an apple tree?" his despairing, heartrending cry could be heard. "What villain and scoundrel has dared to tie a horse to an apple-tree? Good God, good God! They have dirtied, spoilt, damaged, ruined it. The orchard is lost! The orchard is destroyed! My God!"

When he returned to Kovrin he looked worn out and insulted.

"What can you do with this accursed people?" he said in a plaintive voice, clasping his hands. "Stepka was carting manure during the night and has tied his horse to an apple tree! The villain tied the reins so tightly round it that the bark has been rubbed in three places. What do you think of that! I spoke to him, and he only stood open-mouthed, blinking his eyes! He ought to be hanged."

When he was somewhat calmer he embraced Kovrin and kissed him on the cheek.

"Well, God help you. . . . God help you . . ." he mumbled. "I'm very glad you've come. Delighted beyond words. . . . Thank you."

Then he went round the whole garden at the same rapid pace and with the same troubled expression, and showed his former ward all the hot-houses, conservatories and fruit-sheds, also his two apiaries, which he called the wonder of the century.

While they were walking round the sun rose and shed its brilliant rays over the garden. It became warm. Foreseeing a bright, joyous and long day, Kovrin remembered it was only the beginning of May, and that the whole summer lay before them, also bright, joyous and long, and suddenly a gladsome, youthful feeling was aroused in his breast, like he used to have

when running about that garden in his childhood. He embraced the old man and kissed him tenderly. They were both much affected as they went into the house, where they drank tea with cream out of old china cups, and ate rich satisfying cracknels—these trifles again reminded Kovrin of his childhood and youth. The beautiful present and the memories that were aroused in him of the past were blended together; his soul was full and rejoiced.

He waited for Tania to get up and had coffee with her and then a walk, after which he went into his own room and sat down to work. He read with attention, made notes, only raising his eyes from time to time to look out of the open window, or at the fresh flowers, still wet with dew that were in a vase on his table, and then he again lowered his eyes to his book, and it appeared to him that every nerve in his system vibrated with satisfaction.

II

In the country he continued to lead the same nervous and restless life as in town. He read and wrote very much, he learned Italian, and when he was walking he thought all the time of the pleasure he would have in sitting down to work again. Everybody was astonished how little he slept; if he happened to doze for half an hour during the day he would afterwards not sleep all night, and after a sleepless night he felt himself active and gay, as if nothing had happened.

He talked much, drank wine and smoked expensive cigars. Often, indeed almost every day, some young girls from a neighbouring estate, friends of Tania's, came to the Pesotskis'. They played on the piano and sang together. Sometimes another neighbour, a young man, who played the violin very well, came too. Kovrin listened to the music and singing with avidity, and he was quite overcome by it, which was evidenced by his eyes closing and his head sinking on one side.

One day after the evening tea he was sitting on the balcony reading. At that time Tania—a soprano, one of her friends—a contralto and the young man playing on his violin were practising Braga's celebrated serenade. Kovrin tried to make out the words—they were Russian—and he was quite unable to understand their meaning. At last laying his book aside and listening attentively he understood: A girl with a diseased imagination heard one night mysterious sounds in the garden, which were so wonderfully beautiful and strange that she thought they were holy harmonies, but so incomprehensible for us mortals that they ascended again to heaven. Once more Kovrin's eyes began to close. He rose, and feeling quite exhausted he began to walk about the drawing-room and then about the dancing hall. When they stopped singing he took Tania's arm and led her on to the balcony.

"Ever since the morning an old legend has been running in my head," he said. "I don't remember if I read it, or whether it was told me, but the legend is a strange one, and not like any other. To begin with it is not very clear. A thousand years ago a certain monk, clad in black, was walking in the desert somewhere in Syria or Arabia. . . . A few miles from the place where he was walking some fishermen saw another black monk moving slowly across the surface of a lake. This

other monk was a mirage. Now you must forget all the laws of optics, which the legend evidently does not admit, and listen to the continuation. From the mirage another mirage was obtained, and from that one a third, so that the image of the black monk was reproduced without end in one sphere of the atmosphere after another. He was seen sometimes in Africa, sometimes in Spain, sometimes in India, then again in the far North. . . . At last he went beyond the bounds of the earth's atmosphere and is now wandering over the whole universe, always unable to enter into the conditions where he would be able to disappear. Perhaps at present he may be seen somewhere on Mars or on some star of the Southern Cross. But, my dear, the main point, the very essence of the whole legend, consists in this, that exactly a thousand years from the time the monk was walking in the desert the mirage will again be present in the atmosphere of the world, and it will show itself to men. It appears that those thousand years are nearly accomplished. . . . According to the legend we can expect the Black Monk either to-day or to-morrow."

"A strange mirage," Tania said. She did not like the legend.

"But the strangest thing is that I can't remember from where this legend has got into my head," Kovrin said, laughing. "Have I read it? Was it told me? Or perhaps I have dreamed about the Black Monk? By God, I can't remember. But the legend interests me. I think of it all day long."

Allowing Tania to return to her guests he left the house, and plunged in meditation he passed along the flower-beds. The sun was already setting. The flowers, perhaps because they had just been watered, exhaled a moist irritating odour. In the house they had again begun to sing, and at that distance the fiddle sounded

like a human voice. Kovrin, straining his memory to remember where he had heard or read the legend, bent his steps towards the park, walking slowly, and imperceptibly he arrived at the river.

Running down the steep footpath that passed by the bare roots he came to the water, disturbing some snipe and frightening a pair of ducks. Some of the tops of the gloomy pines were still illuminated by the rays of the setting sun, but on the surface of the river evening had already settled down. Kovrin crossed the footbridge to the other bank. Before him lay a wide field of young rye not yet in flower. Neither a human habitation nor a living soul was to be seen near or far, and it seemed as if this footpath, if only you went far enough along it, would lead to that unknown, mysterious place into which the sun had just descended, and where the glorious blaze of the evening brightness was still widespread.

"What space, what freedom, what quiet is here!" Kovrin thought as he went along the footpath. "It seems as if the whole world was looking at me dissembling and waiting, that I should understand it. . . ."

But just then waves passed over the rye and a light wind touched his bare head. A minute later there was again a gust of wind, but a stronger one. The rye began to rustle, and behind it the dull murmur of the pines was heard. Kovrin stopped in amazement. On the horizon something like a whirlwind or a water-spout—a high black column, stretched from the earth to the sky. Its outlines were indistinct; from the first minute it was evident that it did not remain on one spot, but was moving with terrible rapidity—moving straight towards Kovrin, and the nearer it came the smaller and clearer it became. Kovrin rushed to one side into the

rye to make room for it, and he had scarcely time to do so. . . .

A monk clad in black, with a grey head and black eyebrows, his arms crossed on his breast, was borne past him. . . . His bare feet did not touch the earth. He had already passed Kovrin for a distance of about twelve feet, when he looked back at him, nodded his head and smiled affably, but at the same time cunningly. What a pale—a terribly pale—and thin face! Again beginning to grow larger, he flew across the river, struck noiselessly against the clayey bank and the pines and, passing through them, disappeared like smoke.

"Well, you see?" Kovrin mumbled. "So the legend is true."

Without trying to explain to himself this strange apparition, but feeling pleased that he had chanced to be so close, and had seen so distinctly not only the black garb, but even the monk's face and eyes, he returned home in pleasant agitation.

In the park and the gardens people were quietly moving about; in the house they were playing—that meant he alone had seen the monk. He was very anxious to tell Tania and Egor Semenych all he had seen, but he thought that they would certainly consider his words mere nonsense, and it would frighten them—it was best to remain silent. He laughed loudly, he sang and danced the mazurka, he was gay and everybody—the guests and Tania—thought that his face had never looked so radiant and inspired, and that he certainly was a most interesting man.

III

After supper, when their guests had departed, he went to his room and lay down on the sofa : he wanted to think about the monk. But a minute later Tania entered the room.

" Here, Andryusha, are some of father's articles ; read them," she said, giving him a parcel of pamphlets and proofs. " They are splendid articles. He writes very well."

" Well, indeed," said Egor Semenych, with a forced laugh, following her into the room ; he was confused. " Don't listen to her, please, and don't read them. However, if you want to go to sleep you may as well read them : they are excellent soporifics."

" I think them excellent articles," Tania said, with deep conviction. " Read them, Andryusha, and persuade papa to write oftener. He might write a whole course of horticulture."

Egor Semenych forced a laugh, blushed and began to say such phrases as confused authors are wont to say. At last he gave in.

" If you must, then first read this article by Gaucher and these Russian notices," he murmured, turning the pamphlets over with trembling hands, " or else you won't understand it. Before reading my refutation you must know what I refute. However, it's all nonsense . . . and very dull. Besides, I should say it's time to go to bed."

Tania left the room. Egor Semenych sat down on the sofa next to Kovrin and sighed deeply.

" Yes, my dear fellow . . ." he began after a short

silence. "So it is, my most amiable Master of Arts. Here am I writing articles, taking part in exhibitions, receiving medals. . . . People say Pesotski has apples the size of a man's head, people say Pesotski has made a fortune by his orchards and gardens. In a word, 'Kochubey is rich and famous.' Query: To what does all this lead? The garden is really beautiful—a model garden. . . . It is not simply a garden, it is an institution, possessing great importance for the empire, because it is, so to speak, a step in a new era of Russian economy —of Russian industry. But what for? For what object?"

"The business speaks for itself."

"That is not what I mean. I ask: What will become of the gardens when I die? In the condition you see it now, it will not exist for a single month without me. The whole secret of its success is not because the garden is large and there are many labourers, but because I love the work—you understand? I love it, perhaps, more than my own self. Look at me. I do everything myself. I work from morning to night. I do all the grafting myself. I do all the pruning myself—all the planting—everything. When I am assisted I am jealous and irritable to rudeness. The whole secret lies in love, that is, in the vigilant master's eye, in the master's hand too, in the feeling that when you go anywhere, to pay a visit of an hour, you sit there and your heart is not easy; you're not quite yourself, you're afraid something may happen in the garden. When I die who will look after it all? Who will work? A gardener? Workmen? Yes? I tell you, my good friend, the chief enemy in our business is not the hare, not the cockchafer, not the frost, but the stranger."

"But Tania?" Kovrin asked, laughing. "She can't

be more injurious than the hare. She loves and understands the business."

"Yes, she loves and understands it. If after my death she gets the garden, and becomes the mistress, I could wish for nothing better. But if, God forbid it, she should get married?" Egor Semenych whispered and looked at Kovrin with alarm. "That's just what I fear! She gets married, children arrive, and then there's no time to think of the garden. What I chiefly fear is that she'll get married to some young fellow, who'll be stingy and will let the garden to some tradesman, and the whole place will go to the devil in the first year! In our business women are the scourge of God!"

Egor Semenych sighed and was silent for a few moments.

"Perhaps it is egoism, but, to speak frankly, I don't want Tania to marry. I'm afraid. There's a young fop with a fiddle, who comes here and scrapes at it; I know very well Tania will not marry him. I know it very well, but I can't bear him! In general, dear boy, I'm a great oddity. I confess it."

Egor Semenych rose and paced about the room for some time, much agitated; it was evident that he wanted to say something very important, but could not make up his mind to do so.

"I love you very much, and will speak to you quite frankly," he said at last, and thrust his hands into his pockets. "There are certain ticklish subjects I regard quite simply, and I say quite openly what I think of them. I cannot bear so-called hidden thoughts. I say to you plainly: You are the only man I would not be afraid to give my daughter to. You are a clever man, you have a good heart, and you would not allow my cherished work to perish. But the chief reason is—I love you as if you were my son—and I am proud of you.

If you and Tania could settle a little romance between yourselves, why—what then ? I would be very glad—very happy ! As an honest man I say this quite openly, without mincing matters."

Kovrin laughed. Egor Semenych opened the door to leave the room, but he stopped on the threshold.

" If a son were to be born to you and Tania I'd make a gardener of him," he said reflectively. " However, these are empty thoughts. . . . Sleep well ! "

Left alone, Kovrin lay down more comfortably on the sofa and began to look through the articles. One was entitled : " Of Intermediate Culture," another was called : " A few words concerning Mr. Z——'s remarks on the digging up of ground for a new garden," a third was : " More about the budding of dormant eyes " ; they were all of a similar nature. But what an uneasy, uneven tone, what nervous almost unhealthy passion ! Here was an article one would suppose of the most peaceful nature, and on the most indifferent subject : it was about the Russian Antonov apple. However, Egor Semenych began with, " *audiatur altera pars*," and finished, " *sapienti sat*," and between these two quotations there was quite a fountain of various poisonous words addressed to the " learned ignorance of our qualified gardeners who observe nature from the height of their cathedras," or else M. Gaucher, " whose success has been created by the unlearned and the dilettante." Here again, quite out of place, was an insincere regret that it was now no longer possible to flog the peasants who stole fruit and broke the trees.

" The work is pretty, charming, healthy, but even here are passions and war," Kovrin thought. " It must be that everywhere and in all arenas of human activity intellectual people are nervous and remarkable for their heightened sensitiveness. Apparently this is necessary."

He thought of Tania, who was so delighted with her father's articles. She was small, pale and so thin that her collar-bones were visible ; she had dark, wide-open clever eyes that were always looking into something, searching for something ; her gait was short-stepped and hurried like her father's ; she spoke much, she liked to argue, and then even the most unimportant phrase was accompanied by expressive looks and gestures. She certainly was nervous to the highest degree.

Kovrin continued to read, but he could understand nothing, so he threw the book away. The same pleasant excitement he had felt when he danced the mazurka and listened to the music now overcame him again, and aroused in him numberless thoughts. He rose and began to walk about the room, thinking of the black monk. It entered his head that if he alone had seen this strange supernatural monk it must be because he was ill and had hallucinations. This reflection alarmed him, but not for long.

" But I feel very well, and I do nobody any harm ; therefore there is nothing bad in my hallucinations," he thought, and he again felt quite contented.

He sat down on the sofa and seized his head in both hands, trying to restrain the incomprehensible joy that filled his whole being, then he went to the table and began to work. But the thoughts he read in the books did not satisfy him. He wanted something gigantic, immense, astounding. Towards morning he undressed and reluctantly lay down in bed : he ought to sleep !

When he heard Egor Semenych's footsteps going down to the garden, Kovrin rang the bell and ordered the man-servant to bring him some wine. He drank several glasses of Château-Laffitte with pleasure, and then covered himself up to the head ; his senses became dim and he went to sleep.

IV

Egor Semenych and Tania often quarrelled and said unpleasant things to each other.

One morning they had a quarrel. Tania began to cry and went to her room. She did not appear at dinner nor at tea. At first Egor Semenych went about looking very important and sulky, as if he wished everybody to know that for him the interests of justice and order stood above everything in the world, but soon he was unable to maintain that character and became depressed. He wandered sadly about the park and constantly sighed: "Oh, good God, good God!" At dinner he would not eat a crumb. At last feeling guilty and having qualms of conscience he knocked at his daughter's locked door and called to her timidly:

"Tania, Tania!"

And in answer he heard on the other side of the door a weak voice exhausted with crying, but still very positive, reply:

"Leave me alone, I beg you!"

The master's trouble affected the whole house, even the people working in the garden were under its influence. Kovrin was immersed in his own interesting work, but at last he too became sad and felt awkward. In order in some measure to dissipate the general gloomy mood he decided to intervene, and early in the evening he knocked at Tania's door. He was admitted.

"Oh, oh, what a shame!" he began jokingly, looking with astonishment at Tania's tear-stained, sad little face that was all covered with red blotches. "Is it possible it is so serious? Oh, oh!"

"If you only knew how he tortures me!" she said, and tears—bitter, plentiful tears—welled up in her large eyes. "He has worn me quite out!" she continued, wringing her hands. "I said nothing to him . . . nothing at all. . . . I only said there is no need to keep . . . extra workmen if . . . if it is possible to get day labourers whenever they are wanted. Why, why the workmen have been doing nothing for a whole week. . . . I . . . I only said this and he shouted at me and he told me . . . many offensive, many deeply insulting things. Why, why?"

"Enough! Enough!" Kovrin said as he arranged a lock of her hair. "You have abused each other, you have wept, and that's enough. One must not be angry for long, that's wrong . . . all the more because he loves you tenderly."

"He . . . he has spoilt my whole life," Tania continued. "I am only insulted and . . . wounded here. He considers me superfluous in his house. What am I to do? He is right. I'll go away from here to-morrow and become a telegraph girl. . . . Let him . . ."

"Well, well, well. . . . Tania, don't cry. You, mustn't, my dear. . . . You are both hot-headed, irritable, and you are both in fault. Come along, I'll make peace between you."

Kovrin spoke affectionately and persuasively, but she continued to cry, her shoulders shaking and her hands clenched, as if a terrible misfortune had befallen her. He was all the more sorry for her because her grief was not serious, yet she suffered deeply. What trifles were sufficient to make this poor creature unhappy for a whole day, yea, perhaps even for her whole life! While comforting Tania, Kovrin thought that besides this girl and her father he might search the whole world without being able to find any other people who loved him as

one of their family. If it had not been for these two people perhaps he, who had lost both his parents in his early childhood, would not have known to his very death what sincere affection was, nor that naïve, uncritical love that only exists between very near blood relatives. And he felt that his half-diseased, overtaxed nerves were drawn towards the nerves of this weeping, shuddering girl as iron is drawn to the magnet. He could never love a healthy, strong, red-cheeked woman, but pale, fragile, unhappy Tania attracted him.

He was pleased to stroke her hair, pat her shoulders, press her hands and wipe away her tears. At last she stopped crying; but for a long time she continued to complain about her father, and of her difficult, unbearable life in that house, begging Kovrin to enter into her position; then she gradually began to smile and to sigh that God had given her such a bad character, and at last she laughed aloud, called herself a fool and ran out of the room.

Shortly after, when Kovrin went into the garden, Egor Semenych and Tania were walking together in the avenue eating black bread and salt (they were both hungry), as if nothing had happened.

V

Delighted that the part of peacemaker had been successful, Kovrin went into the park. While sitting on a bench thinking he heard the sound of wheels and of girls' laughter—visitors had arrived. When the

shades of evening had begun to settle down on the gardens faint sounds of a violin and of voices singing reached his ear, and this reminded him of the black monk. Where, in what land or on what planet was that optical incongruity now being borne ?

He had scarcely remembered the legend, and recalled to his memory the dark vision he had seen in the rye field, when just before him a middle-sized man with a bare grey head and bare feet, who looked like a beggar, came silently out of the pine wood, walking with small, unheard steps. On his pale, deathlike face the black eyebrows stood out sharply. Nodding affably this beggar or pilgrim came noiselessly and sat down on the bench. Kovrin recognized in him the black monk. For a minute they looked at each other—Kovrin with astonishment ; the monk in a kindly and, as on the previous occasion, in a somewhat cunning manner, and with a self-complacent expression.

" But you are a mirage," Kovrin exclaimed ; " why are you here and sitting on one place too ? That is not in accordance with the legend."

" That's all the same," the monk replied after a pause, in a low quiet voice, turning his face towards Kovrin. " The mirage, the legend and I are all the products of your excited imagination. I am a phantom."

" Then, you do not exist ? " Kovrin asked.

" Think what you like," the monk answered with a faint smile. " I exist in your imagination, and your imagination is part of nature, consequently I exist in nature too."

" You have a very old, clever and expressive face ; just as if you had really existed for more than a thousand years," Kovrin said. " I did not know that my imagination was capable of creating such phenomena. But why

are you looking at me with such rapture ? Do I please you ? "

" Yes. You are one of the few who are justly called the chosen of God. You serve the eternal truth. Your thoughts, your intentions, your extraordinary science and your whole life bear the godlike, the heavenly stamp, as they are devoted to the reasonable and the beautiful, that is to say, to that which is eternal."

" You said the eternal truth. . . . But can people attain to the eternal truth, and is it necessary for them if there is no eternal life ? "

" There is eternal life," the monk answered.

" Do you believe in the immortality of man ? "

" Yes, of course. A great brilliant future awaits you men. And the more men like you there are on earth, the sooner this future will be realized. Without you, the servants of the first cause, you who live with discernment and in freedom, the human race would, indeed, be insignificant. Developing in a natural way it would long have waited for the end of its earthly history. You are leading it to the kingdom of eternal truth several thousand years sooner—and in this lies your great service. . . . You incarnate in yourselves the blessing with which God has honoured mankind."

" But what is the object of eternal life ? " Kovrin asked.

" The same as of all life—enjoyment. True enjoyment is knowledge, and eternal life offers numberless and inexhaustible sources of knowledge ; this is the meaning of : ' in my Father's House are many mansions.' "

" If you only knew how pleasant it is to listen to you," Kovrin said, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

" I'm very pleased."

" But I know that when you go away I will be troubled

about your reality. You are a vision, a hallucination. Consequently I am psychically ill, I am not normal."

"And what of that! Why are you troubled? You are ill because you have worked beyond your strength and you are exhausted, which means that you have sacrificed your health to an idea, and the time is near when you will sacrifice your life to it too. What could be better? It is the object to which all noble natures, gifted from above, constantly aspire."

"If I know that I am mentally diseased, can I believe in myself?"

"How do you know that the men of genius, who are believed in by the whole world, have not also seen visions? Scholars say now that genius is allied to insanity. My friend, only the ordinary people—the herd—are quite well and normal. All this consideration about the nervous century, overwork, degeneration, etc., can only seriously alarm those whose object in life is the present—that is the people of the herd."

"The Romans said: 'mens sana in corpore sano.'"

"Not all that the Romans and Greeks said is true. Overstrain, excitement, ecstacy, all that distinguishes the prophets, the poets, the martyrs for ideas, from ordinary people, is opposed to the animal side of man's nature, that is, to his physical health. I repeat, if you wish to be healthy and normal go to the herd."

"It is strange, you say what often comes into my mind," Kovrin said. "You appear to have looked into my soul and listened to my most secret thoughts. But let us not speak of me. What do you mean by the eternal truth?"

The monk did not reply. Kovrin glanced at him and could not distinguish his face. The features became misty and melted away. The monk's head and hands

gradually disappeared, his body seemed to be blended with the bench and with the evening twilight and then he vanished entirely.

"The hallucination is over," Kovrin said, and he laughed. "What a pity!"

He returned towards the house gay and happy. What little the black monk had said to him flattered not only his self-love, but his whole soul, his whole being. To be one of the chosen, to serve the eternal truth, to stand in the ranks of those who will render mankind worthy of the Kingdom of God a few thousand years sooner than it would otherwise have been, that is, will save mankind from an extra thousand years of struggle, sin and suffering, to sacrifice everything—youth, strength, health, to the idea—to be ready to die for the general good—what a high, what a happy fate! His clean, chaste life, so full of work passed through his memory; he remembered what he himself had learned, what he had taught others, and he arrived at the conclusion that there was no exaggeration in the words the monk had spoken.

Tania came to meet him through the park. She was dressed in another frock.

"Here you are at last!" she said. "We are looking for you everywhere. But what has happened to you?" she said with astonishment, gazing at his enraptured, beaming countenance and at his eyes that were brimming over with tears. "How strange you look, Andryusha."

"I am satisfied, Tania," Kovrin said, putting his hands on her shoulders. "I am more than satisfied, I am happy! Tania, dear Tania, you are a most congenial creature! Dear Tania, I am so glad, so glad!"

He kissed both her hands passionately and continued:

"I have just passed through bright, beautiful,

unearthly moments. But I cannot tell you all because you would call me mad, or you would not believe me. Let us talk of you. Dear, charming Tania ! I love you, and I have become used to love you. Your nearness, our meetings, ten times daily have become a necessity for my soul. I don't know how I shall be able to exist without you, when I go home."

" Well ! " and Tania laughed, " you will forget us in two days. We are little people, and you are a great man."

" No, let us talk seriously," he said. " I will take you with me. Yes ? Won't you come with me ? You want to be mine ? "

" Well, well ! " Tania said and again she wanted to laugh, but laughter would not come, and red spots came out on her face.

She began to breathe fast, and she walked on very quickly, not towards the house, but deeper into the park.

" I never thought of this . . . never ! " she said, clasping her hands as if in despair.

Kovrin followed her and continued to speak with the same brilliant, excited face.

" I want love that would conquer me entirely, and that love, Tania, you alone can give me. I am happy, happy ! "

She was stupified, she bent, she shrivelled, she seemed suddenly to grow ten years older, and he thought her beautiful and he expressed his thoughts aloud :

" How beautiful she is ! "

VI

When Egor Semenych heard from Kovrin that the romance had not only begun, but that there was to be a wedding, he walked about the rooms for a long time trying to hide his agitation. His hands began to tremble, his neck seemed to grow thicker and became purple ; he ordered his racing droshky to be put to and drove off somewhere. Tania, seeing how he whipped the horse and how low down, almost over his ears, he had pressed his cap, understood his mood, shut herself up in her room and cried all day.

The peaches and plums were already ripening in the hot-houses ; the packing and sending off to Moscow of these delicate and tender goods required much attention, trouble and work. Owing to the summer having been very hot and dry, it was necessary to water every tree ; this took up much time and labour, besides multitudes of caterpillars appeared on the trees, which the work-people, as well as Egor Semenych and Tania, crushed with their fingers, to Kovrin's great disgust. Besides all this work it was necessary to accept orders for fruit and trees for the autumn deliveries, and to carry on a large correspondence. While at the busiest time, when it seemed that nobody had a moment to spare, the season for field work came on and took away more than half the hands from the garden. Egor Semenych, very much sunburnt, exhausted and irritated, rushed about now in the gardens, now in the fields, crying that he was torn to pieces, and that he would send a bullet through his head.

There was also all the bustle caused by the preparation

of the trousseau, on which the Pesotskis set great store; everybody in the house was made quite dizzy by the click of scissors, the noise of sewing machines, the fumes of hot irons and the caprices of the milliner, a nervous lady, who was easily offended. And, as if on purpose, every day saw the arrival of guests, who had to be entertained and fed, and who often even stayed the night. However, all this drudgery passed by almost unperceived as if in a mist. Tania felt that love and happiness had come upon her unawares, although for some reason from the age of fourteen she had been convinced that Kovrin would be sure to marry her. She was amazed, she was perplexed, she could not believe it herself. . . . At times she was suddenly overpowered by such joy, that she wanted to fly above the clouds, and pray to God there; at others, equally suddenly, she would remember that in August she would have to take leave of her paternal home and her father, or—God knows from where the thought would come—that she was insignificant, small and unworthy of such a great man as Kovrin—then she went to her own room, locked herself in and wept bitterly during several hours. When they had company it would suddenly appear to her that Kovrin was uncommonly handsome, and that all the women were in love with him, and were envious of her, then her soul was filled with pride and delight as if she had conquered the whole world, but he had only to smile affably at one of the girls to cause her to tremble with jealousy and retire to her own room; then there were tears again. These new sensations quite took possession of her; she helped her father mechanically, and never noticed the peaches nor the caterpillars, nor the labourers, nor even how quickly the time flew.

Much the same happened to Egor Semenych. He worked from morning to night, he was always hurrying

somewhere, he constantly lost his temper, he was irritable, but all this took place in a sort of enchanted state of semi-sleep. It was as if there were two men in him: one was the real Egor Semenych who, listening to his gardener, Ivan Karlych, making his report about the disorders in the gardens, would be indignant, and put his hands to his head in despair; and the other, not the real one who, as if in a half-tipsy state, would suddenly break in to the business report in the middle of a word and placing his hand on the gardener's shoulder would begin to murmur:

"Whatever one may say there is much in blood. His mother was a wonderful, a most noble, a most clever woman. It was a delight to look at her good, bright, pure face, like an angel's. She painted beautifully, she wrote verses, she could speak five foreign languages, she sang. . . . Poor thing, may the heavenly kingdom be hers, she died of consumption."

The unreal Egor Semenych sighed, and after a pause continued:

"When he was a boy growing up in my house, he had the same angelic, bright and good face. He has the same look, the same movements and the same soft, elegant manner of speaking that his mother had. And his intellect! He always astonished us by his intellect. By the way, it is not for nothing that he is a Master of Arts! . . . No, not for nothing! But wait a little, Ivan Karlych, you'll see what he'll be in ten years! He'll be quite unapproachable!"

But here the real Egor Semenych, checking himself, made a serious face, caught hold of his head and shouted:

"Devils! They've dirtied, destroyed, devastated everything! The garden is lost! The garden is ruined!"

Kovrin worked with the same zeal as before, and did not notice the hurly-burly around him. Love only

added oil to the fire. After each meeting with Tania he returned to his room happy, enraptured, and with the same passion with which he had just kissed Tania and had told her of his love, he seized a book or set to work at his manuscript. All that the black monk had said about the chosen of God, eternal truth, the brilliant future of the human race, etc., only gave his work a special, an uncommon meaning and filled his soul with pride, and the consciousness of his own eminence. Once or twice a week either in the park or in the house he met the black monk and conversed with him for a long time; but this did not frighten him; on the contrary, it delighted him, as he was firmly convinced that such an apparition only visited the chosen, the eminent people, who had devoted themselves to the service of the idea.

One day the monk appeared during dinner and sat down in the dining-room near the window. Kovrin was delighted, and he very adroitly turned the conversation with Egor Semenych and Tania upon subjects that might interest the monk. The black guest listened and nodded his head affably; Egor Semenych and Tania also listened and smiled gaily, never suspecting that Kovrin was not talking to them, but to his vision.

Unperceived the fast of the Assumption was there, and soon after it the wedding-day arrived. The marriage was celebrated according to Egor Semenych's persistent desire "with racket," that is, with senseless festivities that lasted two days. They ate and drank far more than three thousand roubles, but owing to the bad hired band, the shrill toasts, the hurrying to and fro of the lackeys, the noise and the overcrowding, nobody could appreciate the bouquet of the expensive wines nor the taste of the wonderful delicacies that had been ordered from Moscow.

VII

It happened on one of the long winter nights that Kovrin was lying in bed reading a French novel. Poor little Tania, who was not yet accustomed to live in a town, had a bad headache, as she often had by the evening, and was long since asleep, but from time to time she was uttering disconnected phrases in her sleep.

It had struck three. Kovrin blew out his candle and lay down. He lay long with closed eyes, but could not get to sleep, because (so it seemed to him) it was very hot in the bedroom and Tania was talking in her sleep. At half-past four he again lit the candle, and at that moment he saw the black monk sitting on the arm-chair that stood near the bed.

"How do you do?" the monk said, and after a short pause he asked: "Of what are you thinking now?"

"Of fame," Kovrin answered. "In the French novel I have just been reading there is a man, a young scientist, who did stupid things, and who pined away from longing for fame. These longings are incomprehensible to me."

"Because you are wise. You look upon fame with indifference, like a plaything that does not interest you."

"Yes, that is true."

"Fame has no attraction for you. What is there flattering, interesting or instructive in the fact that your name will be carved on your gravestone, and then time will efface this inscription together with its gilding? Besides, happily you are too many for man's weak memory to be able to remember all your names."

"Naturally," Kovrin agreed. "Why should they be remembered? But let us speak of something else. For example, of happiness. What is happiness?"

When the clock struck five he was sitting on his bed with his feet resting on the rug and turning to the monk he was saying:

"In ancient times one happy man was at last frightened at his own happiness—it was so great! And in order to propitiate the gods he sacrificed to them his most precious ring. You know that story? Like Polycrates, I am beginning to be alarmed at my own happiness. It appears to me strange that from morning to night I only experience joy; I am filled with joy and it smothers all other feelings. I do not know what sadness, grief or dullness is. Here am I not asleep. I suffer from sleeplessness, but I am not dull. Quite seriously, I'm beginning to be perplexed."

"Why?" the monk asked in astonishment. "Is joy a superhuman feeling? Ought it not to be the normal condition of man? The higher a man is in his intellectual and moral development, the more free he is, the greater are the pleasures that life offers him. Socrates, Diogenes and Marcus Aurelius knew joy, and not grief. The apostle says: 'Rejoice always.' Therefore rejoice and be happy."

"What if suddenly the gods were angered?" Kovrin said jokingly, and he laughed. "What if they take from me my comfort and make me suffer cold and hunger, it will scarcely be to my taste."

In the meantime Tania had awaked and looked at her husband with amazement and terror. He was talking, addressing himself to the arm-chair, gesticulating and laughing; his eyes glistened and there was something strange in his laughter.

"Andryusha, with whom are you talking?" she

asked, catching hold of the hand he was stretching out to the monk. "Andryusha, with whom? . . ."

"Eh? With whom?" Kovrin became confused. "With him. There he sits," he answered, pointing to the black monk.

"There's nobody here . . . nobody! Andryusha, you're ill!"

Tania put her arms round her husband and pressed close to him, and as if to protect him from visions she put her hand over his eyes. "You are ill!" She sobbed and her whole body trembled. "Forgive me, darling, my dear one; I have long noticed that your soul is troubled about something. You are mentally ill, Andryusha. . . ."

Her shivering fit was communicated to him. He looked again at the arm-chair, which was now empty; he suddenly felt a weakness in the arms and legs, he was alarmed and began to dress.

"It's nothing, Tania, nothing . . ." he mumbled, shivering. "I really feel a little out of sorts . . . it's time to admit it."

"I have long noticed it—and papa has noticed it too," she said, trying to restrain her sobs. "You talk to yourself, you smile in a strange way . . . you don't sleep. Oh, my God, my God, save us!" she said in terror. "But you must not be afraid, Andryusha, don't be afraid, for God's sake don't be afraid. . . ."

She also began to dress. Only now, when he looked at her, Kovrin understood all the danger of his position, he understood what the black monk and his talks with him meant. It was now quite clear to him that he was a madman.

They both dressed, without knowing why, and went into the drawing-room. She went first, he followed her. Here Egor Semenych, who was staying with them, was

already standing in his dressing-gown with a candle in his hand.

"Don't be afraid, Andryusha," Tania said again, trembling like one with a fever. "Don't be afraid. Papa, it will soon pass, it will soon pass."

Kovrin was too excited to be able to speak. He wanted to say to his father-in-law in a playful tone:

"Congratulate me, I think I'm out of my mind," but his lips only moved, and he smiled bitterly.

At nine o'clock in the morning he was wrapped up in a fur coat and a shawl and driven in a carriage to the doctor's. He began a cure.

VIII

Summer had come back again, and the doctor ordered Kovrin to go to the country. Kovrin was already cured, he had ceased seeing the black monk, and it only was necessary to restore his physical strength. While living on his father-in-law's estate he drank much milk, he worked only two hours a day, he did not drink wine, nor did he smoke.

On the eve of St. Elias's day vespers were celebrated in the house. When the deacon handed the censer to the priest there was an odour of the churchyard in the whole of the huge old hall, and it made Kovrin feel dull. He went into the garden. He walked about there without noticing the magnificent flowers; he sat on one of the benches and then wandered into the park; when he came to the river he went down to the water's edge

and stood there for some time plunged in thought looking at the water. The gloomy pines, with their rough roots that but a year ago had seen him so young, joyful and hale, now did not whisper together, but stood motionless and dumb, just as if they did not recognize him. And, really, he was changed since last year; his head was closely cropped, his long beautiful hair was gone, his gait was languid, his face had grown stouter and paler.

He crossed over the foot-bridge to the other bank. Where the year before there had been rye, now mowed-down oats lay in long rows. The sun had already disappeared, and on the horizon the red glow of sunset was still widespread, foretelling wind for the next day. It was quiet. Looking in the direction where a year before the black monk had made his first appearance, Kovrin stood for about twenty minutes till the brightness of the sunset had faded away.

When he returned to the house languid and dissatisfied, vespers were over. Egor Semenych and Tania were sitting on the steps of the terrace drinking tea. They were talking about something, but when they saw Kovrin coming they suddenly were silent, and he concluded, judging by their faces, that the conversation had been about him.

"I think it's time for you to have your milk," Tania said to her husband.

"No, it's not time . . ." he answered as he sat down on the very lowest step. "Drink it yourself. I don't want it."

Tania exchanged an anxious glance with her father and said in a guilty tone:

"You yourself have noticed that milk does you good."

"Oh yes, very much good," Kovrin said, smiling. "I congratulate you; since Friday I have added another

pound to my weight." He squeezed his head tightly between his hands and said sadly: "Why, why do you make me have this cure? All sorts of bromatic preparations, idleness, warm baths, watching, poor-spirited, alarm for every mouthful, for every step—all this in the end will make a perfect idiot of me. I went mad, I had the mania of greatness, but for all that I was gay, healthy and even happy; I was interesting and original. Now I have become more sober-minded and matter-of-fact, but in consequence I am now like everybody else. I am mediocre, life is tiresome to me. . . . Oh, how cruelly you have acted towards me! I saw hallucinations; in what way did that interfere with anybody? I ask you, with whom did that interfere?"

"God knows what you are saying!" Egor Semenych said with a sigh. "It's tiresome to listen to you!"

"Then don't listen."

The presence of people, especially of Egor Semenych, irritated Kovrin. He answered him drily, coldly, even rudely, and when he looked at him it was always with derision and with hatred. Egor Semenych was confused and coughed guiltily, although he could feel no blame. Unable to understand this sudden and sharp change in their friendly and kind-hearted relations, Tania pressed close to her father, and looked into his eyes with troubled glances; she wanted to understand the cause, but could not; all that was clear to her was that their relations became with every day worse and worse, that latterly her father had aged very much, and that her husband had become irritable, capricious, quarrelsome and uninteresting. She could no longer laugh and sing, she ate nothing at dinner, she often had sleepless nights, expecting something dreadful, and she was so worn out that once she lay in a faint from dinner-time until evening. During vespers it had

appeared to her that her father was crying, and now when they were all three sitting together on the terrace she had to make an effort not to think of this.

"How happy were Buddha, Mohammed and Shakespeare, that their kind relations and doctors did not try to cure them of their ecstasies and inspirations!" Kovrin said. "If Mohammed had taken bromide to calm his nerves, had worked only two hours a day and had drunk milk, as little would have remained of this remarkable man as of his dog. The doctors and the kind relations will in the end so blunt the capacities of mankind that at last mediocrity will be considered genius and civilization will perish. If you only knew how thankful I am to you!" Kovrin said with vexation.

He felt greatly irritated and to prevent himself from saying too much he rose quickly and went into the house. The night was calm, and the scent of tobacco and jalap was borne through the open window. In the large dark ballroom the moonlight lay in green patches on the floor and on the piano. Kovrin remembered his raptures of the previous summer, when the jalaps smelt in the same way and the moon looked in at the windows. In order to renew last year's frame of mind he hurried into his study, lit a strong cigar and ordered the butler to bring him some wine. But the cigar only left an unpleasantly bitter taste in his mouth, and the wine had not the same flavour it had had the year before. What loss of habit does! He got giddy from the cigar, and after two sips of wine he had palpitations of the heart, so he had to take a dose of bromide.

When she was going to bed Tania said to him:

"My father adores you. You are angry with him for some reason and it is killing him. Only look at him: he is ageing not by days, but by hours. I implore you, Andryusha, for God's sake, for the sake of your late

father, for the sake of my peace, be more affectionate with him."

"I can't, and I won't."

"But why?" Tania asked, beginning to tremble all over. "Tell me why?"

"Because I don't like him, that's all," Kovrin said carelessly, and shrugged his shoulders; "but let us not talk of him, he is your father."

"I can't, I really can't understand," Tania said, pressing her hands to her temples and looking at a point in front of her. "Something incomprehensible, something terrible is happening in our house. You are changed, you are not like yourself. You are clever, you are no ordinary man and you get irritated with trifles; you meddle in all sort of tittle-tattle. Such trifles agitate you, that sometimes one is astonished and cannot believe it, and asks oneself: Is it you? Well, well, don't be angry, don't be angry," she continued, alarmed by her own words and kissing his hands. "You are clever, kind, noble. You will be towards with my father. He is so good."

"He's not good, but good-natured. The good-natured uncles in farces, who are somewhat like your father—well-fed and with good-natured faces, extremely hospitable and a little comical—appeared touching and amusing to me in novels and farces and also in real life at one time—now they are repugnant to me. They are all egoists to the marrow of their bones. What's most repugnant to me is their being overfed and their abdominal, their entirely oxlike or swinelike optimism."

Tania sat down on the bed and laid her head on the pillow.

"This is torture," she said, and her voice showed she was quite exhausted, and that it was difficult for her to speak. "Ever since the winter there has not been a

single quiet moment. Good God, it is terrible! I suffer . . ."

"Yes, of course, I am Herod, and you and your little papa are the Egyptian infants. Oh, of course!"

His face appeared to Tania to be ugly and disagreeable; hatred and an expression of derision did not become him. For some time she had noticed there was something wanting in his face; it was as if a change had taken place in his countenance ever since the time his hair had been cut. She wanted to say something insulting to him, but at the moment she caught herself having such inimical feelings that she became alarmed and left the bedroom.

IX

Kovrin was appointed to a professor's chair. His inaugural address was announced for the second of December, and the notice of this lecture was hung up in the corridor of the University. But on the appointed day he sent a telegram to inform the provost that owing to illness he was unable to give the lecture.

He had had a severe hæmorrhage from the throat. For some time he had spat blood, but about twice a month the hæmorrhage was considerable, and after these attacks he experienced great weakness and fell into a somnolent condition. This illness did not cause him any special anxiety, as he knew that his mother had lived for ten years and even longer with exactly the same malady, and the doctors assured him that

there was no danger; they advised him only to be calm, to live a regular life and to talk as little as possible.

In January he was again unable to give the lecture owing to the same cause, and in February it was already too late to begin the course, and it had to be postponed until the next year.

At that time he no longer lived with Tania, but with another woman, who was two years older than he was, and who looked after him as if he were a child. His frame of mind was peaceful and tranquil: he obeyed willingly, and when Varvara Nikolaevna decided to take him to the Crimea he consented, although he had a foreboding that nothing good would come of this journey.

They arrived in Sevastopol towards evening and stayed the night at an hotel to rest before proceeding the next day to Yalta. They were both exhausted from the long journey. Varvara Nikolaevna had some tea, went to bed and was soon sound asleep. But Kovrin remained up. An hour before leaving home he had received a letter from Tania, and he had not been able to make up his mind to open it; it was still lying in his side pocket, and the thought of its being there agitated him unpleasantly. In the depths of his soul he now quite sincerely considered his marriage to have been a mistake; he was glad that he had definitely separated from her, and the remembrance of that woman, who at last had turned into a live walking skeleton and in whom all appeared to be dead with the exception of the large clever eyes that looked steadily at you—aroused in him nothing but pity and sorrow for himself, and the handwriting on the envelope reminded him how unjust and cruel he had been two years ago, how he had vented his own voidness of soul,

dullness, solitude and dissatisfaction with life on quite innocent people. This also reminded him of how one day he had torn into small pieces his dissertation and all the articles he had written during his illness and how he had thrown them out of the window, and the scraps of paper, blown about by the wind, had fluttered on to the flowers and the trees ; in each line he saw strange pretensions that were founded on nothing, hare-brained passions, insolence, the mania of greatness, and this had produced on him the effect of reading a description of his own vices ; but when the last copy-book had been torn up and had flown out of the window for some reason he had suddenly become sorry and embittered, and he had gone to his wife and had told her all sorts of unpleasant things. Good God, how he had pestered her ! One day wanting to cause her pain he had told her that her father had played an unenviable part in their romance as he had asked him to marry her. Egor Semenych, who had accidentally overheard this, rushed into the room and in his despair was unable to utter a word ; he only stood there shifting from one foot to another and uttering a strange lowing sound as if he had been deprived of the power of speech, and Tania, gazing at her father, gave a piercing shriek and fell down in a swoon. It was disgraceful !

All this recurred to his memory at the sight of the familiar handwriting. Kovrin went out on to the balcony ; it was a calm warm evening, and there was a scent of the sea. The moon and lights were reflected in the beautiful bay, which was of a colour for which it was difficult to find a name. It was a delicate and soft blending of blue and green ; in places the water assumed the colour of green copperas, and in other places it seemed as if the moonlight had solidified, and instead of water had filled the bay, and in general what harmony

of colour there was all around, what a peaceful, calm and lofty enjoyment!

In the floor below, just under the balcony, the window was probably open, because one could distinctly hear women's voices and laughter. It was evident an evening party was going on there.

Kovrin made an effort, unsealed the letter and re-entering his room he read:

"My father has just died. I owe this to you as you have killed him. Our garden is ruined: strangers are now masters there; that is to say, what my poor father so feared is happening. I owe this to you too. I hate you with my whole soul, and I hope you will soon perish. Oh, how I suffer! My soul is consumed by unbearable pain. May you be accursed. I mistook you for an extraordinary man, for a genius. I loved you, but you proved to be a madman. . . ."

Kovrin could read no farther, he tore up the letter and threw it away. He was overpowered by a feeling of uneasiness that was almost like fear. Varvara Nikolaevna was sleeping behind the screen, and he could hear her breathing; from the story below the sound of women's voices and laughter were borne to him, but he had a sort of feeling that in the whole of the hotel there was not a living soul besides himself. Because unhappy, sorrowing Tania had cursed him in her letter, and had wished him to perish, a feeling of dread came over him, and he looked furtively at the door as if he feared that the unknown power, which in the space of some two years had caused such ruin in his life and in the lives of those dearest to him, would enter the room and again take possession of him.

By experience he knew that when his nerves were unstrung the best remedy was work. He must sit down to the table and force himself to concentrate his mind on

some special subject. He took out of his portfolio a copy-book in which he had jotted down the synopsis of a small compilatory work he had thought of writing if the weather proved to be bad in the Crimea, as it was dull to be without occupation. He sat down to the table and began to work at this synopsis, and it appeared to him that his old peaceful, submissive, equitable frame of mind was coming back. The copy-book with the synopsis aroused in him thoughts of worldly vanities. He thought how much life takes for the insignificant or very ordinary blessings that it is able to give man in exchange. For example, in order to receive before forty an ordinary professorial chair, and to expound in a languid, tiresome, heavy style very ordinary thoughts, which besides are the thoughts of other people —in a word, to attain the position of a moderately good scholar, he, Kovrin, had to study for fifteen years, to work day and night, pass through a serious mental disease, to survive an unsuccessful marriage and commit all sorts of follies and injustices, which it would be pleasant to forget. Kovrin realized now quite plainly that he was an ordinary mediocrity and he was quite satisfied with this, as he considered every man must be contented with what he was.

His synopsis would have been able to calm him if the white scraps of the torn-up letter that lay on the floor had not prevented him from concentrating his thoughts. He rose from the table, collected the fragments of the letter and threw them out of the window ; but a light wind was blowing from the sea and the scraps of paper were scattered on the window-sill. He again was seized by a feeling of uneasiness that was almost like fear, and it seemed to him that in the whole of the hotel with the exception of himself there was not a single living soul. . . . He went on to the balcony.

The bay, as if alive, looked at him with numberless azure, dark blue, turquoise-blue and fiery eyes and enticed him towards itself. It was really hot and sultry, and it would be pleasant to have a bathe.

Suddenly in the lower story just under the balcony there was the sound of a violin and two delicate women's voices began to sing. They were singing something very familiar. The song that was being sung below told of a girl who had a sick imagination, who heard mysterious sounds at night in the garden, and made up her mind that they were sacred harmonies that were incomprehensible to us mortals. . . . Kovrin had catchings of his breath and his heart grew heavy with sadness, and a beautiful sweet joy, such as he had long forgotten, throbbed in his breast.

A high black column that looked like a whirlwind or a waterspout appeared on the opposite shores of the bay. With terrible rapidity it moved across the bay in the direction of the hotel, becoming smaller and darker, and Kovrin had scarcely time to stand to one side to make room for it. . . . A monk with a bare head and black eyebrows, barefooted, with hands crossed on his breast was borne past him and stopped in the middle of the room.

"Why did you not believe me?" he asked reproachfully, and looked kindly at Kovrin. "If you had believed me then, when I told you that you were a genius, you would not have passed these two years so sadly and so miserably."

Kovrin believed that he was the chosen of God and a genius, he instantly remembered all his former conversations with the black monk, and he wanted to speak but blood began to flow from his throat straight on to his breast, and he, not knowing what to do, passed his hands over his chest and his cuffs became saturated

with blood. He wanted to call Varvara Nikolaevna, who was sleeping behind the screen; he made an effort and said:

"Tania!"

He fell on the floor and raising himself on his arm again called:

"Tania!"

He called to Tania, he called to the great gardens with their lovely flowers sprinkled with dew, he called to the park, to the pines with their rugged roots, to the fields of rye, to his wonderful science, to his youth, courage, joy, he called to life that was so beautiful. He saw on the floor close to his face a large pool of blood, and from weakness he could not utter another word, but an inexpressible, a boundless happiness filled his whole being. Below, just under the balcony, they were playing the serenade, and the black monk whispered to him that he was a genius and that he was only dying because his weak human body had lost its balance and could no longer serve as the garb for a genius.

When Varvara Nikolaevna awoke and came from behind the screen Kovrin was already dead and his face had stiffened in a blissful smile.

THE PRIVY COUNCILLOR

In the beginning of April, 1870, my mother, Clavdia Arkhipovna, the widow of a first lieutenant, received a letter from her brother, Ivan, the Privy Councillor, who resided in St. Petersburg, in which, besides various pieces of news, he wrote: "The liver complaint from which I suffer has long obliged me to live abroad every summer; but as I find this year that I have not sufficient cash for my cure in Marienbad, it is very probable, dear sister, I may come to Kochuevka this summer, to pass some time with you."

My mother grew pale and trembled in every limb when she read this letter, but soon an expression of laughter and tears appeared on her countenance. This struggle between tears and laughter always reminded me of the twinkling and spluttering of a brightly burning candle when water is sprinkled on it. Having read the letter a second time, my mother called her household together, and with a voice trembling with emotion she began to explain to us that there had been four brothers Gundasov: one Gundasov died as an infant, another went to the wars and also died, the third—may it be said without offence to him—was an actor, and the fourth . . .

"The fourth—he is far above us," my mother sobbed; "my own brother . . . we grew up together. . . . Ah, how I tremble . . . how I tremble. . . . Why, he is a Privy Councillor—a general! . . . How shall I greet

him . . . my angel? How shall I, a silly, uneducated old woman, be able to converse with him . . . I have not seen him for fifteen years! Andryushenka," my mother continued, turning to me, "be happy, you little goose! It is for your good luck that God sends him to us!"

As soon as we had heard a very minute history of the whole Gundasov family, a running about and a bustle began in the whole estate, such as I had never seen except before Christmas and Easter. The only things that had pity shown them were the vault of heaven and the water in the river, everything else was unmercifully cleaned, washed and painted. If the sky had been smaller and not so high, and the water of the river had not run so swiftly, even they would have been scrubbed with sand and rubbed with bast. The walls, that were already white as snow, were whitewashed all over, the floors always bright and shining were polished every day. The tom-cat, Dock (one day during my childhood I had cut off a good quarter of his tail with the chopper used for breaking sugar, and that is how he came by the name of Dock), was banished from the dwelling-rooms and given into the charge of Anisya; and Fedka was told that if the dogs came anywhere near the porch God would punish him. But nobody suffered more than the poor sofas, chairs and carpets. At no previous time had they been beaten with sticks so unmercifully as they were beaten now, in the expectation of our guest. My pigeons, hearing the noise of beating, were so excited that they almost flew away to heaven.

The tailor, Spiridon, came from Novostroevka. He was the only tailor in the whole district who dared to work for the gentry. He was a good, capable, hard-working man, who did not drink and who had certain

ideas of style and elegance ; but, nevertheless, he worked abominably. The thought that he did not make his things sufficiently fashionable caused him to alter each article five or six times. He often went to the nearest town, trudging along on foot, to study the fashions worn by the local dandies, with the result that in the end he made our clothes in a way that even a caricaturist would have thought exaggerated and overdone. To be fashionable we strutted about in trousers, which were so narrow, and jackets, which were so short, that when we found ourselves in the company of young ladies we felt ashamed.

Spiridon took my measure carefully and slowly. He measured me from every point, up and down, round and round, as if I were a barrel for which he had to make hoops ; he made careful notes with a thick pencil on a piece of paper and covered his measure with three-cornered marks. When he had finished with me it was the turn of my tutor, Egor Alexeevich Pobedimsky. My never-to-be-forgotten tutor was just at the age when young men are much occupied with the cultivation of their moustache, and think a great deal about their personal appearance and the fit of their clothes, so you may imagine with what trepidation Spiridon turned to him. Egor Alexeevich had to throw his head back, stretch out his legs in the form of a reversed letter V ; first he had to raise his arms, then to lower them again. Spiridon measured him several times circling round and round like an enamoured pigeon round his mate, now and again sinking on one knee and bending his body into a hook. . . . My mother, faint and weary from all her exertions and troubles, flushed from constant ironing, looked on during this lengthy process and kept repeating :

" Now mind, Spiridon, God will punish you if you

spoil the cloth. You will have no more luck if you fail to get a good fit."

My mother's words only made Spiridon become hot and cold, because he was sure he would not get the right fit. He took one rouble and twenty kopecks for making my suit, and for Pobedimsky's two roubles; the cloth, lining and buttons were provided by us. This cannot be called exorbitant, as Novostroevka was about ten versts distant from our place, and the tailor came to try on about four times. Each time we tried on the narrow trousers, drawing them on with difficulty, and got into the exceedingly tight jackets, which were tacked together with white threads, my prudish mother frowned and seemed astonished.

"Good Lord, what vulgar new fashions! One's ashamed to look at you. If my brother were not a man about town, I would certainly never think of having such fashionable clothes made for you."

Spiridon, glad that she blamed the fashions and not his work, shrugged his shoulders and drew a long breath as much as to say: "What can you do? 'Tis the spirit of the age!"

The excitement with which we awaited the arrival of our guest could only be compared with the tension of spiritists at a séance, when expecting the apparition of the spirit. My mother suffered from sick-headaches and she was constantly in tears. I lost my appetite, slept badly and did not learn my lessons. The longing speedily to see the general did not desert me even in my dreams. I constantly dreamed of him, that is to say, of a man with epaulets, a high gold-embroidered collar that reached to his ears, with a drawn sword in his hand, just like the man whose portrait hung in our drawing-room, above the sofa, and stared with terrible black eyes on all who dared to look at him. Only Pobedimsky

remained quite composed. He was not afraid, nor delighted; only from time to time, when my mother related the history of the Gundasov family, he would remark:

"Yes, it will be pleasant to converse with a man of the world."

Everybody on our estate looked upon my tutor as a person possessing an exceptional nature. He was a pimply young man of twenty, with a low forehead and unusually long disorderly hair. His nose was so long that, when he wanted to examine anything closely, my tutor had to bend his head on one side like a bird. In our eyes there was no man as learned, wise and gallant in the whole district. He had passed through six classes of the gymnasium, and had then entered a veterinary college, from which, in less than six months, he had been expelled. The cause of his expulsion he kept a profound secret, which enabled anybody, wishing to do so, to look upon my tutor as a man who had been victimized, and they surrounded him with an atmosphere of mystery. He spoke little, and on serious subjects only; he did not fast during Lent; and he looked upon life from a contemptuous height, which, however, did not prevent him from accepting presents from my mother, in the shape of suits of clothes, or of painting grinning faces with red teeth on my paper kites. My mother did not like his "pride," but she bowed before his learning.

We had not long to wait for our guest. In the beginning of May two loads of trunks and portmanteaus arrived from the nearest station. These trunks looked so majestic that the coachmen, quite automatically, took off their caps as they got them down from the carts,

"There must be uniforms and ugnpowder in these trunks," I thought.

Why gunpowder? Probably the dignity of a general

was closely connected in my mind with cannon and gunpowder.

The next day, May 10th, when I awoke, my nurse told me in a whisper that my uncle had arrived. I got up quickly, washed anyhow and rushed out of the room without saying my prayers. In the passage I butted into a tall, square-built gentleman, with fashionable whiskers, dressed in a smart overcoat. Almost dying of fright, and scarcely remembering the instructions my mother had given me as to how I should greet my uncle, I approached this formidable personage, bowed low, knocking my heels together, and stooped to kiss his hand; but the gentleman would not allow me to do so and informed me that he was not my uncle, but only my uncle's valet Peter. The sight of this Peter, who was dressed in a much richer style than either I or Pobedimsky, astonished me greatly, and I must confess I can't get over it to this very day. Who could have thought that such sedate, serious people, with such strict and clever eyes could, by any possibility, be servants? And for what reason?

Peter told me that my uncle was with my mother in the garden, so I scampered after them.

Nature, not knowing the history of the Gundasov family, nor my uncle's rank, felt much more free and less shy than I did. The noise that went on in the garden was like the row of a country fair. Numberless starlings cutting through the air chased the gnats and flies over the paths and the flower-beds with noise and chatter. Flocks of chirping sparrows hid in the lilac bushes, which were covered with delicate fragrant blossoms, that seemed to stretch out straight into your face. The songs of thrushes, the twittering of innumerable small birds, and the humming of bees and gnats were heard on all sides. At another time I would have

started to chase the grasshoppers, or to throw stones at a crow that was sitting on a mound of earth beneath the aspen trees, and turned his long beak from side to side, but now I dared not think of any mischief. My heart throbbed and there was a cold feeling in my stomach. I was preparing myself to meet the man with the epaulets, the drawn sword and the fierce eyes.

But imagine my disenchantment! Walking by my mother's side in the garden I saw a thin, little dandy in a white silk suit and a white cap. He had his hands in his pockets and his head well thrown back, and he kept constantly running in advance of my mother; he looked quite a young man. There was so much life and movement in his whole figure that the treacherous signs of age could only be noticed when you got near him from behind, and saw beneath his cap the silver gleam of his closely cropped hair. Instead of the dignity and stiffness of a general, I saw almost boyish agility; instead of the embroidered high collar that reached to the ears, an ordinary blue silk cravat. My mother and my uncle were walking slowly in the avenue and talking together. I approached quietly from behind and waited until one of them should turn round.

"What a paradise you have here, Kladya!" my uncle said. "How charming, how nice everything is! If I had only known what a beautiful place you have, I would never have gone abroad during all these years."

My uncle bent down quickly and smelled a tulip. All he saw charmed and interested him. It seemed almost as if it were the first time in his life that he had seen a garden or a sunny day. This strange man moved as if worked by wires and never ceased speaking, not allowing my mother time to put in a word. Suddenly, at the turn of the road, Pobedimsky appeared from behind a group of elders. His apparition was so unexpected that

my uncle started and stepped back. In honour of the occasion my tutor wore his Inverness coat with large cape-like sleeves, which made him look like a windmill, especially when you saw him from behind. His mien was majestic and solemn. Pressing his hat to his breast, in the Spanish fashion, as the marquises do in melodrama, he took a step forward and made my uncle a profound bow, bending his body with a slight inclination to one side.

"I have the honour of introducing myself to Your Excellency," he said in a loud voice. "I am the pedagogue and instructor of your nephew, a former student of the Veterinary Institution, the nobleman Pobedimsky."

This politeness on the part of my tutor pleased my mother very much. She smiled and waited, hoping to hear some further clever remarks; but my tutor, expecting that in reply to his majestic greeting he would receive an equally majestic answer (that is to say, a general-like H'm! and two fingers of an outstretched hand), was very much confused and taken aback when the general laughed affably and shook his hand in a friendly and hearty manner. He mumbled something incoherent, coughed and retired.

"Is that not splendid!" laughed my uncle; "just look at him, he has put on his large flapping coat and thinks he is a very clever fellow. That pleases me, I swear, by God! What an amount of youthful assurance and life there is in that stupid flapping coat. . . . Ah! and who is this boy?" he said suddenly, turning round and seeing me.

"That is my Andryushenka," said my mother, flushing. "My consolation!"

I scraped my foot in the sand and bowed low.

"A fine boy, a fine boy," my uncle mumbled, removing

his hand from my lips and stroking my hair. "Your name is Andryusha? So, so, h'm! Yes, I swear, by God! . . . H'm! You have lessons?"

With fond exaggeration my mother began to describe the progress I had made in science and religion, while I, according to the prearranged programme, walked at my uncle's side and continued to make low obeisances. We had just got to the point when my mother began to throw out hints, that owing to my quite exceptional capacities it would be a good thing if I could get into a military school at the expense of the Crown, and when I, also according to programme, began to cry and to beg my uncle to use his influence, when he suddenly stopped, and spreading his arms in astonishment exclaimed:

"Good gracious! What is this?"

Coming along the path towards us was Tatiana Ivanovna, the wife of Fedor Petrovich, our bailiff. She was carrying a white starched petticoat and a long ironing-board. In passing she looked up timidly at our guest from beneath her long eyelashes and blushed.

"It gets better and better every hour," my uncle murmured between his teeth, looking after her with admiration. "You have a surprise at every step, sister; I swear, by God!"

"She's our beauty," my mother answered. "Fedor brought her from an estate a hundred versts from here."

Not everybody would have called Tatiana Ivanovna a beauty. She was a plump, graceful little woman of about twenty, with dark brown hair and brown eyes, always rosy and nice-looking, but neither in her face nor in her figure was there a single decided line, no bold stroke on which the eye could rest; it seemed as if nature, when she created her, had been without any inspiration, or boldness. Tatiana Ivanovna was timid,

easily confused and good-tempered; she went about smoothly and noiselessly, she spoke little and seldom smiled; her whole life was even and placid as her own unwrinkled face and smoothly brushed hair. My uncle screwed up his eyes and looking after her smiled. My mother looked fixedly at his smiling face, and became very grave.

"And so, brother, you have never married," she said with a little sigh.

"No, I never married."

"Why?" my mother asked quietly.

"How am I to tell you? It just happened so. In my youth I worked so hard that I had no time to live, and when I wanted to begin living I looked round and found I had already fifty years behind me. . . . I had had no time. However, it's dull to talk about it now . . ."

My mother and my uncle both sighed at the same time and went on. I lagged behind and ran away to find my tutor, with whom I wanted to talk about our impressions. I found Pobedimsky standing in the middle of the yard, looking majestically at the sky.

"One sees that he is a cultivated man," he said, twisting his head. "I hope we shall get on together."

In about an hour my mother joined us.

"Now, my dears, here's another trouble," she commenced panting for breath. "My brother has brought his valet with him; and this valet is such a fine gentleman that we can't put him to sleep in the kitchen, or give him a bed in the passage; he must, forsooth, have his own room. I can't think where I am to lodge him. What would you say, children, to going for a time into the farm-house, to Fedor, I could then give the valet your room? Eh?"

We agreed at once, because we should be much freer

if we lived in the farm-house than we were in the house, always under mother's eyes.

"There's nothing but one trouble after another," my poor mother continued. "Now my brother says that he cannot dine at twelve o'clock, but must have his dinner at seven, as they do in the capital. All this bother will drive me mad. By seven o'clock the dinner will be quite spoilt if it's left in the oven. . . . It's certain men never understand domestic affairs, even when they are very clever. . . . I shall have to make two dinners. . . . You, children, will dine as usual at midday, while I, poor old woman, will have to hold out until seven, on my brother's account."

Then with a deep sigh my mother ordered me to do all I could to please my uncle, whom God had sent to me as a blessing and for my good fortune, and then she ran away to the kitchen. That very day Pobedimsky and I removed to the farm-house where Fedor lived. We were lodged in a passage room that lay between the lobby and the room occupied by our bailiff.

Notwithstanding the arrival of my uncle and our new quarters, life went on much in the usual way and, contrary to our expectations, it was dull and monotonous. In honour of our guest we were given holidays. Pobedimsky, who never read anything, nor occupied himself in any way, sat most of the time on his bed, looking over his long nose into vacancy, and he seemed to be thinking. From time to time he would get up, try on his new suit and then sit down again to meditate in silence. Only one thing bothered him—and that was the flies, which he mercilessly tried to kill by slapping his hands together. After dinner he usually rested, and the sound of his snores made the whole place melancholy. I either ran about the garden all day long, or sat in our room in the farm-house and made paper kites.

During the first two or three weeks we seldom saw my uncle. For whole days together he sat in his room and worked regardless of the heat or the flies. His unusual capacity for sitting still, as if glued to his chair, astonished us very much, and we considered it a great feat. For us lazy boys, who knew nothing of systematic work, his industry seemed to be quite a marvel. He got up at about nine o'clock, and would sit at his table without moving until dinner; then having had his dinner he would return to his work and sit on until late at night. Whenever I peeped at him through the keyhole, I always saw the same sight: my uncle sitting at his table and working. The work he did seemed to consist of writing with one hand and turning over the leaves of a book with the other, and strange to say, it made him move all over. He swung his legs like a pendulum, whistled softly and kept time by nodding his head. His appearance all the while was quite absent-minded and light-hearted, not as if he were working, but rather as if he were having a game of noughts and crosses with himself. He was always dressed in a short silk jacket and wore a very bright-coloured tie, and every time I peeped through the keyhole I seemed to smell the odour of effeminate scents. He only left his room to come to dinner, but he always ate very little.

"I can't understand my brother," mother complained. "Every day I kill turkeys and pigeons for him, I even prepare fruit salads with my own hands, but he only eats a plate of soup and a tiny bit of meat as big as your finger, and then retires to his room again. When I beg him to eat a little more he returns to the table and takes a glass of milk. Now what's there in a glass of milk? . . . Only slops. . . . You can die from such diet. If you try to persuade him he only laughs and jokes. No, my darling does not like our food!"

The evenings were much gayer than the days. Usually when the sun was setting and the long shadows appeared in the yard we, that is to say, Tatiana Ivanovna, Pobedimsky and I, could be found sitting on the little perron of our house. We sat there in silence until it became dark. Yes, what can you talk about when every subject has already been discussed? We had had our subject of conversation—the arrival of my uncle, but that had been exhausted too. My tutor never took his eyes off Tatiana Ivanovna, and sighed deeply at intervals. . . . At the time I did not understand these sighs and never tried to fathom their meaning, but now—they explain to me very much.

When the shadows joined together and formed one uniform darkness our bailiff, Fedor, returned from shooting or from the fields. Fedor always produced on me the impression of a wild and terrible man. He was the son of a Russianized gipsy. He had a dark complexion, large black eyes, curly black locks and a dark dishevelled beard. Our farm labourers had given him the nickname of "the deuce." Besides the appearance he had also much of the gipsy nature. He could not sit at home and often disappeared for whole days in the fields or out shooting. He was sullen, bilious and silent, and neither feared anyone nor admitted any authority. He was rude to my mother; he said "thou" to me, and looked upon the learning of Pobedimsky with disdain. All this was excused him, because we considered him a passionate, hot-tempered man who was in ill-health. My mother valued him because, notwithstanding his gipsy origin, he was ideally honest and industrious. He loved his wife, Tatiana Ivanovna, passionately, as gipsies love, but with a love that was gloomy and seemed to cause suffering. In our presence he never fondled his wife, but only gazed at

her with staring eyes and his mouth drawn to one side.

When he returned home from the fields he would go into the house, deposit his gun angrily and noisily in a corner, come to us on the perron and sit down next to his wife. After resting he would ask her some questions about the housekeeping, and then sink into silence.

"Let us sing," I suggested.

My tutor tuned his guitar and began to sing with the deep bass voice of a deacon: "In the midst of outstretched valleys." We all joined in. My tutor took the bass, Fedor sang a scarcely audible tenor, while Tatiana and I sang treble in unison.

When the whole sky began to twinkle with stars and the frogs ceased to croak, our supper was brought us from the kitchen. We went into the house and sat down to eat. My tutor and the gipsy ate ravenously, and with so much noise that it was difficult to know if they were cracking bones, or if it was the crunching of their own jaws, while Tatiana Ivanovna and I had hardly time to eat our share. After supper the farmhouse sank into profound slumber.

One evening, about the end of May, we were sitting in this way on the perron waiting for supper, when suddenly a shadow appeared as if it had sprung up out of the earth and Gundasov stood before us. He looked at us for a long time, and at last clasping his hands and laughing merrily he exclaimed:

"An idyll! They sing and dream of the moon. Beautiful, I swear, by God! May I sit down near you and dream?

We said nothing but looked at each other. My uncle sat down on the lower step, yawned and looked at the sky. There was silence. Pobedimsky, who had long been wanting to converse with a new man, was delighted

to have this opportunity, and was the first to break silence. For intellectual conversation he had only one subject and that was about epizoa. It often happens when one finds oneself in a thousand-headed crowd, for some reason it is only the features of a single face that impress themselves on the memory, and you remember them long after. So it was with Pobedimsky; of all that he had heard during the half-year he had been at the Veterinary College he could remember only one thing.

"Epizoa cause enormous losses to the national husbandry. In the conflict with them the community must go hand in hand with the government."

Before saying this to Gundasov my tutor coughed three times, and in his excitement he flapped the wings of his Inverness coat repeatedly. Hearing this remark about epizoa my uncle looked at him attentively and gave an amused sniff.

"I swear, by God, this is lovely," he murmured, looking at us as if we had been wax figures. "This is really life! That's how it ought to be in reality! And why are you silent, Pelagea Ivanovna?" he asked, turning to Tatiana Ivanovna.

She became confused and began to cough.

"Talk, good people, sing . . . play! Do not lose time. That rascal time has a way of running on, he does not wait! I swear, by God, you have not time to look round before old age is there. . . . Then it is too late to begin living. What do you say, Pelagea Ivanovna? One must not sit silent and immovable."

At that moment our supper was brought from the kitchen. My uncle came into the house with us, and for company sake he ate five curd cakes and the wing of a duck. He ate and looked at us. We all aroused raptures in him, and seemed to affect him. No matter what nonsense my unforgetable tutor talked or whatever

Tatiana Ivanovna did, he found charming—admirable. After supper Tatiana Ivanovna sat down quietly in a corner to knit, and he did not take his eyes off her little fingers and chatted unceasingly.

"You, my friends, must hasten to live," he said. "God forbid that you should sacrifice the present for the future! In the present is youth, health, flame—the future is deception . . . smoke! As soon as you attain twenty years, begin to live."

Here Tatiana Ivanovna dropped a knitting-needle, and my uncle springing from his chair picked it up and handed it to her with a bow. It was then, I perceived for the first time, that there were more refined people in the world than Pobedimsky.

"Yes," my uncle continued, "love, marry, commit follies. . . . Follies are much more vital and healthy than our efforts and strivings after a rational life."

My uncle talked much and long; so long, indeed, that he bored us, and I sat in a corner of the room on atrunk, and as I listened I began to doze. I was annoyed that he never once took any notice of me. He only left our house at two o'clock in the morning long after I, being unable to wrestle any longer with my drowsiness, was fast asleep.

From that day my uncle began to come to the farm-house every evening to see us. He sang with us, he had supper with us and remained every night until two o'clock, chatting incessantly and always on the same subject. His evening and night occupations were quite given up, and at the end of June, when the Privy Councillor had learned to eat my mother's turkeys and fruit salads, the day work was also abandoned. My uncle tore himself away from his table and was drawn into "life." During the day he walked about the garden whistling, and bothered the workmen by making them

talk to him and tell him all sorts of tales. Whenever he saw Tatiana Ivanovna he always ran after her, and if she was carrying anything would offer to help her, which confused her horribly.

As the summer advanced my uncle became more and more giddy, brisk and distracted. Pobedimsky was quite disappointed in him.

"He is much too one-sided," he said. "There's not a single sign that he has stood on the highest steps of the hierarchy. He does not even understand how to talk. After every word you have: 'I swear, by God!' No, he does not please me!"

From the moment that my uncle began to visit us in the farm-house, a marked change took place in Fedor, and in my tutor. Fedor ceased to go out shooting; he returned home earlier and became more gloomy, and his eyes seemed to flash angrily on his wife in quite an unaccountable manner. My tutor never mentioned epizoa in my uncle's presence; he grew morose and often smiled ironically.

"There he comes, our mouse-coloured goat," he would grumble when he saw my uncle approaching our house.

I attributed the change that had taken place in both of them to his having offended them. My thoughtless uncle was always mixing up their names, and to the very last day of his stay he was unable to distinguish which was my tutor and which was Tatiana Ivanovna's husband, and Tatiana Ivanovna he called sometimes Nastasia, or Pelagea, or Eudoxia. All the time he declared he was charmed with us, and said endearing things to us all, laughing and behaving just like a little boy. All this might have given offence to young men; but I now understand it was not a question of offence, but of deeper feelings.

I remember one night I sat dozing in the corner on a trunk. My eyes seemed glued together with a sticky glue, and my body, tired out with running about all day, swayed from side to side. I struggled with sleep, and tried to see what was going on around me. It was about midnight, Tatiana Ivanovna, rosy and quiet as usual, was sitting at a small table sewing a shirt for her husband. Fedor glowered at her with gloomy and jealous eyes from one corner of the room, and Pobedimsky sat in another disappearing into the high collar of his shirt and sniffing angrily. My uncle walked from one end of the room to the other and was thinking of something. Silence reigned, and you could only hear the rustle of the linen in Tatiana Ivanovna's hands.

My uncle stopped suddenly before Tatiana Ivanovna and said:

"You are all so young, fresh and good; you live so tranquilly in this quiet place that I envy you. I have become attached to your kind of life, and my heart sinks when I think I must soon go away from here. Believe me when I say so! Believe me, I am quite sincere!"

Sleep closed my eyes, and I forgot where I was. When a sharp knock awoke me, my uncle was standing before Tatiana Ivanovna, looking at her with admiration. His cheeks were burning.

"My life is lost," he said. "I have never lived. Your young face reminds me of my lost youth; I would be glad to sit here for the rest of my days, looking at you. I would be happy if I could take you with me to Petersburg."

"Why?" Fedor asked in a hoarse voice.

"I would put you on my writing-table under a glass case, admire you and show you to others. Do you know, Tatiana Ivanovna, we have none like you there?

We have wealth, distinction, sometimes beauty, but we have not this vital truth, this healthy tranquillity."

My uncle sat down next to Tatiana Ivanovna and took her hand.

"So, you don't want to go with me to Petersburg?" he said, laughing. "In that case let me only have your hand to take with me? . . . A lovely hand! . . . . What, not even that? Ah, well, you're a miser, then let me only kiss it?"

At that moment the cracking of a chair was heard. Fedor jumped up, and with measured heavy strides came to his wife. His face was a deadly grey and quivering. He struck the table with his clenched fist with all his might and said in a hollow voice:

"I won't allow it!"

At the same moment Pobedimsky also sprang from his chair. He looked pale, too, and vicious as he approached Tatiana Ivanovna, and he also struck the table with his fist.

"I . . . I won't allow it!"

"What? What is the matter?" asked my astonished uncle.

"I won't allow it!" Fedor repeated, striking the table again.

My uncle jumped up, blinking in a frightened manner; he wanted to speak, but astonishment and fear prevented him from saying a word, and looking confused he hobbled away with the tottering gait of an old man, leaving his hat in our house. Shortly after, when my mother, all of a flutter, came running into the room to see what was the matter, she found Fedor and Pobedimsky still standing like two blacksmiths, hammering on the table with their fists and repeating: "I won't allow it!"

"What has happened here?" my mother asked.

"What has caused my brother to fall ill? What is the matter?"

Seeing Tatiana Ivanovna's pale and frightened face and her enraged husband, my mother evidently guessed what was the matter; she sighed and shook her head.

"Now, that's enough! Enough hammering on the table!" she said. "Fedor, stop! And why are you thumping too, Egor Alexeevich? What have you got to do with the matter?"

Pobedimsky suddenly seemed to collect himself, and became very confused. Fedor looked at him fiercely, then at his wife, and began to walk about the room. After my mother had left us I witnessed a scene that haunted me like a bad dream for long after. I saw Fedor catch hold of my tutor, lift him into the air and hurl him out of the door. . . .

When I awoke in the morning my tutor was not in his bed. In answer to my questions, nurse told me in a whisper that early that morning my tutor had been taken to the hospital to have his broken arm set. This news made me sad, and thinking of last night's row I went into the yard.

The weather was dull. The sky was covered with low clouds, a sharp breeze swept along the ground and raised dust, papers and feathers from the earth. You felt the approach of rain. Both people and animals were affected by a feeling of melancholy. When I went into the house I was asked not to make a noise and to walk about quietly, as my mother had a bad headache and was in bed. What was I to do? I went out of the gate, sat down on a bench and began to try to understand the meaning of what I had heard and seen the previous day. From our gate a road led past the smithy, and past a pool of water that never dried up, to the high road, I looked at the telegraph posts encircled by clouds of

dust, I looked at the sleepy birds sitting on the wires, and I became so melancholy that at last I began to cry.

A dusty wagonette crammed full of people from the town, probably going on a pilgrimage, passed along the high road. The wagonette had scarcely had time to get out of sight when a light droshky and pair of fine horses came along the road. Standing up in the droshky, holding on to the coachman's belt, was the district police master, Akim Nikitich. To my great amazement the droshky turned up our road, and drove rapidly past me into the yard. I had not recovered from my surprise at this visit of the police master, when I heard the sound of bells and a calash with three horses came in sight. The district judge was standing in this calash and directing the coachman towards our gate.

"What is the meaning of this?" I thought as the dust-covered judge passed by. "It is probably Pobedimsky, who has accused Fedor of assault, and they have come to take him to prison."

The mystery was not so easily solved. The police master and judge were only the forerunners. In less than five minutes a carriage drove into the yard, passing me so rapidly that I was only able to distinguish a red beard through the window.

Lost in conjectures and having a presentiment of something unpleasant, I went into the house. In the lobby the first person I met was my mother. She was very pale and looked with anxiety at the door behind which men's voices were heard talking. The guests had arrived so suddenly that they had found her in the midst of her bad headache.

"Mama, who has come?" I asked.

"Sister," my uncle's voice called to her, "send in some refreshments for the Governor and me, please."

"It is easy to ask for refreshments," my mother

murmured, almost fainting with alarm, "what can I prepare at a moment's notice? I shall be disgraced in my old age."

Putting her hands to her head, my mother rushed into the kitchen. The unexpected arrival of the Governor aroused all the inhabitants of the manor, and hurried them on to their legs. Then there began terrible slaughter. The throats were cut of about six fowls, five turkeys, eight ducks, and in the hurry the old gander was also beheaded. He was the progenitor of our flock of geese and my mother's great favourite. The coachman and the man-cook seemed to have gone out of their minds and slaughtered without regard to race or age. For the sake of some sort of sauce, two of my valuable tumbler pigeons were sacrificed, and they were as dear to me as the old gander was to my mother. For a long time I could not forgive the Governor for having been the cause of their death.

In the evening when the Governor and his suite, after partaking of a copious meal, got into their carriages and drove away, I went into the house to see the remains of the feast. Looking into the sitting-room I saw that both my mother and my uncle were there. My uncle, with hands behind his back, paced nervously backward and forward near the walls of the room, shrugging his shoulders. My mother, looking thin and weary, sat helplessly on the sofa, and followed each of my uncle's movements with heavy eyes.

"Pardon me, sister, but that is not the way to do things," my uncle grumbled, frowning. "I introduced the Governor to you, and you did not even give him your hand! You made him feel quite uncomfortable, poor man! No, this will never do. . . . Simplicity is a good thing, but it must have its bounds. . . . I swear, by God! . . . And then that dinner! . . . Is it possible

to offer such dinners ? What sort of rags did you serve for the fourth course ? "

" That was a duck with a sweet sauce," my mother answered quietly.

" A duck ! . . . Excuse me, sister, but, but . . . I have a heartburn. . . . I am ill ! "

My uncle made a wry face, and looking as if he wanted to cry, he continued :

" Why the deuce did that Governor come ! What did I want with his visit ? Phew ! . . . What a heartburn ! I shan't be able to sleep, or to work. I am quite unstrung. . . . I don't understand how you can live here without work, in this dullness. . . . Ah ! . . . Now the pain begins again . . . here at the pit of the stomach."

My uncle frowned and walked about quicker.

" Brother," my mother asked quietly, " what does your journey abroad cost you ? "

" At the very least three thousand," my uncle replied in a tearful voice. " I would gladly go ; but where am I to find the money ? I haven't got a kopeck. . . . Phew ! this heartburn ! "

My uncle stopped at the window and looked out sadly on the grey dull landscape, and then he began to walk about again.

There was a short silence, my mother looked long at the icon as if meditating on something and beginning to cry she said :

" Brother, I will give you these three thousand . . ."

. . . . . .

Three days later the majestic trunks were sent to the station and the Privy Councillor soon followed them. When he took leave of my mother he began to cry, and

for a long time he could not tear his lips away from her hand, but as soon as he was seated in the calash his face lighted up with a childlike joy. Beaming and happy he settled himself comfortably in his seat and kissed his hand in farewell to my weeping mother, when suddenly his eyes alighted on me. An expression of the greatest surprise appeared on his face and he asked :

" Who is this boy ? "

My mother, who had assured me that God had sent my uncle as a blessing for me, was greatly distressed by the question. There were no questions that troubled me. I looked at the happy face of my uncle and for some reason I felt sorry for him. I couldn't help it ; I sprang into the calash and embraced that giddy, light-hearted man, so weak and yet so human. Looking into his eyes and wishing to say something agreeable, I asked :

" Uncle, have you ever been in a battle ? "

" Ah, you dear boy ! " laughed my uncle, kissing me. " A dear boy ! I swear, by God ! How natural all this is, how living ! I swear, by God ! "

The calash drove off. I stood looking after it, and for a long time this parting : " I swear, by God ! " rang in my ears.

THE WAGER

I

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker paced up and down his study, thinking of the party he had given in the autumn fifteen years before. Many clever men had been at that party, and the conversation had been interesting. One of the subjects they had talked of was the death penalty. The guests, among whom were many learned men and several journalists, were mostly against capital punishment. They considered this form of penalty out of date, not justifiable in a Christian State and immoral. In the opinion of many, capital punishment ought to be replaced everywhere by solitary confinement for life.

"I do not agree with you there," the host said. "I have neither tried the death penalty nor solitary confinement, but if one may judge à priori, in my opinion to condemn a man to death is more moral and more humane than solitary confinement. An executioner kills at once, solitary confinement kills gradually. Which executioner is more humane, he who kills with one stroke or he who takes away your life, little by little, during long years?"

"Both the one and the other are immoral," said one of the guests, "for both have the same object—to take away life. The State is not God. The State has no

right to take away that which it cannot give back, even if it wanted to."

One of the guests, a jurist, a young man of twenty-five years of age, when asked his opinion on the subject replied :

" Both capital punishment and solitary imprisonment for life are equally immoral, but if I were told to chose between death and solitary confinement for life I would certainly choose the latter. To live under any conditions is better than not to live at all."

The discussion became very animated. The banker, who was younger then and more impulsive, suddenly lost control of himself, and striking the table, he turned to the young jurist and exclaimed :

" That is not true ! I bet you two million roubles that you would not be able to stand solitary confinement in a cell for even five years."

" If you are serious," the jurist answered, " I accept your wager. I bet that I will remain in solitary confinement not only five, but fifteen years."

" Fifteen ! I accept it," the banker cried. " Gentlemen, bear witness, I stake two millions."

" Done," said the jurist ; " you stake millions and I stake my liberty."

So this cruel and senseless wager was made. The banker, who at that time scarcely knew how many millions he possessed—spoilt as he was by success in his hazardous speculations—was delighted with this wager. During supper he joked and chaffed the jurist about it.

" Think better of it, young man, while yet there is time. Two millions are as nothing to me, I can easily risk losing them, but you, remember you are risking three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four years, because you will not stand it longer.

Besides, don't forget that a voluntary imprisonment is much harder to bear than one you are forced to undergo. The knowledge that at any moment you have the right to go free will poison your whole existence in the prisoner's solitary cell. . . . I am sorry for you!"

Now the banker, thinking of all this as he paced up and down, asked himself:

"What was the use of this bet? What profit is it to anyone, that this jurist has sacrificed fifteen of the best years of his life; and that I throw away two millions? Can it prove to mankind that capital punishment is better or worse than lifelong imprisonment? No . . . a thousand times no. . . . It was senseless . . . madness. . . . On my part it was the caprice of a man with superabundance, and on his the common greed for wealth."

He also remembered what had taken place after that party. It had been arranged that the jurist should serve his time of solitary confinment in a detached building that stood in the banker's grounds, and be strictly watched. It had also been decided that during the fifteen years he should be deprived of the right to cross the threshold of the building in which he was confined; of seeing any human being; of hearing the voice of any man; or of receiving letters or newspapers. He was allowed to have musical instruments, to read books, to write letters, to drink wine and to smoke tobacco. It was settled that his only communications with the outer world were to be effected in silence through a small window made specially for the purpose. All that he required, books, notes, food, wine and anything else he might want, he was to get in any quantity he desired by passing out a note through the window. The terms of the wager were settled with regard to all

possible contingencies, and they entered into the most minute details, so as to make the confinement strictly solitary, and binding the jurist to remain in prison exactly fifteen years from twelve o'clock on the 14th of November, 1870, until twelve o'clock on the 14th of November, 1885. The slightest attempt on the part of the jurist to evade any of the conditions of the wager, or to leave his confinement even two minutes before the settled time, would release the banker from his obligations to pay the two millions.

Judging by his short letters, the prisoner suffered greatly during the first year from solitude and ennui. At every hour of the day, and even at night, the sounds of the piano could be heard in his room. He did not ask for wine or tobacco. "Wine," he wrote, "arouses desire, the worst enemy of a prisoner, besides there is nothing more dull than to drink good wine in solitude; and tobacco spoils the air of my room." During the first year the jurist asked for books, mostly of a light character: novels with complicated love plots, detective stories, fantastic tales, comedies and the like.

During the second year the sounds of music ceased, and the jurist asked for the works of various classical authors. In the fifth year the sounds of music were heard again, and the prisoner asked for wine. His guards reported that this year, whenever they looked through the window, they noticed that he only ate, drank, lay on his bed, often yawned and spoke angrily to himself. He read no books. Sometimes at night he sat down to write, and wrote for hours, but in the morning he tore into small scraps all that he had written. More than once he was heard weeping.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began diligently to study languages and to read philosophy and history. He was so industrious in the study

of these sciences that the banker had scarcely time to supply him with all the books he required. In the course of four years he demanded no less than six hundred volumes. Once during this time of mental activity the banker received from the prisoner, among other letters, the following :

"My dear Gaoler,

I write this letter in six languages. Show it to people who know them. Let them read it, and if they do not find a single error in it, I entreat you to order a shot to be fired in your garden. This shot will tell me that my application has not been in vain. The genius of all centuries and lands speaks in different tongues, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you could only know what a sublime joy fills my soul now that I can understand them!"

The request of the prisoner was gratified. The banker ordered that two shots should be fired in the garden.

After the tenth year of his confinement the prisoner constantly sat motionless at the table and read the New Testament. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who, in the course of four years, had been able to master six hundred volumes, written by the wisest of mankind, should employ more than a year in the reading of a comparatively short and easily comprehensible book. After the Bible, he began to study the history of religion and works on theology.

During the last two years of his imprisonment the captive read very much, but without confining himself to any branch of literature, sometimes he occupied himself with natural history, sometimes he asked for Byron and Shakespeare. Often on the same note he would ask for works on chemistry and medicine, novels

and some books on philosophy or a theological treatise. His reading was so varied that he seemed like a drowning man swimming in the sea surrounded by fragments of wreckage, and eagerly trying to save himself by clinging first to one fragment and then to another.

II

The old banker remembered all that had happened during the past years, and he thought:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock he will be free. In fulfilment of our wager I shall have to pay him two millions. What will remain for me? If I pay this money all will be lost. I shall be a ruined man."

Fifteen years ago he could hardly count his millions, but now he was afraid to ask himself whether he had more money or debts. Hazardous gambling on 'change, risky speculations and the impetuosity, which even in his old age often mastered his prudence, had little by little undermined his business, and the fearless self-confident proud millionaire had become a second-rate banker, who trembled at every rise or fall of the market.

"A damned wager," the old man murmured, raising his hands to his head in despair; "why didn't this man die? He is now only forty years of age. He will take from me all I possess—marry, enjoy his life and speculate on 'change. While day after day I, like a beggar, envious of his prosperity, shall hear him say the same words . . . 'I owe you all the happiness I enjoy in life, let me help you?' No, this is more than I can bear.

The only escape from bankruptcy and shame is the death of this man."

Three o'clock struck. The banker listened. All was quiet in the house ; the only sound that could be heard was the rustle of the frozen leaves in the night wind. Trying to make no noise he took from his safe the key of the door that had not been opened for fifteen years, and putting on his great-coat he went into the garden.

The night was cold and dark. It was raining. A sharp damp wind blew over the garden and moaned through the trees, giving no rest to the dry autumn leaves that had not yet fallen. The banker strained his eyes, but he could see neither the ground under his feet, nor the white statues which decorated the garden, nor the trees, nor the garden house. Carefully going towards the house he called twice to the watchman. There was no answer. The watchman had evidently taken shelter from the weather, and was sleeping soundly either in the kitchen, or the conservatory.

" If only I have the courage to execute my plan," the old man thought, " suspicion will fall first on the watchman."

Groping his way in the darkness he at last found the steps and the door and he entered the lobby of the little house, then he made his way into the small passage, where he struck a match. Not a soul was to be seen. Somebody's bedstead without a mattress stood in the passage, and in a far corner an iron stove loomed in the darkness. The seals on the door of the room, where the prisoner was confined, were in perfect order.

When the match went out, the old man, trembling with excitement, looked through a small peep-hole in the door.

In the room a candle burned dimly. The prisoner

was seated at the table. All that could be seen of him was his back, his hair and his hands, that were resting on the table. On two arm-chairs and scattered on the floor were numerous open books.

Five minutes passed, and the prisoner did not move. Fifteen years of imprisonment had taught him to sit motionless. The banker tapped gently on the glass of the peephole, but the prisoner did not answer this sound by the slightest movement. Then the banker carefully removed the seals from the door and inserted the key into the keyhole. The rusty lock gave out a hoarse sound, and the door squeaked on its hinges. The banker expected to hear an exclamation of surprise or the sound of feet, but three minutes passed and all remained silent as before on the other side of the door. . . . He decided to enter the room.

Sitting at the table was a man, hardly human in appearance. He resembled a skeleton covered with skin, with long womanlike hair and a shaggy beard. His face was yellow, with earthy tints and hollow cheeks. His back was long and narrow, and the hand, on which his unkempt head was resting, was so thin that it was frightful to look at. His hair was turning white, and looking at his old and sunken face, none would have believed that he was a man of only forty years of age. He was sleeping. Lying on the table before his sunken head was a sheet of paper, on which something was written in very small characters.

"Wretched man," thought the banker, "he is sleeping and probably dreaming of millions. I could easily take this half-dead creature, throw him on the bed and smother the last sparks of life with the pillow in such a way that even the most skilled examination would not be able to reveal the traces of violence. However, let me first see what he has written here."

The banker took up a paper from the table and read the following:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock I shall be free, and the right to have intercourse with my fellow-men will be mine; but before leaving this room, and again looking on the sun, I find it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience, and before God, who sees me, I declare to you that I despise freedom and life and health and all that your books call the joys of this world.

"For fifteen years I have studied attentively the life of this world. It is true I neither saw the earth nor its peoples, but in your books I lived. . . . I drank luscious wines, I sang songs, I hunted the deer and the wild boar in the forests. . . . I loved women. Like clouds airy beauties, created by the genius of your great poets, visited me in the night and whispered wonderful tales which intoxicated me. In your books I climbed to the summit of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and I saw from those heights the sun rise in the morning, and at night it shed its purple glow over the sky and the ocean and the mountain-tops. I saw beneath me the flashing lightning cut through the clouds. I saw green fields, forests, rivers, lakes and towns. I heard the song of the sirens and the music of the shepherd's reed-pipes. I felt the touch of the wings of beautiful demons, who had flown to me to talk about God. In your books I cast myself down into bottomless abysses, performed wonders, committed murder, set towns on fire, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms. . . .

"Your books gave me wisdom. All that had been achieved by the untiring brain of man during long centuries is stored in my brain in a small compressed mass. . . . I know I am wiser than you all. . . .

"And I despise all your books, I despise all earthly

blessings and wisdom. All is worthless and false, hollow and deceiving like the mirage. You may be proud, wise and beautiful, but death will wipe you away from the face of the earth, as it does the mice that live beneath your floor; and your heirs, your history, your immortal geniuses will freeze or burn with the destruction of your earth.

"You have gone mad and are not following the right path. You take falsehood for truth, and deformity for beauty. You would be surprised if instead of fruit there appeared on your apple and orange trees frogs and lizards, or if your roses exhaled the smell of sweating horses; so I am surprised that you barter heaven for earth. . . . I do not want to understand you.

"To prove to you how I despise all that you value I renounce the two millions on which I looked, at one time, as the opening of paradise for me, and which I now scorn. To deprive myself of the right to receive them, I will leave my prison five hours before the appointed time, and by so doing break the terms of our compact. . . ."

The banker read these lines, replaced the paper on the table, kissed the strange man, who had written them, on the head and with tears in his eyes quietly left the house. Never before, not even after sustaining serious losses on 'change, had he despised himself as he did at that moment. When he reached his own house he went to bed, but the emotion he had just experienced, and tears that he could not repress, kept him long awake. . . .

* * * * * *

The next morning the trembling and pale watchman came to inform him that they had seen the man, who

lived in the small house, crawl through the window into the garden, go to the gate and then disappear. On hearing this the banker followed by his servants went to make sure that his prisoner had really run away. . . .

Not to arouse idle talk, he took from the table the paper containing the prisoner's renunciation, and on returning home he locked it up in his safe.

IN THE RAVINE

I

THE village of Ukleevo lay in a ravine, so that only the belfry and the chimneys of the print-works could be seen from the high road or the railway station. When a stranger asked what village it was, he was answered:

"That's the village where the precentor ate all the caviar at the funeral."

It had happened at a funeral feast in the house of the manufacturer Kostyukov that the old precentor, noticing among the *hors d'œuvres* a jar of large-grained caviar, had begun eating it greedily; he was nudged, his sleeve was pulled, but he appeared to be stupefied with delight and had lost all feeling; he could only continue to eat. He ate up all the caviar; and there had been four pounds in the jar. Many years had passed since that day; the precentor had been dead a long time, but the caviar was remembered. Was it that life was so uneventful there, or because people could notice nothing except such trifles as this unimportant event, that had occurred ten years before, but somehow this was all they could tell you about the Ukleevo village.

The village was never free from fever, and the mud there was thick even in summer, especially near the ences, which were overhung by old willows that cast their shade far around. Here there was always a smell

of refuse from the factory and of acetic acid that was used in the manufacture of the prints. The factories—three print-works and one tannery—were not in the village, but at some distance from it. They were only small works, and not more than four hundred hands were employed in them. The water in the river often had a bad smell from the tannery; the refuse infected the meadow and the peasants' cattle suffered from anthrax, so the factory was ordered to be closed down. It was considered to be closed; but it really worked secretly, as was well known to the commissary of the rural police and to the district doctor, who each received ten roubles a month from the manufacturer. There were only two passably good houses built of brick and covered with sheet iron in the whole village; one was occupied by the district administration and the other, a two-storied house that stood just opposite the church, belonged to Grigory Petrovich Zybukin, a burgher of Epifan.

Grigory kept a grocer's shop, but this was only to save appearances; he really sold vodka, cattle, hides, corn, pigs—in fact, he traded in anything that came to hand, and once, when there was a demand from abroad for magpies, as it was the fashion to trim ladies' hats with them, he made thirty kopecks on every pair he sold. He also bought timber for felling, lent money out at interest, and was, in general, an enterprising old man.

He had two sons. The eldest, Anisim, served in the police, in the detective department, and was but seldom at home. The youngest, Stepan, helped his father in his business, but much assistance was not expected from him, as he had bad health and was deaf; his wife, Aksinia, however, a pretty well-built woman, who walked about on holidays in a hat and with a parasol,

rose early, went to bed late and all day long ran about with her skirts well tucked up, rattling her keys from barn to cellar or served in the shop, and old Zybukin, looking at her gaily with sparkling eyes, would feel sorry that his eldest son was not married to her, but that she was the wife of the younger, the deaf one, who evidently had not much appreciation for womanly beauty.

The old man always had a disposition for domestic life, and he loved his family above everything in the world, especially his eldest son, the detective, and his daughter-in-law. Hardly had Aksinia got married to his deaf son before she showed quite unusual capacities for business; she soon knew to whom credit could be given, and who could not be trusted; she always kept the keys beside her, and never gave them up, not even to her husband; she rattled at the abacus as she made up the accounts; she looked at the horses' teeth like the muzhiks,* and she was always laughing or scoidlng. The old man only smiled at whatever she did or said, and he would mumble contentedly:

"Ah! That's a daughter-in-law! Ah, you're a real beauty, *matushka*. . . ."†

He was a widower, but a year after his son's wedding he could not endure it any longer and got married too. A girl was found for him in a village thirty versts from Ukleevo. Varvara Nikolaevna came from a good family; she was not quite young, but good-looking and showy. She had scarcely had time to settle down in her room in the upper story before everything became bright in the house; it seemed as if new panes had been put into the windows. The icon lamps burnt brightly, the tables were covered with snow-white cloths; on

* A peasant.

† "Little mother," used as a term of endearment.

the window-sills and in the little garden flowers with red centres appeared ; and at dinner they no longer ate out of one bowl, but a plate stood before each. Varvara Nikolaevna had a kind, pleasant smile, and it seemed as if everything in the house smiled around her. And, what never had been before, beggars, pilgrims and wanderers began to come into the yard ; beneath the windows the plaintive sing-song voices of the Ukleevo old women and the apologetic coughs of the feeble, lean old men, who had been discharged from the factories for drunkenness, were to be heard. Varvara helped them all with money, bread, old clothes and, later on, when she had become more used to the place, she began to take things from the shop. Once the deaf man saw her take two packets of an eighth of a pound of tea, and, as he was troubled about it, he told his father.

" Mama has taken two eighths of tea. How am I to book it ? "

The old man did not answer him, but he stood for some time in silence, thinking and moving his eyebrows ; then he went upstairs to his wife.

" Varvarushka, *matushka*," he said affectionately, " if you require anything out of the shop, take it. Take whatever you want, you're welcome to it. Don't hesitate."

And the next day the deaf man called to her as he ran across the yard :

" Mama, if you need anything, take it ! "

There was something new, something gay and bright, in the fact that she gave alms, as there was in the icon lamps and the red flowers. On the last days before a fast, on the fête of their village which lasted three days, when they sold to the muzhiks rotten salt beef with such a heavy odour about it that it was difficult to stand near the barrel, and they received as pledges from the

drunkards scythes, caps and their wives' dresses ; when the workmen from the factories, grown dizzy from the bad vodka, wallowed in the dirt; and sin, that was as thick as fog, appeared to hang around in the air, then it seemed to grow lighter from the thought that there was a quiet, tidy woman in the house who had nothing to do with the salt beef nor the vodka ; and her charity acted in those painful foggy days like the safety-valve of an engine.

The days in Zybukin's house were all busy. The sun had not yet risen when Aksinia could be heard spluttering as she washed in the passage ; the samovar boiling in the kitchen hummed ominously, foretelling something evil. Old Grigory Petrovich, small and clean, clad in a long black frock-coat, print trousers and shiny high boots, went about the rooms tapping with his heels like the father-in-law in the old song. The shop was opened. When it became light a racing droshky was brought to the door and the fine old man, who nobody would have guessed was already fifty-six years old, took his seat in it, pressing his large cap well over his ears. His wife and daughter-in-law were there to see him off. At such times when he was dressed in a good clean coat, and a fine black horse that had cost three hundred roubles was harnessed to the droshky, the old man did not like that any of the muzhiks should approach him, or come with their petitions or complaints ; he could not bear the muzhiks, but disdained them, and if he saw that one of them was waiting near the gate he would shout angrily :

" Why are you standing there ? Move on ! "

Or if it was a beggar he would cry out :

" God will provide."

He drove off on business ; his wife, in a dark dress and a black apron, did out the rooms or helped in the

kitchen. Aksinia carried on the trade in the shop, and in the whole yard the tinkle of bottles or money, the sound of her laughter, or her shouts, and also the angry voices of the customers, whom she tried to overreach, could be heard; at the same time it was evident that a secret trade in vodka was going on there. The deaf man also sat in the shop; or he walked about the street without a cap and his hands in his pockets looking absent-mindedly either at the village huts or at the sky. About six times a day they had tea, and four times they sat down to table to eat. In the evening they counted the day's receipts and wrote up the books and then they slept soundly.

All three print-works in Ukleevo were connected by telephone with the houses of the manufacturers, Khrymin senior, Khrymin junior, and Kostyukov. A telephone had also been installed in the office of the district administration, but it soon ceased to act there, as bugs and cockroaches made it their abode. The district head-clerk was almost illiterate, and wrote every word in the official documents with capital letters, but when the telephone was spoiled he said:

"Yes, now we shall indeed find it difficult to get on without a telephone."

The senior Khrymins were always at law with the junior Khrymins; sometimes the junior Khrymins quarrelled among themselves and went to law too, and then their print-works were closed down for a month or two, until they had made up their differences. This greatly diverted the inhabitants of Ukleevo, as each new quarrel provided them with subjects for much gossip and scandal. On holidays Kostyukov and the junior Khrymins used to drive about through Ukleevo at such speed that they overran the calves. Aksinia, dressed up in her Sunday best and a rustling starched petticoat, walked

about in front of her shop. The junior Khrymins would catch her up and carry her off as if by force. It was then, too, that old Zybukin, taking Varvara with him, would drive out to display his new horse.

In the evening after these drives, when people had gone to bed, the sounds of a costly accordion could be heard in the junior Khrymins' yard, and if there was a moon these notes acted on the soul in a disquieting and joyful manner, and Ukleevo did not appear quite such a hole.

II

The eldest son, Anisim, came home very seldom, and only for the great Holy Days; but he often sent presents and letters by fellow-villagers, who were returning home. The letters were written by somebody else in a beautiful handwriting, each one on a sheet of paper that looked like a petition, and they were full of expressions that Anisim never used in speaking, such as: "Dear papa and mama, I send you a pound of flower of tea to be used for the satisfaction of your physical requirements."

At the foot of each letter there was scrawled, as if with a spoiled pen: "Anisim Zybukin," and beneath this again in the same beautiful handwriting: "Agent."

These letters were read aloud several times, and the old man, who was quite affected by them and red in the face from excitement, would say:

"Well, well, he did not want to live at home, but went on a learned career. What then, let him have his own way! Each one has his destiny."

It happened just before the Carnival that there was a heavy fall of rain and sleet ; the old man and Varvara went to the window to look at it, and they saw Anisim coming in a sledge from the station. He had not been expected. When he entered the room he seemed troubled and alarmed, and the whole time he stayed this look did not leave him, but his manner was free. He was in no haste to leave, and it almost appeared that he had been discharged from the service. Varvara was pleased to see him ; she looked at him in a sly manner, sighed and shook her head.

" How is it, *batushka*," she said, " this young fellow is already twenty-eight, and he still lives the life of a bachelor, O-ho-ho ! . . ."

From the next room her quiet even speech could be heard ; " O-ho-ho," she began to whisper with the old man and with Aksinia, and their faces assumed the cunning and mysterious expression of plotters.

They decided to find Anisim a wife.

" O-ho-ho ! . . . Your younger brother has long been married," Varvara said, " and you're still without a mate, like a cock in the market. What sort of life is this ? This one and that one has got married ; God willing, why don't you get married too, then you can do as you like, you'll go back to work and your wife will remain at home to help. You young fellows live without order, and, I see, you forget all rules. O-ho-ho ! you're all sinners, you townfolk."

As they were rich when one of the Zybukins got married, only the prettiest girl was chosen for him. For Anisim they also looked for a pretty girl. He himself had an uninteresting insignificant appearance ; he was frail, unhealthy, small of stature and he had stout round cheeks that looked as if they had been blown out ; his eyes never twinkled, but his gaze was sharp ·

he had a small, thin red beard, and when thinking he always stuck it into his mouth and bit the ends of the hairs ; besides he often drank too much, and this could be noticed in his face and his gait. But when he was informed that a wife, and a very pretty one too, had been found for him he only said :

" Well, I am not a fright either. I must confess that in our family we Zybukins are all handsome."

Close to the town lay the village of Torguevo. Quite recently one half of it had been joined to the town, the other half remained a village. In the first part a widow lived in her own house ; she had a sister, who was very poor, and went out to char ; this sister had a daughter called Lipa, who also went out to do day work. In Torguevo much was talked about this girl's beauty, but all the young men were held back by her terrible poverty ; people said it would only be a man well on in years, or a widower, who would wed her despite her poverty, or he might simply take her to live with him, and in that way her mother would also not be in want. Varvara heard about Lipa from the matchmakers, and she drove over to Torguevo.

After that a proper *smotriny** with refreshments and wine was arranged in her aunt's house, and Lipa was in a new pink dress made for the occasion and a crimson ribbon shone like flame in her hair. She was thin, weak and pale, with fine delicate features that were tanned by her exposure to the air as a day labourer ; a sad, timid smile never left her face, and she had a childlike, trustful and inquiring gaze.

She looked very young, almost a child, with a scarcely perceptible bosom, but in years she was old enough to marry. She really was very pretty, and there was only

* An official visit paid by the potential bridegroom to the bride, customary among Russian merchants and peasants.

india-rubber galoshes, and instead of a cravat a red cord with little balls at the end, and thrown over his shoulders was an overcoat—also quite new.

After having gravely prayed to God he greeted his father, and gave him ten silver roubles and ten half-rouble coins; he gave Varvara as many and he gave Aksinia twenty quarter-rouble pieces. The chief charm of this present was that all these coins were quite new, as if specially chosen, and glistened in the sun. Anisim made great efforts to look sedate and serious, and he puffed out his cheeks, but he smelled of brandy; he had probably gone to the refreshment bar at each station. And again there was the same free-and-easy manner that did not accord with the man at all. Then Anisim and the old man sat down to eat and to drink tea, and Varvara played with the new coins and inquired about the people from their village who were living in town.

"Thank God, they are all getting on and living well," Anisim answered. "There has only been an event in Ivan Egorov's life: his old woman, Sophia Nikiforovna, is dead. She died of consumption. The memorial dinner for the repose of her soul was ordered at a confectioner's for two-and-a-half roubles for each person. There was also grape wines. There were some muzhiks—from our village among the guests—and for them also two-and-a-half roubles was paid. They ate nothing. As if muzhiks understand sauces!"

"Two-and-a-half roubles!" the old man said, and he shook his head.

"Well, you see, it's not like the village there! You go to a restaurant to have a snack, you order this and that, you meet friends, you have drinks; before you know where you are it's dawn, and then you're in for three or four roubles each. When Samorodov is there

he likes to finish up with coffee and cognac—and cognac is sixty kopecks a wineglass."

"He always lies," the old man mumbled, delighted; "he always lies."

"Now I'm always with Samorodov. He's the Samorodov who writes my letters to you. He writes beautifully. And, mama, if I were to tell you," Anisim continued addressing Varvara, "what sort of a man this Samorodov is, you would not believe it. We all call him Mukhtar; he's like an Armenian—quite black. But I see through him; I know all his affairs, just like my own five fingers, mama, and he feels it, and is always coming after me; there's no shaking him off, fire and water won't separate us now. It seems a bit uncanny for him, but he can't live without me. Wherever I go, he goes too. I have a good eye, mama, a true eye. I walk about the market; a muzhik is selling a shirt. 'Stop, that shirt has been stolen!' And it turns out to be true—the shirt had been stolen."

"How did you know it?" Varvara asked.

"It's just my eye. I don't know what sort of a shirt it is. I'm somehow drawn towards it: it's stolen, that's why. With us in the detective service they say: 'Ah, Anisim has gone to shoot snipe!' That means, to look for stolen goods. Yes. . . . Everyone can steal, but how is it to be hidden! The world is large, but there's nowhere to hide stolen goods."

"Last week in our village the Guntorevs were robbed of a ram and two ewes," Varvara said and sighed. "There's nobody to look for them. . . . O-ho-ho! . . ."

"Why not? I don't mind trying. It's easy to find them."

. . . . . .

The wedding-day arrived. It was a cold, clear and gay April day. From the early morning carts and

droshkies, harnessed with two and three horses, decorated with many-coloured ribbons and with tinkling bells, drove about the village of Ukleevo. The rooks, who were disturbed by this driving, made a noise in the willows and the starlings sang, without stopping, enough to crack their voices, as if they, too, were delighted that there was a wedding in Zybukin's house.

In the house the tables were already arranged with long fish, hams, stuffed poultry, boxes of sprats, all sorts of salted and pickled delicacies and a whole army of bottles of vodka and wine ; there was a scent of smoked sausage and tinned lobster that had turned sour. Old Zybukin, tapping with his heels, went round the tables, stopping here and there to sharpen one knife against another. Varvara was constantly calling for something, or with a troubled look and very much out of breath she was running to the kitchen, where ever since dawn Kostyukov's man-cook and Khrymin junior's cook had been hard at work. Aksinia, in curl papers, without a dress, in her stays and squeaky new shoes, rushed about the yard like a whirlwind, and only gleams of her bare knees and bosom could be seen. There was noise, scolding, swearing ; the passers-by stopped at the wide-open gate, and everywhere it was felt that something unusual was being prepared.

" They've gone for the bride ! "

The tinkle of bells could be heard, and it gradually died away in the distance far beyond the village. . . . Soon after two o'clock the people began to assemble ; the bells could again be heard. " The bride is coming ! " The church was packed, the church lustre was lighted, the choir was singing and they sang, as old Zybukin had wished, from notes. The brilliancy of the lights and of the bright coloured dresses blinded Lipa ; it appeared to her that the choristers, with their loud voices, were

knocking with hammers at her head; the stays she wore for the first time in her life, and her shoes squeezed her, and she looked as if she had just recovered from a faint—she gazed around and could not understand anything. Anisim, dressed in a black frock-coat with a red cord instead of a cravat, stood meditative, staring at one point, and when the choristers sang very loud he crossed himself rapidly. He felt agitated and wanted to cry. He had known this church from his early childhood; here his late mother had brought him to the communion; here at one time he had sung with the boys in the choir; how well he knew every corner, every icon. Now he was being married; he must get married for the sake of order, but he did not think about it any more, he seemed to have forgotten it, and he thought no more about his wedding. Tears prevented him from seeing the icons, he had a load on his heart; he prayed and asked God to avert the inevitable misfortune that was ready to overwhelm him, if not to-day then to-morrow, and that it might pass by like a thunder cloud goes past a village in time of drought, without giving a drop of rain. What numbers of sins he had piled up in the past, what numbers of sins, not to be escaped from, not to be repaired, so that it was absurd to ask for pardon. Still he asked for pardon and even sobbed quite loud, but nobody took any notice of it as they thought he was drunk.

A child's alarmed cry was heard.

"Dear mama, take me away; darling mammy, take me away!"

"Quiet there!" the priest shouted.

When the young couple drove back from church the crowd ran after them; near the shop, near the gate and in the yard a crowd had collected. The village women came to cheer. The bride and bridegroom had scarcely

crossed the threshold when the choir, who were standing ready in the passage with notes in their hands, welcomed them by the loud singing of a wedding hymn, and a band, that had been ordered from town, struck up playing. Sparkling wine from the Don was handed round in high wineglasses, and the carpenter-contractor Elizarov, a tall, spare old man with such thick eyebrows that his eyes were hardly to be seen, turning towards them, addressed the newly married pair:

"Anisim and you, dear child, love one another; live according to God's ordinance, children, and the Queen of Heaven will not desert you." He fell on the old man's shoulder, sobbing. "Grigory Petrovich, let us weep, let us weep for joy!" he said in a shrill, high voice, but instantly burst out laughing, and continued in a loud, deep bass: "Ha-ha-ha! Here you have a fair daughter-in-law. All with her is in order, all smooth, nothing rattles, the whole mechanism is in order, there are many screws."

He came from the Egorevsky district, but since quite a young man he had worked in Ukleevo, both in the factories and in the district, and had become accustomed to the place. For long he had been known as an old man, spare and tall as he was now, and he had long since received the nickname of the "Crutch." Perhaps it had been given him because for more than forty years he had only been occupied with repairs in the factories—he judged every person and everything by their solidity—wondering if they required repair. Before he sat down to table he tried several chairs to see if they were sound, he even touched the fish.

After the sparkling wine had been drunk they all sat down to table. The guests talked and moved their chairs, the choir sang in the passage, the band played and the women in the yard cheered in unison. All these

noises, produced at the same time, formed a terribly wild combination of sounds, which made one feel quite dizzy.

Crutch fidgeted about on his chair, he jostled his neighbours with his elbows, preventing them from talking, and he was either weeping or laughing.

"Children, children, children," he mumbled rapidly. "Aksinia, *matushka*, Varvarushka, let us all live in peace and unity—my dear little axes. . . ."

He never drank much and now he had got tipsy from one glass of English bitters. This horrible bitters, concocted of God only knows what, made all those who had drunk it feel dizzy, it seemed to stun them. Their tongues refused to obey.

The clergy was there, the clerks from the factories, with their wives, the shopkeepers and the innkeepers from other villages. The head of the district administration and his secretary, who had served together for fourteen years and who, during the whole of that time, had never made out or signed a single document, nor let a single man leave the office without having cheated or wronged him in some way, were now sitting side by side. They were both stout, well-fed men, and it seemed that their very system was so thoroughly impregnated with falsehood that even the skin of their faces was of a specially rascally nature. The secretary's wife, a skinny, squinting woman, had brought all her children with her, and like a bird of prey she was constantly looking askance at the various dishes and pouncing upon everything that came to hand, which she hid away in her own or her children's pockets.

Lipa sat like a statue of stone, with the same impassable expression on her face that it had worn in church. Anisim had never spoken to her from the time he had made her acquaintance, so that he did not even know

what her voice sounded like, and now sitting next to her he still remained silent and drank English bitters; but when he had become intoxicated he began to talk, addressing himself to Lipa's aunt, who was sitting opposite:

"I have a friend, whose name is Samorodov. Quite an exceptional man. He's a personal notable citizen, and he can talk! But, Auntie, I see through him, and he feels it too. Permit me to drink a glass to Samorodov's health with you!"

Varvara, weary and worried, went round the table pressing her guests to eat, and she was evidently pleased that there were so many good things to offer, and that everything was in abundance; nobody would criticize them now. The sun set, but the feast still continued; the people could no longer understand what they ate; it was impossible to hear what was said, and only from time to time, when the music ceased, a woman in the yard was distinctly heard shouting:

"They have sucked our blood, the Herods, is there no ruin for them?"

In the evening there was dancing. The junior Khrymins arrived, bringing their own wine with them, and one of them, when he took part in a quadrille, danced, holding a bottle in each hand and a wineglass between his teeth, which caused great amusement. In the midst of the quadrille some of the men began dancing the Russian dance. Aksinia, in her green dress, flitted about and wind seemed to blow from her train. Somebody trod upon it and tore off the flounce, at which Crutch shouted:

"Hullo! The base-board has been torn off! Children, children!"

Aksinia had naïve grey eyes that seldom blinked, and a naïve smile constantly played on her face. In these

unblinking eyes, in her small head on her long neck and in her graceful movements there was something serpentine. All in green with a yellow breast and with her smile she looked like a snake that gazes on the passers-by in spring from among the young rye, stretching out its neck and raising its head. The Khrymins were very free with her, and it was quite evident that she was on the most intimate terms with the eldest of them. But the deaf man did not understand anything, and did not look at her ; he sat with his legs crossed, eating nuts and cracking them between his teeth with so much noise that it appeared as if he were shooting out of a pistol.

Now Zybukin himself went into the middle of the room and began to wave his handkerchief, making a sign that he too wanted to dance a Russian dance, and in the whole house and in the yard there was a murmur of approbation.

" He's going to dance. He himself's going to dance."

Varvara danced, but the old man only waved his handkerchief and beat time with his heels. Those who watched him there and in the yard hanging on to each other as they looked through the window were in raptures, and for a moment forgave him everything—both his wealth and his injuries.

" Grigory Petrovich's a trump," could be heard in the crowd. " Go it ! There's go in you still ! Ha-ha ! "

All this finished late at night, at past one o'clock. Anisim, very shaky on his legs, went the round of the choristers and musicians, giving to each as a parting gift a new half-rouble. The old man, not at all shaky but treading more heavily on one leg, conducted his guests to the door, saying to each :

" The wedding has cost two thousand roubles."

When the guests were departing it was discovered that somebody had exchanged an old overcoat for a

very good one belonging to an elegant innkeeper, and Anisim suddenly became excited, and shouted :

" Stop ! I will find it at once ! I know who stole it ! Stop ! "

He rushed into the street in pursuit of someone ; he was caught however, and brought home, led arm-in-arm ; when there he was pushed, tipsy, red with anger and wet, into the room where her aunt had already undressed Lipa, and the door was locked from without.

IV

Five days passed. Anisim was preparing to go back to town, and he went upstairs to take leave of Varvara. All the icon lamps were burning in her room, and there was a smell of incense. She was seated near the window knitting a stocking of red worsted.

" You've stayed with us a short time," she said. " You find it dull, I expect ? O-ho-ho ! . . . We live well, we have everything in plenty and your wedding was celebrated worthily in the proper way ; the old man says : it cost two thousand. In a word we live like merchants, but it's dull here. We wrong the people too much. My heart aches, dear friend, to see how we wrong them. Oh, good Lord ! It's either a horse that is exchanged, or we buy something, or we hire a labourer —in everything there is cheating. Cheating and cheating. The fast oil in the shop is bitter and rancid, worse than other people's tar. Now tell me, honestly, can't one trade in good oil ? "

"Each knows his own business best, mama."

"Must we not all die? Oh-oh! You ought really to speak to father! . . ."

"Why don't you speak to him yourself?"

"Well—well! I give him my opinion, and he says the very words you do: 'Each knows his own business best.' God's judgment is righteous."

"Of course, nobody will look into it," Anisim said and sighed. "There's no God after all, mama. Who's to look into it!"

Varvara gazed at him with astonishment, laughed and clasped her hands. He became confused because she believed his words so sincerely and looked upon him as an oddity.

"Perhaps God exists, but there is no faith," he said. "When I was being married I was not quite myself. It was as though you take an egg from under a hen and a chick pipes in it, so my conscience suddenly piped and while I was being married I thought the whole time: there is a God! But when I left the church it was as nothing. Besides, how am I to know if there is a God or not? In childhood we were not taught that, and the infant at his mother's breast is already taught to know his own business. Papa also does not believe in God. The other day you said that Guntorov's sheep had been stolen. . . . I have found them; a Shikalov peasant stole them; he stole them, but their hides are in papa's hands. . . . That's faith for you!"

Anisim winked and shook his head.

"The chief of the district does not believe in God," he continued, "nor the secretary either. And if they go to church, and keep the fasts, it's only that people might not speak badly of them, and in case there should really be a Last Judgment. Now they say that the end of the world has come, because people have grown

weak, and don't honour their parents and so on. That's all nonsense. I understand it in this way, mama, that the whole trouble comes because people have no conscience. I see through them, mama, and understand. I see when a man has on a stolen shirt. You see a man sitting in a tavern, and you think he's only drinking tea; I see the tea too, but I see besides that he has no conscience. I go about all day, and there's no man with a conscience. And the whole reason is because they do not know if there is a God or not. . . . Well, *mamasha*, good-bye. Be well and happy, and bear me no ill-will."

Anisim bowed to the ground before Varvara.

"We thank you for everything, *mamasha*," he said. "You have brought our family much profit. You are a very superior woman, and I am much obliged to you."

Anisim left the room much agitated, but returned and said:

"Samorodov has inveigled me in a certain business: I shall become rich or perish. If anything happens, *mamasha*, comfort my father."

"Come now, what is this? O-ho-ho. . . . God is merciful! But Anisim, you ought to be more caressing with your wife, you only look at each other and pout; you might at least smile."

"But she's so queer . . ." Anisim said, and he sighed. "She understands nothing; she never speaks. She's very young, let her grow up."

A large well-fed white horse, harnessed to a light cart, was already standing at the door.

Old Zybukin, with a little run, jumped into it like a young man and took the reins. Anisim kissed Varvara, Aksinia and his brother. Lipa was also standing motionless at the door and looking in another direction, as if she had not come out to see her husband off, but

by accident and for no special reason. Anisim went up to her and just touched her cheek with his lips.

"Good-bye," he said.

And without looking round at him she smiled in a strange way, her face seemed to quiver, and for some reason everybody was sorry for her. Anisim also jumped in and put his arms a-kimbo, for he thought himself handsome.

As they drove up out of the ravine Anisim looked back at the village. It was a warm, clear day. For the first time the cattle had been driven out, and the girls and old women dressed in their holiday finery were going about near the herd. The brown bull bellowed, rejoicing at his liberty, and pawed the ground with his fore legs. Everywhere, above, below, the larks were singing. Anisim looked back at the church, so well proportioned and white—it had recently been white-washed—and he remembered that only five days before he had prayed in it; he looked back at the school with its green roof, at the river where, as a boy, he had bathed and fished, and gladness throbbed in his breast, and he wished that suddenly a wall might grow up before him and prevent him from going any farther, and that he might remain only with the past.

When they got to the station they went to the bar and had a glass of sherry. The old man put his hand in his pocket for his purse in order to pay.

"I stand this," Anisim said.

The old man slapped him on the shoulder with emotion and winked at the bar-keeper, as much as to say: "See what a son I have."

"Anisim, why don't you remain at home in the business?" he said. "You would be priceless! I'd cover you with gold from head to foot, my son."

"I can't, *papasha!*"

The sherry was sour and it smelled of sealing-wax, still they each had another glass.

When the old man returned from the station at the first moment he could not recognize his youngest daughter-in-law. Lipa changed as soon as her husband had driven out of the yard, and had suddenly become gay. Barefooted, in an old worn petticoat, with her sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, she was washing the floor in the passage and the stairs, singing in a small silvery voice, and when she carried out the large tub with slops and looked at the sun with her childish smile, it appeared as if she, too, were a lark.

An old labourer, who was passing the porch, shook his head and quacked :

" Yes, Grigory Petrovich, God has sent you good daughters-in-law ! They're not women, but real treasures."

V

On Friday, the eighth of July, Elizarov, who went by the nickname of Crutch, was returning with Lipa from the village of Kazansky, where they had been to the service in the church in honour of its Patron saint, the Holy Virgin of Kazan. Far in the rear they were followed by Lipa's mother, Praskovya, who constantly lagged behind, being ill and breathless. It was almost evening.

" Ah, ah ! " . . . Crutch exclaimed with astonishment as he listened to Lipa. " Ah, ah ! . . . Well ! "

" I am very fond of jam, Il'ya Makarich," Lipa said.

"I like to sit down in a quiet corner and drink tea with jam. Or, Varvara Nikolaevna and I drink tea together, and she tells me something touching. She has a lot of jam—four jars. 'Have some more, Lipa,' she says, 'don't be afraid.'"

"Ah, ah! Four jars!"

"They live well. They have tea with white rolls; and there's as much meat as you can eat, too. They live well, but it's terrible in their house, Il'ya Makarich. Oh, how terrible!"

"What is so terrible, my child?" Crutch asked, and he looked back to see how far behind Praskovya was.

"At first after the wedding I was afraid of Anisim Grigorich. He was all right, he did not ill-treat me; but only when he came near me it made my flesh creep, all my bones were frozen. I did not sleep a single night; all the time I shivered and prayed to God. And now, Il'ya Makarich, I'm afraid of Aksinia. She's all right, always smiling; but sometimes she looks in at the window, and her eyes are such angry ones, and they look green as a sheep-pen. The junior Khrymins are leading her astray. 'Your old man has some land at Butekino,' they say to her, 'about forty acres; this soil is sandy and there's water too,' so they say: 'Aksinia, build a brick-kiln there on your own account, and we will take a share in the business! Bricks are at twenty roubles the thousand. It's a profitable business. Yesterday at dinner Aksinia said to the old man: 'I want to start brick works at Butekino; I'll be a merchant on my own.' That's what she said and smiled. But Grigory Petrovich's face became dark; it was evident he was not pleased. 'As long as I live,' he said, 'we can't separate, we must all go together.' She cast up her eyes and ground her teeth. . . . Fritters were served—but she would not eat!"

"Ah, ah!" Crutch exclaimed in astonishment. "She would not eat!"

"Just have the goodness to tell me when does she sleep?" Lipa continued. "She sleeps half an hour and then jumps up again and walks about; she's always walking and poking about; looking if the muzhiks have not set something on fire, or stolen something. . . . I'm afraid to be with her, Il'ya Makarich! And after the wedding the junior Khrymins never went to bed at all, but went straight to town for their lawsuit, and people say Aksinia is the cause of it. Two of the brothers promised to build her brick works, and the third is offended at this, and their factory has been closed down for more than a month, and my Uncle Prokhor is without work and begs for crusts from door to door. I tell him to go out to plough or to saw wood, why shame oneself! 'I'm unused to peasant's work, I don't know how to do it, Lipinka,' he says."

Near a small aspen wood they sat down to rest and to wait for Praskovya. Elizarov had been a contractor for a very long time; but he kept no horse and went everywhere in the district on foot, with a bag in which he carried bread and onions, taking long strides and swung his arms. It was difficult to walk alongside of him.

At the beginning of the wood there was a boundary post. Elizarov touched it, to see if it was solid. Praskovia, quite breathless, caught them up there. Her wrinkled face, that always looked alarmed, was now beaming with happiness; that day she had been to church like other people, and afterwards had gone to the market, and had drunk pear *kvass!* * This happened seldom, and it seemed to her that this was the first day of pleasure she had had in her whole life. Having rested they all three went on together. The sun was setting,

* *Kvass* is a sort of very thin beer.

and its rays, penetrating through the wood, lighted up the stems of the trees. In front of them loud voices could be heard. The Ukleevo girls had long since passed them, but they had evidently stayed in this wood, probably to look for mushrooms.

"Heigh! girls!" Elizarov shouted. "Heigh, beauties!"

In answer there was only laughter.

"Crutch is coming! Crutch! Old crank!"

And the echo laughed too. They had now left the wood behind them. The tops of the factory chimneys could be seen, the cross on the belfry glittered; it was the village, "that same village where the precentor ate all the caviar at the funeral." They had now almost reached home; they had only to go down into this deep ravine. Lipa and Praskovya, who had been walking barefoot, sat down on the grass to put on their stockings and boots; the contractor sat down too. Looking down from above, Ukleevo, nestling among its willows with its white church and swift river, seemed beautiful and peaceful; only the roofs of the factories that were painted from economy a dull greyish colour seemed disturbing. On the opposite slopes rye could be seen, in cocks, in sheaves, here, there and everywhere, as if it had been scattered by a gale; some was only just reaped and lay in rows; and there were oat fields also getting ripe that glittered in the sun's rays like mother-of-pearl. It was harvest time. That day was a holiday, the next Saturday the rye had to be brought in, the hay carted, and then Sunday, again a holiday; every day there were rumbles of distant thunder; it was sultry, it looked like rain, and gazing at his fields everyone wondered if God would give him time to get in his corn; and his soul was gay and joyful, though at the same time troubled.

"Mowers are dear just now," Praskovya said. "A rouble and forty a day."

The people from the market at Kazanskay continued to flow past: women, hands from the factories in new caps, beggars, children. . . . Now the dust was raised by a passing cart with a horse that had not been sold, and seemed to be glad of it, running behind; then somebody passed leading an obstinate cow by the horns; again a cart jogged along, full of drunken muzhiks, with their legs hanging over the sides. One old woman came dragging along a boy in a large hat and high boots; the boy was overcome by the heat and his heavy boots which prevented him from bending his knees, but he never ceased blowing vigorously at a toy trumpet; they had gone down into the ravine and had turned into the street, and still the sounds of the trumpet could be heard.

"Our manufacturers are somehow not quite themselves . . ." Elizarov said. "Bad luck! Kostyukov got angry with me. 'Too many boards have been used for the cornice.' 'Too many? As many as were needed, Vasili Danilich,' I said, 'have been used. I don't eat boards with my porridge.' 'How dare you use such words to me? Blockhead . . . this, that and the other! Don't forget yourself. I made you a contractor!' he shouted. 'A wonder, indeed! When I was no contractor,' I said, 'I drank tea every day all the same.' 'You're all rascals,' he said. I held my tongue. 'We're rascals in this world,' I thought. 'You'll all be rascals in the next.' Ha-ha-ha! The next day he was softer. 'Don't be angry with me for my words, Makarich,' he said. 'If I spoke a word too much, you can't help admitting I'm a first guild merchant, and your superior. You ought to hold your tongue.' 'You're a first guild merchant and I'm a

carpenter,' said I; 'that's quite true. Saint Joseph was a carpenter too,' said I. 'Our work is righteous and pleasing in God's sight. If you wish to be my superior, why then pray have the goodness, Vasili Danilich.' After this conversation I thought: 'Who is superior, a first guild merchant or a carpenter? Surely the carpenter, children.' "

Crutch reflected and then added:

"It's so, children. He who works and suffers is surely superior."

The sun had set. Above the river, in the church close and on the meadows near the factories, a thick mist, white as milk, was rising. The darkness was coming on quickly, here and there a light gleamed below, and it seemed as if the mist was hiding a bottomless abyss beneath it. Lipa and her mother—who had been born beggars, and were quite ready to remain so to the end, giving to others everything except their frightened and meek souls—may perhaps have had now for a moment an indistinct glimmer that in this vast, mysterious world, in the endless lines of life, even they were powers, and they were superior to somebody else. It was pleasant for them to sit up there; they smiled happily, and quite forgot that they must also return to the ravine.

At last they reached home. At the gates, and near the shop, the mowers were sitting on the grass. Usually the Ukleevo peasants would not work for Zybukin, and he was obliged to hire strangers, and now it appeared in the gloom that the people who were seated there were men with long black beards. The shop was still open, and through the open door the deaf man could be seen playing draughts with a boy. The mowers were either singing in a low, hardly audible voice, or were loudly demanding payment for the previous day's work; but

they were not paid, to prevent them from going away before the morrow. Old Zybukin, without either coat or waistcoat, was seated near the porch with Aksinia, drinking tea under the shade of the birch trees; a lighted lamp stood on the table.

"Eh, granddad," a mower called out from the other side of the gate, in a mocking tone. "Pay us at least the half! Eh, granddad!"

Laughter was heard, and they again began to sing in a low, scarcely audible voice. . . . Crutch sat down to drink tea.

"Well, and so we went to the fair," he began to relate. "We amused ourselves very well, children, thank God. But an unpleasant thing happened. Sashka, the smith, bought some tobacco and gave the shopkeeper a silver half-rouble. The half-rouble was a false one," Crutch continued, looking round; he wished to speak in a whisper, but he spoke in a hoarse, choking voice that was heard by everybody. "And the half-rouble was false. He was asked where he had received it? 'Anisim Zybukin gave it to me!' he said, 'when we were at his wedding.' . . . The policeman was called, and he was led away. Take care, Petrovich, that trouble does not come of it—people may talk . . ."

"Granddad, eh granddad," the same voice called again from behind the gates. "Granddad, eh!"

There was a long silence.

"Ah, children, children, children . . . ." Crutch muttered rapidly as he rose from his seat; he was getting very drowsy. "Well, thank you for your tea and sugar, my child. It's time to go to bed. I'm getting rotten, all my beams are rotting away. Ha-ha-ha!"

And in going away he added:

"It's probably time to die."

He sobbed. Old Zybukin did not finish his tea, but sat there for some time, thinking; and the expression on his face seemed to be one of listening to Crutch's receding footsteps, though he was long since in the street.

"Sashka, the smith, probably lied," Aksinia said, guessing his thoughts.

He went into the house, but soon returned with a roll; he undid it and the silver roubles glittered; they were all quite new. He took one up, tested it with his teeth and threw it on the table, then he threw down another. . . .

"The roubles are really false . . ." he said, and he looked at Aksinia as if in perplexity. "They are the ones Anisim brought—his present. Take them, daughter," he whispered, and pressed the roll into her hand; "take them and throw them into the well. . . . The devil take them. And see there is no talk. Whatever happens. . . . Take the samovar away, put out the lights. . . ."

Lipa and Praskovya, who were sitting in the coach-house, saw the lights go out one after another; it was only upstairs in Varvara's room that the red and blue icon lamps shone dimly, and a breath of peace, ease and ignorance seemed to come thence. Praskovya could not get accustomed to the idea that her daughter had married a rich man, and when she came there she pressed timidly against the walls and smiled suppliantly, and they sent her out tea and sugar. And Lipa was also unable to become accustomed to her new position, and after her husband had left she did not sleep in her own bed, but anywhere—in the kitchen, in the coach-house—and every day she washed the floors or the linen, and it appeared to her that she was out to char. And now

when they got back from their pilgrimage they had drunk tea in the kitchen with the cook, and then they had gone into the coach-house and lay down on the floor in a corner between the sledge and the wall. It was dark there and it smelled of harness. The lights were extinguished in the whole house and they heard the deaf man shutting up the shop, and the mowers settling down for the night in the yard. Far away at the junior Khrymins somebody was playing on a costly accordion. . . . Praskovya and Lipa were beginning to doze.

When they were roused by somebody's footsteps the moon was shining brightly. Aksinia was standing at the door of the coach-house holding her bedding in her hands.

"It's probably cooler here . . ." she said, and coming in she lay down almost at the threshold, so that the whole of her figure was in the moonlight.

She did not sleep but breathed heavily, and tossing about from the heat she threw off almost everything she had on her—and in the magic of the moonlight what a beautiful, what a proud animal she was! After a little time footsteps were heard again, and the old man, dressed all in white, appeared in the doorway.

"Aksinia," he called, "are you here?"

"Well!" she said angrily.

"I told you to throw the money into the well. Did you do it?"

"What next! Why throw property into the water? I gave them to the mowers."

"Oh, my God!" the old man exclaimed in amazement and alarm. "You mischief-making woman! Oh, my God!"

He clasped his hands and went away, mumbling something. Shortly after Aksinia sat up, sighed heavily

from vexation and then, rising, took up her bedding and went away.

"Why did you let me marry into this house, mother darling!" Lipa exclaimed.

"A girl must marry, daughter. That is ordained not by us."

A feeling of inconsolable grief was about to overcome them, but it appeared to them that somebody was looking down from the high heavens, from the blue sky, whence the stars saw everything that happened in Ukleevo and kept guard over them. And however much the evil might be, still the night was calm and lovely, and there was truth in God's world and always would be, the same calm and lovely truth, and everything on the earth waits till it is able to blend with truth, as the moonlight blends with the night.

Both of them were soothed, and pressing close together they fell asleep.

VI

Long since the news had arrived that Anisim had been sent to prison for the coining and the circulation of false money. Months passed, more than half a year passed, the long winter was over, spring had come and the people in the house and in the village had become accustomed to the fact that Anisim was in prison. When anybody passed the house or the shop at night he would remember that Anisim was lying in prison. Or when the churchyard bell tolled for some reason, people

remembered that he was lying in prison awaiting his trial.

It appeared as if a shadow had fallen on the house. The building had grown darker, the roof had become rusty, the door of the shop, which was covered with sheet iron and painted green, had faded, and even old Zybukin seemed to have grown darker. It was long since he had had his hair and beard cut, and they were much overgrown; he no longer sat down in his cart with a run, and he did not shout to the beggars, "God will give." His strength was beginning to fail him, and this could be noticed in everything. People feared him less; the local police officer had drawn up a protocol in the shop, although he received as heretofore what was due, and three times he had been cited to town to be tried for the secret sale of spirits, but the case was always adjourned, owing to the non-appearance of the witnesses; and the old man was tired out.

He often went to see his son; he hired somebody, he presented a petition to somebody, he presented a banner to some institution. He gave a silver holder for a tea-glass, with an inscription in enamel, "The soul knows moderation," and a long spoon to the chief warden of the prison where his son was confined.

"Solicit, petition, leave no stone unturned," Varvara said. "O-ho-ho! You ought to ask some of the gentry, they might write to the chief judge. . . . They might let him be free till the trial! Why oppress the lad!"

She too grieved; she grew stouter and her hair became whiter, but she continued to light the icon lamps in her room, and saw that everything should be clean and in order in the house, and she treated her guests to jam and apple-jelly. The deaf man and Aksinia carried on the trade of the shop. They began

a new business—the brick works in Butekino—and Aksinia drove there almost every day. She drove herself, and when she met acquaintances she would stretch out her neck, like a snake in the young rye, and smile naïvely and enigmatically. Lipa played all the time with her child, which had been born just before Lent. It was a small baby, lean and yellow, and it was strange that he could cry and look around, and that he was considered a person, and was even called Nikifor. He lay in his cradle, and Lipa, going to the door and bowing, would say :

" How do you do, Nikifor Anisimich ? "

Then she rushed towards him and covered him with kisses. And again she went to the door and again she said :

" How do you do, Nikifor Anisimich ? "

And he kicked about his red little legs, and his tears were mixed with laughter as it was with the carpenter Elizarov.

At last the day of the trial was appointed. The old man went to town five days before. Then they heard that several muzhiks from the village were taken there as witnesses ; their old labourer also went, as he had received a summons too.

The trial was on a Thursday. But Sunday passed and the old man had not returned, and there was no news from him. On Tuesday towards evening Varvara was sitting near the open window to listen if there were no sounds of the old man's returning. In the next room Lipa was playing with her baby. She was rocking it in her arms, and was saying to it with delight :

" You will grow up big, very big ! You will be a muzhik, and we'll go out together to day work. We'll go together to day work ! "

" Come now ! " Varvara said, offended. " What

sort of day work have you, silly girl, invented ? He'll be a merchant with us ! . . ."

Lipa began to sing in a low voice, but soon after she forgot and again said :

" You'll grow big, very big ; you'll be a muzhik, we'll go together to day work ! "

" Come now ! You're repeating it again ! "

Lipa with Nikifor in her arms stopped in the doorway and asked :

" Maminka, why do I love him so much ? Why do I pity him so much ? " she continued with a shaky voice, and her eyes glittered with tears. " Who is he ? What is there of him ? He's light as a feather, as a crumb, yet I love him, I love him like a real man. He can't do anything, he can't speak, yet I understand all that he wants by his little eyes."

Varvara sat listening ; she heard the noise of the evening train coming into the station. Had the old man arrived by it ? She did not hear or understand what Lipa was saying, she did not notice how time passed, she only trembled all over, and it was not from fear, but from curiosity. She saw a cart full of muzhiks drive past quickly and noisily. They were the witnesses who were returning from the station. The old labourer jumped off this cart as it passed the shop and he went into the yard. She heard how he was greeted in the yard, and he was asked about something. . . .

" Deprived of all rights and property," he said in a loud voice, " and six years of Siberia with hard labour."

She saw Aksinia come out of the shop by the back door ; she had just been delivering some kerosene, and had a bottle in one hand and a watering-pot in the other and she was holding a silver coin in her mouth.

" Where is *papasha ?* " she asked hissingly.

"At the station," the workman answered. "'I'll come home when it gets darker, he said.'"

When it became known in the yard that Anisim had been condemned to hard labour, the cook in the kitchen began wailing vociferously in the way they do for a dead man, as she thought this was demanded by propriety:

"And why have you deserted us, Anisim Grigorievich, our bright falcon? . . ."

The alarmed dogs began to bark. Varvara ran to the window, stunned by her grief, and called out to the cook at the top of her voice:

"Enough, Stepanida, enough! Don't overpower us, for Christ's sake!"

They forgot to put on the samovar, they could think of nothing. It was only Lipa who could not understand what had happened, and continued to carry her child about.

When the old man arrived from the station, nobody asked him any questions. He greeted everybody, and then went through all the rooms in silence; he would not have any supper.

"There was nobody with influence . . ." Varvara began, when they remained alone. "I told you to ask the gentry. . . . You did not listen to me then. . . . A petition might . . ."

"I did what I could!" the old man said, and he seemed to wipe the past away with a gesture of his hand. "When Anisim was condemned I went to the gentleman who had defended him. 'Nothing can be done now, it's too late.' And Anisim himself said: 'Too late.' Still, when I left the court I spoke to an advocate; I gave him an advance. . . . I shall wait a week and then go again. It's God's will. . . ."

The old man again went through all the rooms in silence, and when he returned to Varvara he said:

"I think I'm ill. My head is misty. . . . My thoughts get mixed."

He shut the door so that Lipa should not hear him, and continued in a whisper:

"I'm not in luck with money. Do you remember the week after Easter, just before his wedding, Anisim gave me some new silver roubles and half-roubles? One roll I put away at once, and the others I mixed with my own money. . . . Formerly when my uncle, Dmitry Filatych, was still alive, God rest his soul, he used to go to Moscow to buy goods and sometimes to the Crimea too. Well, he had a wife, and while he was away on business this wife amused herself with other men. There were six children, and it often happened when uncle got tipsy he would laugh: 'I can't for the life of me make out which are my children and which are "others."' He was easygoing. That's just how it is with me now: I can't make out which money is real and which counterfeit. And they appear to me all false."

"Well I never! God preserve you!"

"I took my ticket at the station and gave three roubles, and it appeared to me they were all false. I became frightened. I must be ill."

"You don't say so. We are all in God's hands. . . . O-ho-ho . . ." Varvara continued and she shook her head. "One must think about it, Petrovich. Who knows what may happen; you're not a young man. Should you die, see that your grandson is not wronged when you're no more. Oh, I'm afraid they'll wrong Nikifor, they'll wrong him! His father can be counted as no more; his mother is young and silly. . . . You could make over some land to the boy. Why not Butekino, Petrovich; it really would be a good thing! . . . Think of it . . ." Varvara continued to persuade

him. "He's a nice boy, it would be a pity. Why not go to-morrow and have the deed made out? Why wait?"

"I'd quite forgotten the grandson . . ." Zybukin said. "I must go and see him. So you say the boy is a fine one? Well, let him grow up; God bless him!"

He opened the door and beckoned with his finger for Lipa to come to him. She approached with her baby in her arms.

"Lipinka, if you want anything, ask for it," he said. "Eat whatever you like, we wont grudge it, if you're only well . . ." He made the sign of the cross over the infant. "And take care of my grandson. My son is no more, but my grandson has remained."

Tears flowed down his cheeks; he sobbed and turned away. Shortly after he went to bed, and fell into a deep sleep after seven sleepless nights.

VII

The old man went to town for a short time. Somebody told Aksinia that he had been at a notary's, in order to make his will, and that he had left Butekino, where she was baking bricks, to his grandson Nikifor. She was informed of this in the morning, when the old man and Varvara were sitting under a birch tree near the door, drinking tea. She shut up the shop, both from the street and from the yard she collected all the

keys that were in her keeping and flung them down at the old man's feet.

"I'm not going to work for you any more!" she shouted in a loud voice, and then suddenly began to sob. "It appears I'm not your daughter-in-law, but your servant! All the people are laughing at me and saying: 'See what a servant Zybukin has hired!' I've never hired myself to you! I'm no beggar, I'm no slave, I have a father and a mother."

She did not wipe away her tears, but stared at the old man with tear-stained, wicked eyes, that squinted with rage; her face and neck were red and strained, for she was shouting with her whole might.

"I won't serve you any more!" she continued. "I'm tired out! When it's a case of work, or to sit in the shop all day long, and at night to slip out for vodka, that's good enough for me; but when land is to be given away then it's the convict's wife and her little devil! She's mistress here, a fine lady, and I'm to be her servant! Give her everything—the galley-slave—may it choke her; I'm going home! Find another fool to serve you, you damned Herods!"

The old man had never once in his life scolded or punished his children, and he had never admitted, even in thought, that a member of his family could use abusive language to him, or act towards him with want of respect; now he was greatly alarmed; he ran into the house and hid behind a cupboard, while Varvara was so panic-stricken that she could not rise from her seat, but only waved her arms about as if she was defending herself from a swarm of bees.

"Good gracious! What's the meaning of this?" she muttered in terror. "Why is she shouting? O-ho-ho! . . . The people will hear her! Be quiet. . . . Oh, be quiet!"

"You've given the galley-slave Butekino," Aksinia continued to shout. "Now you can give her all the rest—I want nothing from you! The devil take you all! You're all one gang! I've seen enough of you! You plundered those who came on foot and those who drove here, robbers, you plundered the old and the young! Who sold vodka without a licence? and the false money? You stuffed your trunks with false money—and now I've become unnecessary!"

Near the widely opened gate a crowd had collected, and were looking into the yard.

"Let the people look," Aksinia cried. "I'll shame you! You'll be consumed with shame! You'll fall at my feet! Eh, Stepan!" she shouted to the deaf man. "Let's drive home this very minute. Let's go to my father and mother. I don't want to live with prisoners! Buck up!"

Linen was hanging out to dry on cords drawn across the yard; she tore down her own petticoats and bodices, which were still quite wet, and threw them over the deaf man's arm. Then still more enraged she rushed about the yard between the rows of linen, tearing it all down and trampling what was not hers in the dust.

"Oh, my good sirs, silence her!" Varvara groaned. "What does she want? Give her Butekino, give it her for the sake of Christ in heaven."

"Well, what a woman!" the people at the gate said. "There's a woman for you! She's in a terrible rage!"

Aksinia rushed into the kitchen, where a wash was going on at that time. Lipa alone was washing, and the cook had gone to the river to rinse the linen. Steam was rising from the wash tub and from the boiler that stood on the stove, and the kitchen was thick and heavy with mist. There was a heap of still unwashed

linen lying on the floor and Nikifor was lying kicking his legs about on a bench near this heap, so that if he fell he would not hurt himself. At the moment Aksinia entered the kitchen Lipa had just taken one of Aksinia's shifts from that heap, had put it into the wash tub and was stretching out her hand to take the large ladle with boiling water that was standing on the table.

"Give it here!" Aksinia said, looking at her with hatred, and she snatched the shift out of the wash tub. "It's not your business to touch my linen! You're a convict's wife and must know your place, and what you are!"

Lipa looked at her panic-stricken, not understanding what had happened; but she caught the look that Aksinia cast on the child, and suddenly understood and became deadly pale. . . .

"You have taken my land, that's also for you!"

Saying this, Aksinia snatched up the ladle of boiling water and poured it over Nikifor.

Then a scream was heard, such as never before had been heard in Ukleevo, and it was hardly credible that a small, feeble creature like Lipa could have uttered such a cry. Suddenly it became quiet in the yard. Aksinia went silently into the house with her usual naïve smile. . . . The deaf man continued to roam about the yard carrying his armful of wet linen and then he began to hang it up again, silently and without hurrying. Till the cook returned from the river nobody had the courage to enter the kitchen and see what had happened there.

VIII

Nikifor was taken to the district hospital, but towards evening he died. Lipa would not wait to be fetched, but wrapped the dead child in a blanket and carried it home.

The hospital, but recently built, stood high up on a hill, and its large windows shone brightly in the setting sun, and it seemed to be on fire inside. Below it lay a little village. Lipa went along the road, and before reaching the village she sat down near a small pond. A woman brought a horse to the water, but it would not drink.

"What do you want then?" the woman said, perplexed. "What do you want?"

A boy in a red shirt was sitting close to the water, washing his father's boots. Not another soul was to be seen either in the village or on the hill.

"It does not drink . . ." Lipa said, looking at the horse.

Then the woman and the boy with the boots went away and nobody was to be seen. The sun went to bed and covered itself up with purple and gold brocade, and long red and purple clouds watched over its repose, stretching themselves out across the sky. Somewhere far away the call of a bittern could be heard that sounded doleful and dull like a cow that was shut up in the cow-house. The cry of this mysterious bird was heard every spring, but they did not know what it was nor where it lived. The hill near the hospital, the bushes by the pond behind the village and all around the fields trilled with the songs of nightingales. The cuckoo was number-

ing the years of somebody's life, and always got wrong and began over again. In the pond angrily straining to outcry each other the frogs croaked, and one could even distinguish the words, "You're like that, you're like that!" What a noise there was! It appeared as if all these creatures cried and sang on purpose, to prevent everybody from sleeping during this spring night, but that all, even the angry frogs, valued and enjoyed every minute: why, life is given only once!

The crescent moon shone silvery in the sky, and there were many stars. Lipa could not remember how long she sat near the pond, but when she rose and went on, everything was sleeping in the village, and not a single light was to be seen. There were about twelve versts to her home, and her strength failed her; she did not know how to go on. The moon shone sometimes in front, sometimes to the right, and the same cuckoo kept calling; but now with a hoarse voice and laughter as if mocking her: "Oh, look out, you'll miss your way!" Lipa walked fast, and lost the handkerchief she had on her head. . . . She looked at the sky and wondered where her boy was now: was he following her or flying up there on high near the stars and did not think any more about his mother? Oh, how solitary it is in the fields at night, in the midst of all this singing, when you yourself cannot sing, in the midst of all these incessant cries of joy when you cannot rejoice, when the moon, also solitary and for whom it is all the same; whether it is spring now or winter, whether people are alive or dead looks down from the sky. . . . When the soul is sad it is hard to be without people around you. If only her mother, Praskovya, were with her, or Crutch, or the cook, or one of the muzhiks!

"Boo!" called the bittern. "Boo-oo!"

Then suddenly human speech was distinctly heard.

"Vavila, harness the horses."

In front of her, at the roadside, a fire was burning; there were no flames; only glowing embers were still to be seen. The chewing of horses could be heard. Through the darkness the outlines of two carts, one with a cask; the other, a lower one, was loaded with sacks, and the figures of two men could be seen; one of the men was leading a horse to harness it to the cart, the other man stood motionless near the fire, with his arms behind his back. A dog growled near the carts. The man who was leading the horse stopped and said:

"Somebody must be coming along the road."

"Sharik, be quiet!" the other man called to the dog.

By the voice one could know that the last speaker was an old man. Lipa stopped and said:

"God help you!"

The old man came up to her, but did not answer at at once.

"How do you do?"

"Your dog won't bite, grandfather?"

"Don't fear, come on. He won't touch you. . . ."

"I was in the hospital," Lipa said after a short silence. "My little son died there. I'm carrying him home."

It was evidently unpleasant for the old man to hear this, for he went away and said hurriedly:

"That does not matter, my dear. It's God's will. Don't dawdle, boy!" he said, turning to his companion. "Look sharp!"

"I can't find your yoke!" the lad said. "It's not here!"

"You're obstinate, Vavila."

The old man took a brand from the fire, blew upon it, lighting up only his own eyes and nose, then when they had found the yoke he came up to Lipa with his light

and looked at her; there was a look of sympathy and softness in his eyes.

"You're a mother," he said. "Every mother is grieved at the loss of her child."

He sighed and shook his head. Vavila threw something into the fire and trampled upon it; it became very dark at once. The vision disappeared, and as before there was only the field, the starlit sky, the noise of the birds who prevented each other from sleeping. A corncrake uttered its sharp cry, apparently just at the place where the fire had been burning.

But a moment after the carts could again be seen, and the old man and long-legged Vavila. The carts squeaked as they drove on to the road.

"Are you saints?" Lipa asked the old man.

"No. We come from Firsanov."

"You looked at me just now, and my heart grew soft. The lad is quiet too. So I thought: they must be saints."

"Have you far to go?"

"To Ukleevo."

"Sit down, we can take you to Kuz'menok. Then you go straight, we turn to the left."

Vavila sat down in the cart with the cask, the old man and Lipa got into the other. They went on at a footpace, Vavila in front.

"My little son suffered all day," Lipa said. "He looked with his little eyes and was silent, he wanted to say something, but could not. Lord God! Queen of Heaven! From grief I kept falling on the floor all the time. I stood there, and fell down near the bed. Tell me, grandfather, why the little ones have to suffer before death. When a grown man suffers, a muzhik or a woman, then their sins are forgiven them; but why should a little one, who has no sins, suffer? Why?"

"Who can say!" the old man answered.

They drove on for about half an hour in silence.

"One can't know everything, the why and the wherefore," the old man said. "Birds have been given not four wings, but two, because they can fly with two wings; so also man has been given to know not everything, but only half or a quarter. As much as he ought to know to be able to live, so much he knows."

"Grandfather, it will be easier for me to go on foot. Now my heart shakes."

"Never mind. Sit still."

The old man yawned and made the sign of the cross over his mouth.

"Never mind," he repeated. "Your grief is only half a grief. Life is long—there will still be good things and bad things, there'll be all sorts of things in it. Mother Russia is great!" he said, and looked all around him. "I've been all over Russia, and have seen everything in her, and, my dear, you can believe my words. There'll be good and bad. I've walked on foot over the whole of Siberia. I've been on the Amour, on the Altai; I emigrated to Siberia and have ploughed the land there; then I became home-sick. I longed for Mother Russia and returned to my native village. We returned to Russia on foot; I remember we were floating on a ferry-boat, I was thin and lean, all tattered and torn, barefoot and shivering, sucking a crust, when a gentleman who was also crossing in the ferry-boat—if he's dead may the Heavenly Kingdom be his—looked at me with pity and tears flowed from his eyes. 'Oh,' he said, 'your bread is black—your days are black too. . . .' I got back to my village, as one says, without house or home. I'd had a wife; she remained in Siberia, buried. So, I live as a workman. And what of that? I'll tell you more. I've known good and bad since then. And I don't want

to die yet, my dear, I'd like to live another twenty years ; so, you see, there's been more good than bad. Yes, and Mother Russia is great ! " he said and he again looked round on all sides and he looked back.

" Grandfather," Lipa asked, " after a man dies, for how many days does his soul remain on earth ? "

" Who can tell ! Let's ask Vavila—he's been to school. Now all sorts of things are taught. Vavila ! " the old man called to him.

" Eh ? "

" Vavila, after a man dies, for how many days does his soul remain on earth ? "

Vavila stopped his horse and only then he answered :

" For nine days. My Uncle Kiril died, but his soul remained in our *isba* for thirteen days."

" How do you know that ? "

" For thirteen days there was crackling in our stove."

" Well, all right. Go on," the old man said, and it was quite clear he did not believe anything of the sort.

Near Kuz'menok the carts turned on to the high road and Lipa went on. The dawn was beginning. When she went down into the ravine the Ukleevo huts and the church hid themselves in the fog. It was cold and it seemed to her that the same cuckoo was still calling.

When Lipa arrived at home the cattle had not as yet been sent out to pasture ; everybody slept. She sat down on the doorstep and waited. The first to come out was the old man ; at the first glance he understood what had happened, and for a long time he was unable to utter a word, but could only smack his lips.

" Oh, Lipa," he said at last, " you were not able to protect my grandson . . ."

He went to wake Varvara. She clasped her hands

and began to sob; but she commenced at once laying out the child.

"He was a fine boy . . ." she said. "O-ho-ho! . . . She had but one boy, and could not even take care of him, the stupid girl . . ."

Prayers for the dead were said morning and evening. On the second day he was buried, and after the burial the guests and the clergy ate very much and greedily as though they had not eaten for a long time. Lipa served at table, and the priest, raising his fork on which there was a salted mushroom, said to her:

"Do not grieve for the infant, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

It was only after all had left that Lipa really understood that Nikifor was no more and would never be again, she understood this and burst into sobs. She did not know into which room she ought to go, in order to cry and sob, as she felt that in this house, after the death of the boy, there was no place for her, that she had nothing more to do there, that she was superfluous; and the others felt it too.

"Well, why are you making such a row here?" Aksinia shouted, suddenly appearing in the doorway; in honour of the funeral she was dressed in quite new clothes and powdered. "Shut up!"

Lipa wanted to cease crying but could not, and only sobbed the louder.

"Do you hear?" Aksinia shouted, and stamped her foot with rage. "Whom am I speaking to? Get out of the house, and see that no trace remains of you, convict's wife. Out with you!"

"Well, well, well!" the old man exclaimed. "Aksinia, *matushka*, be calm. She's crying . . . it's quite natural . . . she has lost her child. . . ."

"It's quite natural . . ." Aksinia mimicked. "She

may pass the night here, but to-morrow there must be no trace of her! It's quite natural!" she repeated, and laughing she turned to go to the shop.

Early the next morning Lipa went away to Torguevo to her mother.

IX

Now the roof of the shop and the door have been painted and shine like new; on the window-sill bright coloured geraniums blossom as formerly, and that which had happened three years ago in Zybukin's house and yard has almost been forgotten.

Old Grigory Petrovich is still considered the master, but really the whole business is now in Aksinia's hands; it is she who sells and buys and without her consent nothing can be done. The brick-field was working well; as bricks were required on the railway line the price had risen to twenty-four roubles the thousand. The women and the girls carted the bricks to the station and loaded the waggons, and they received for this work twenty-five kopecks per day.

Aksinia had entered into partnership with the Khrymin juniors, and their factory went by the name of Khrymin Juniors and Co. They had opened a tavern near the station; they did not play any longer on the expensive accordion in their factory yard, but now they play on it in this tavern; the chief of the post department, who had also started some sort of commerce, and the stationmaster, who had done the same, often came there. The Khrymin juniors had

given deaf Stepan a gold watch, and he constantly took it out of his pocket and held it to his ear.

People in the village said that Aksinia had become very powerful; and really, when in the morning she drove over to her brick works, with her naïve smile, looking pretty and happy, or when afterwards she gave orders at the works, one felt that she had great power. Everybody in the house was afraid of her, and in the village and at the works too. If she went to the post office the postmaster would jump from his chair and say to her:

"Have the goodness to be seated, Xenia Abramovna."

One day a landowner, a dandy in a *poddevka** made of fine cloth and in patent leather top-boots, who was already getting on in years, when selling her a horse was so captivated that he gave her the horse for the price she wanted. He held her hand long in his, and looking into her gay, artful and naïve eyes, he said:

"For a woman like you, Xenia Abramovna, I am ready to do whatever she desires. Only tell me when we can meet, so that nobody should disturb us?"

"Whenever you like!"

After that this aged dandy began coming to the shop in order to drink beer. The beer was abominable and as bitter as wormwood. The landowner shook his head, but drank it.

Old Zybukin no longer interfered in the business. He never kept any money in his own possession, as he was quite unable to distinguish a real coin from a false one, but he kept silent and never told anybody about this weakness. He also became forgetful, and if he was not given food he never asked for it; they had become used to have their meals without him, and Varvara often said:

* A sleeveless overcoat worn by the peasants.

"Yesterday again he went to bed without eating."

She said it with indifference as she had become accustomed to it. For some reason, both in summer and winter he went about in his fur coat, and it was only on very hot days that he did not leave the house. Usually dressed in his fur coat, with the collar turned up and the coat well wrapped round him, he walked about the village, on the road to the station, or he would sit from morning to night on the bench near the church gate. He would sit there motionless. The passers-by bowed to him, but he did not return their salutes, for he did not like the muzhiks any more than he had done. If he was asked about anything he answered quite sensibly and politely but briefly.

In the village reports went about that his daughter-in-law had turned him out of his own house and gave him nothing to eat, and that he was supported by charity; some people rejoiced, others were sorry for him.

Varvara had grown still stouter and more grey, and as formerly she did good deeds, and Aksinia did not prevent her. There was so much jam now that they were unable to finish it before the new season came on; it became candied and Varvara almost cried, not knowing what to do with it.

Anisim was almost forgotten. One day a letter from him arrived. It was written in verse on a large sheet of paper like a petition, in the same beautiful handwriting as formerly. Evidently his friend Samorodov was sharing his punishment. Beneath the verses one line was written in an ugly scarcely legible handwriting: "I am always ill here, I am sad, help for Christ's sake."

Once—it was on a bright autumn day, towards evening—old Zybukin was sitting near the church gate, with the collar of his fur coat turned up, so that nothing but his

nose and the peak of his cap could be seen. At the other end of the long bench Elizarov was seated, and next to him sat Yakov, the watchman from the school-house, a toothless old man of seventy. Crutch and the watchman were conversing.

"Children must feed and look after the old people—honour thy father and thy mother," Yakov said with irascibility; "and she, the daughter-in-law, has turned the old man out of his own house. The old man has nothing to eat or to drink—where is he to go? It's the third day he's eaten nothing."

"The third day," Crutch repeated with astonishment.

"He sits in this way, and says nothing. He has grown weak. Why is he silent? He ought to go to law—the court would not praise her."

"Who has been praised by the court?" Crutch asked, not having heard correctly.

"What for?"

"The woman's not a bad one—painstaking. In their business it's impossible without it . . . that is, without sin. . . ."

"Out of his own house," Yakov continued irritably.

"Get your own house first—then turn people out of it. Eh! well, they've found a fine one, don't you think! A perfect plague!"

Zybukin heard, but did not move.

"It's all one if it's your own house or another's if it's only warm, and the women don't scold . . ." Crutch said, and laughed. "When I was younger I regretted my Nastasia very much. She was a quiet woman. But she was always saying: 'Makarich, buy a house! Buy a house, Makarich! Buy a horse, Makarich!' She was dying, and still she said: 'Makarich, buy a racing droshky, so as not to go on foot.' And I only bought her ginger-bread; nothing else."

"The husband is deaf and stupid," Yakov continued, paying no attention to Crutch. "A fool's no better than a goose. How can he understand anything? You may beat a goose on the head with a stick—even then it won't understand."

Crutch got up from his seat to go home to the factory. Yakov also rose and they went away together, continuing their talk. When they had gone about fifty paces old Zybukin also rose and went slowly after them, taking unsteady steps as if he were walking on ice.

The village was already sinking into the twilight of evening, and the sun shone only on the upper part of the road that curled about like a snake from the bottom to the top. The old women were returning from the wood, with the children; they were carrying baskets of mushrooms. The women and the girls were coming in a crowd from the station, where they had been loading waggons with bricks, and their noses and their cheeks just under the eyes were covered with red brick dust. They were singing. Lipa walked in front, singing in a small thin voice and looking up at the sky, as if in triumph and gladness that the day, thank God, was over and she might rest. Her mother, the charwoman, Praskovya, was also in the crowd of women, walking with a bundle in her hand and, as always, breathing heavily.

"Good evening, Makarich," Lipa said when she saw Crutch. "Good evening, dear!"

"Good evening, Lipynka!" Crutch answered, delighted to see her. "Butterflies, little girls love the rich carpenter! Ho-ho-ho! My children, my dear children" (Crutch sobbed). "My dear little hatchets."

Crutch and Yakov went on, and the girls could hear them talking. A little farther on the girls met old Zybukin, and they became instantly silent. Lipa and

Praskovya stayed behind, and when the old man came up to them Lipa bowed low and said :

" How do you do, Grigory Petrovich ! "

Her mother also bowed. The old man stopped and looked at them without saying a word ; his lips trembled, and his eyes filled with tears. Lipa took out of the bundle her mother was carrying a piece of pie and handed it to him. He took it and began to eat.

The sun had quite set now, its brilliancy had faded away from the heights and the road. It was becoming dark and cold. Lipa and Praskovya went on, and for a long time they continued to cross themselves.

THE COSSACK

MAXIM TORCHAKOV, citizen of Berdiansk and the tenant of the Lower Farm, was returning with his young wife from church and carefully bringing home the Easter cake, the Kulich, that had just been blessed at the midnight service. The sun had not yet risen, but the east, already bright with pink and gold, was chasing away the mists that hide from sight the blue sky in the early morning. All was still around. . . . The birds were not quite awake. A quail called : " pit-poidem, pit-poidem," and far over the plain, flapping its heavy wings, a sleepy kite flew away in the distance. No other living thing was to be seen in the steppes.

Torchakov drove along, thinking that in the whole year there was no better or gayer holiday than Easter. He had not been married long, and it was the first Easter he was celebrating with his young wife. Whatever he looked upon, whatever he thought of seemed to him bright, gay and happy. He thought of his homestead and found that all was in good order there ; his house could not be better ; there was plenty of everything ; and all was good ; he looked at his wife, and she ap peared to him pretty, kind and gentle. Everything made him feel happy : the glow of the eastern sunrise, the young grass, even his squeaking britska, and the kite soaring in the sky. And when he stopped on the way to run into a tavern, to light his cigarette and have a drink, he became even more jolly.

"It is called a great day," he said, "and it is a great day, sure enough. Wait a moment, Liza, the sun will soon begin to dance. He dances every Easter! So he must be happy too."

"He is not alive," his wife remarked.

"There are people on him," Torchakov exclaimed, "by God, there are! Ivan Stepanich told me that there are people on all the planets, on the sun and the moon too. . . . That's true. . . . But perhaps the learned talk nonsense; the evil one tempts them! . . . Stop! Is that a horse? So it is."

Half-way to their home, at the Crooked Valley, Torchakov and his wife saw a saddled horse standing quietly on the road, smelling last year's steppe grass. By the roadside, on a mound of grass, a red-haired Cossack was seated, almost bent double, looking at his feet.

"Christ is risen!" Maxim called to him. "Woah!"

"Verily He is," the Cossack answered, without looking up.

"Where are you going?"

"Home, on leave."

"Then why are you sitting here?"

"Just so. . . . I'm ill. . . . I can't go farther."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Everything."

"H'm! . . . What a misfortune! People are keeping holiday, and you are ill. You'd better go on to the village, or to the inn. What's the good of sitting here?"

The Cossack raised his head, looked at Maxim, his wife, and at the horse with the weary eyes of an invalid.

"Are you coming from church?" he asked.

"Yes, we're coming from church."

"I have been caught on the highway this holiday.

God did not allow me to get home. I want to mount and get on, but I have no strength. You orthodox Christians might give me, a poor traveller, some of your consecrated Kulich with which to break my fast."

"Some Kulich?" Torchakov repeated. "So I can. . . . Wait a moment . . . directly. . . ."

Maxim began hastily to search in his pockets, and looking at his wife he said:

"I have no knife. There is nothing to cut it with, and to break it would spoil the whole Kulich. There's a fix! Just look if you haven't a knife."

The Cossack got up, groaned and going to his saddle found a knife.

"What's this nonsense?" Torchakov's wife said crossly. "I won't allow you to spoil the Kulich. And what should I look like if I brought it home already cut? Ride on to the village where the muzhiks live, there you will be able to break your fast," and she took the napkin, with the Kulich, from her husband, saying: "I won't give it. One must keep the rules. This is no ordinary cake, but a Kulich that has been blessed; it's a sin to crumble it uselessly."

"Well, well! Cossack, don't be angry," Torchakov laughed. "The wife won't allow it! Good-bye, a pleasant journey to you!"

Maxim took up the reins, smacked his lips and the britska continued its journey with much squeaking. His wife grumbled for a long time, and tried to prove that to cut into a Kulich before you got home was a sin and against all rules. In the east, piercing through thick clouds, the first rays of the rising sun shone forth; the song of a lark was heard in the sky. Now not only one, but three kites, keeping at a respectful distance from each other, soared over the steppes. The grasshoppers began to chirp in the young grass.

After driving about a verst from the Crooked Valley, Torchakov turned round and looked back.

"No signs of the Cossack," he said. "It's heartrending to fall ill on the road. . . . Nothing could be worse . . . he must go on . . . and can't . . . he has no strength. . . . He might even die on the road. . . . We did not give him any Kulich, Liza, and we ought to have given him a bit. . . . He wanted to break his fast too."

The sun rose, but Torchakov could not see if he were dancing or not. For the rest of the way he said nothing, but sat thinking and looking at his horse's black tail. He did not know why he had become dull, and why nothing of the holiday happiness remained in his heart. When he got home and had exchanged Easter greetings with his labourers, he felt gayer and began to chat. He sat down to break his fast, and after eating a slice of the consecrated Kulich, he looked at his wife sadly and said:

"It was wrong, Liza, that we did not give the Cossack something with which to break his fast."

"By God, you're a crank," Liza exclaimed, surprised, and she shrugged her shoulders. "Where did you fish up this new-fangled idea? Who ever heard of distributing the blessed Kulich on the highways? Is it a cake? Now, that it is on the table and has been cut into, everybody may eat of it, even your Cossack. Do you think I'd care?"

"That's all very well, but we ought to have given some to the Cossack. He was worse off than a beggar, or an orphan. On the high road, far from home and ill."

Torchakov drank half a glass of tea, and then he could not eat or drink any more. He did not want to eat, the tea would not go down his throat and he became sad again. After breaking their fast he and his wife retired

to bed. About two hours later, when Liza awoke, he was standing at the window looking into the yard.

"Have you got up already?" his wife asked.

"I don't know why it is, but I can't sleep.. . . Oh, Liza," he sighed, "we wronged that Cossack."

"There you are again with your Cossack," yawned his wife. "Can't you get him out of your head?"

"He has served his Tsar, perhaps shed his blood, and we treated him like a swine. We ought to have brought him home with us, the poor invalid, to feed him; but we did not even give him a piece of bread."

"Do you think I would allow you to spoil the Kulich for no purpose? And a consecrated one too! You would have cut it up on the way, and I would have been shamed at home? That's what you wanted!"

Maxim said nothing, but went quietly into the kitchen; he cut a slice of Kulich, wrapped it up, with five eggs, in a napkin, and took it into the barn to find his workmen.

"Kus'ma, drop that accordion," he said to one of them; "saddle the bay, or Ivanchik, and ride quickly to the Crooked Valley. There you will find a sick Cossack, with his horse: give him this. Perhaps he has not ridden away yet."

Maxim again became more cheerful; but after waiting several hours for Kus'ma he lost patience and could wait no longer, so he saddled a horse and rode out to meet him.

He met him almost at the Crooked Valley.

"Well, have you seen the Cossack?"

"No, he is nowhere. He must have ridden away."

"H'm! What a misfortune!"

Torchakov took the bundle from Kus'ma and rode on. When he got to Shustrova he asked the peasants:

"Brothers, have you seen a sick Cossack with a horse?

Hasn't he passed this way ? A red-haired man on a bay horse ? "

The peasants looked at each other, and said they had seen no Cossack.

" A returning post-chaise went by, that's true. But no Cossack or anything else passed this way—no, there was nothing."

Maxim returned home in time for dinner.

" That Cossack is sticking in my head, do what I will," he said to his wife. " He gives me no peace ! I am always thinking of him. What if God wanted to test us, and sent an angel or a saint in the guise of a Cossack, to meet us on our path ? Things like that do happen. It was not right, Liza, to wrong a man so."

" Why are you always bothering me about your Cossack." Liza lost patience. " He sticks to us like pitch."

" You know you are not kind," Maxim said, looking into his wife's face.

And for the first time since he was married he noticed that his wife was not kind.

" And what if I am not kind ? " Liza cried angrily, thumping the table with a spoon. " I won't have the consecrated Kulich distributed to every drunkard on the roadside."

" But was the Cossack drunk ? "

" He was drunk."

" Na, you fool ! "

Maxim rose from the table and began to accuse his young wife of being uncharitable and silly. She also got cross, and answering reproaches with reproaches she began to cry, and went into her bedroom, declaring that she would go back to her father. Since their marriage this was the first domestic scene the Torchakov's had had. Until evening he went about his farmyard thinking

of his wife's face, and now it appeared to him to be wicked and ugly. The Cossack, as if on purpose, would not get out of his thoughts, and Maxim was pursued all the time either by his sick eyes or their own wrong deed.

"Ah! We have wronged a man!" he kept on mumbling to himself.

In the evening when it got dark he was seized with an irresistible melancholy, such as he had never known before. This fit of melancholy, and because he was angry with his wife, made him drink, and he got drunk—drunk as he had never been since his marriage. When drunk he used all sorts of bad language, and abused his wife, telling her that she had a wicked, ugly face, and that he would turn her out next day and send her back to her father. The day after the holidays he wanted to get over his drunken fit by taking another glass, but he only got drunk again.

. . . . . .

From that day the trouble began.

The horses, the cows, the sheep and the beehives began little by little to disappear from the yard. Maxim got drunk oftener and oftener, debt grew, his aversion for his wife increased. All his misfortunes Maxim explained to himself as being caused by his unkind wife; but chiefly because God was angry with him on account of the sick Cossack.

Liza saw the ruin around them, but she could not understand who was the cause of it.

MISS N. N.'S STORY

One summer evening about nine years ago, during hay-making time, I and Peter Sergéich, who was acting as assistant magistrate at the time, rode over to the station to fetch the letters.

The weather was splendid, but when we were returning we heard thunder and we saw an angry black cloud that was coming straight towards us. The cloud approached us and we rode towards it.

On its dark background our house and the church looked white and the tall poplars seemed turned to silver. There was a scent of rain and new-mown hay in the air. My companion was in high spirits. He laughed and talked all sorts of nonsense. He said it would not have been a bad thing if on our way we could come across some mediæval castle with battlemented towers, moss-grown and with owls, where we might take shelter from the storm, and where in the end we would be killed by the lightning . . .

Suddenly the first wave passed over the rye and oat fields, and a violent gust of wind raised a cloud of dust on the road. Peter Sergéich laughed and spurred his horse on.

"Splendid!" he shouted. "This is splendid!"

Infected by his gaiety and by the thought that I would soon be wet to the skin, and might be killed by the lightning, I also began to laugh.

This whirlwind and the rapid riding against the storm

took the breath away, making one feel like a bird; it agitated and tickled the breast. When we rode into our yard the wind had subsided, but large drops of rain rattled on the grass and on the roofs. There was not a soul near the stables.

Peter Sergéich unbridled the horses and led them to the stalls. While waiting for him to finish, I stood at the door and looked at the slanting rain. The luscious and exciting odour of the hay was more perceptible here than in the fields; the clouds and rain made it dusk.

"What a peal!" Peter Sergéich said, coming up to me after a terribly prolonged peal of thunder, when it appeared as if the sky had been rent asunder. "Wasn't that a peal?"

He stood beside me in the doorway, still breathing heavily from the rapid riding, and he looked at me. I noticed that he was admiring me.

"Natalia Vladimirovna," he said, "I would give verything I possess if I could only remain thus and look at you for ever. You are beautiful to-day."

He gazed at me enraptured, and with entreaty in his eyes; his face was pale, and on his beard and moustache raindrops glistened, and they, too, seemed to look at me with love.

"I love you!" he said. "I love you and am happy when I see you. I know you cannot be my wife; I want nothing, I require nothing, but that you should know I love you. Be silent, do not answer me, do not pay any attention to me, only know that you are dear to me, and permit me to look at you."

His enthusiasm was communicated to me. I looked at his inspired face; I heard his voice which was blended with the noise of the rain, and as if enchanted I was unable to move.

I wished to look at his brilliant eyes and listen to him without end.

"You are silent—excellent!" Peter Sergéich said. "Continue to be silent."

I was happy. I laughed with pleasure and ran under the pelting rain into the house; he also laughed, and with a skip and a jump he ran after me.

Making a noise like two children we both rushed, wet and breathless, up the stairs and bounced into the room. My father and brother, who were unaccustomed to see me laughing and gay, looked at me with surprise, and they also began to laugh.

The storm clouds passed away, the thunder became silent, but still the raindrops glistened in Peter Sergéich's beard. The whole of that evening until supper he sang, whistled, played noisily with the dog, chased it round the rooms and just missed knocking the man-servant, who was bringing in the samovar, off his legs. At supper he ate very much, talked very loud, and asserted that when you ate fresh cucumbers in the winter you had a taste of spring in the mouth.

When I went to bed I lit my candle, opened the window wide and gave myself up to the undefined feelings that possessed my breast. I remembered that I was free, healthy, distinguished, rich, that I was loved, but chiefly that I was distinguished and rich—distinguished and rich—how nice that was, my God! . . . Then feeling the cold that was borne to me together with the dew from the garden, I cuddled up in bed and tried to understand if I loved or did not love Peter Sergéich . . . and not being able to understand anything I fell asleep.

In the morning when I saw a trembling spot of sunshine and the shadow of lime branches on my bed, all that had happened the day before arose vividly in my

mind. Life appeared to me rich, varied, full of attractions. I dressed quickly, singing, and ran into the garden. . . .

And what was afterwards ? Afterwards—was nothing. In the winter, when we were living in town, Peter Sergéich came to us but seldom. The acquaintances of the country are only charming in the country and in summer—in town, and in winter they lose half their attraction. When in town you offer them tea, they seem to be in other people's coats, and stir their tea too long with the spoons. Sometimes in town Peter Sergéich also spoke of love, but how different it sounded when spoken in the village. In town we felt more strongly the wall that separated us ! I was distinguished and rich ; and he was poor, he was not even noble, only the son of a deacon, he was only an assistant magistrate ; we both —I from youth, and he, God knows why—considered this wall very high and thick, and he, when he came to us in town, smiled affectedly and criticized the higher society, or remained gloomily silent when anybody else was in the drawing-room. There is never a wall that cannot be broken through ; but the heroes of present-day fiction, as far as I know them, are too timid, too slow, too lazy and fearsome, and they are too apt to be satisfied with the thought that they are failures, and that their own life has duped them ; instead of struggling, they only criticize and call the world mean, and they forget that their own criticism gradually degenerates into meanness.

I was loved ; happiness was near, and it appeared to be living shoulder to shoulder with me. I sang as I lived, not trying to understand myself, not knowing for what I waited, or what I wanted from life—and time sped on and on. People passed me with their love, bright days and warm nights flitted by ; nightingales sang—

there was the scent of hay—and all this so charming and wonderful in recollection passed quickly by me unvalued, as with everybody, leaving no trace and vanished like a mist. . . . Where is it all ?

My father died. I have grown old. All that pleased me, that caressed me, that gave me hope—the noise of rain, the rolling of thunder, the thoughts of happiness, the words of love—all this has become a mere recollection, and I see before me a flat, empty plain ; there is not a single living soul on the plain, and there on the distant horizon it is dark and terrible . . .

There was a bell. Peter Sergéich had come to see me. When I see the country in winter and remember how green it became for me in summer, I whisper :

" Oh, my darlings ! "

And when I see the people with whom I passed my spring, I grow sad and warm, and I whisper the same words.

Long since, by my father's influence, he had been transferred to town. He has grown somewhat older, somewhat thinner. Long ago he ceased to talk to me of love, he no longer talked nonsense, he did not like his work ; he had some sort of ailment, he was disappointed with something ; he had given up expecting anything from life and he had no zest in existence. He sat down near the fire and looked silently into the flames. And I, not knowing what to say, asked :

" Well, what is it ? "

" Nothing," he replied.

Then there was silence again. The red glow of the fire skipped about his sad face.

I remembered the past, and suddenly my shoulders began shaking, and I burst into bitter tears. I became unbearably sorry for myself, and for this man, and I passionately longed for that which was passed, and for

that which life now refused us. And now I no longer thought that I was distinguished and rich.

I sobbed aloud, pressing my temples and murmured: "My God, my God, life is ruined . . ."

And he sat there in silence and did not say: "Do not cry." He understood that it was necessary to cry, and that the time had come for that. I saw in his eyes that he was sorry for me, and I, too, was sorry for him, and I was vexed for that poor timid wretch who had not been able to arrange either my life or his own.

When I conducted him to the door it appeared to me that he was purposely very long in the ante-room in putting on his fur coat. He kissed my hand a couple of times, and he looked long into my tear-stained eyes. I think at that moment he remembered the thunderstorm, the streams of rain, our laughter and my face as it was then. He wanted to say something to me, and he would have been glad to have said it; but he said nothing, he only shook his head and pressed my hand hard. God bless him!

When he had gone I returned into my boudoir and sat down again on the carpet in front of the fire. The red coals had changed into ashes and were going out. The frost knocked more fiercely at the windows, and the wind began singing a song about something in the chimney.

My maid came into the room, and thinking I had fallen asleep, called to me. . . .

THE PEASANTS

I

NIKOLAI CHIKILDÉEV, a waiter in the Moscow Slavyansky Bazaar hotel, fell ill. He suffered from numbness in the legs, and he had difficulty in walking, so that one day when going along a corridor with a tray of ham and peas in his hands he tripped, fell down and dropped the tray. He was obliged to leave his situation. All the money he had, and his wife's savings too, were spent on cures, and at last he had nothing left for food; he also felt dull without work, and he made up his mind that he really ought to go home to his village. It would be easier to be ill at home and life would be cheaper too. It is not without cause that the adage says: At home even the walls help.

He arrived in his village of Zhukovo in the evening. In the recollections he had of his childhood his old home appeared to him light, cosy and comfortable; now, when he entered the *isba*,* he was startled at what he saw: it was so dark, poky and dirty. His wife Olga and his daughter Sasha, who had accompanied him, looked with perplexity at the large dirty stove that occupied nearly half of the *isba*, and was black with smoke and flies. What numbers of flies! The stove was somewhat awry, the beams in the walls were crooked, and it seemed

A peasant's log-hut

as if the *isba* might fall to pieces at any moment. In the front corner near the icons old bottle labels and scraps of newspapers had been stuck on the wall in lieu of pictures. Poverty, poverty all around! None of the grown-up members of the family were in; they were all in the fields reaping. A little girl of about eight with almost white hair, unwashed and indifferent, was sitting on the stove. She did not even look at the new-comers. Below a white cat was rubbing itself against the poker.

"Pussy, Pussy!" Sasha said, trying to entice it. "Pussy!"

"She can't hear," the little girl said. "She's deaf!"

"Why?"

"So. She was beaten."

At the first glance Nikolai and Olga understood what sort of life they would have there, but they said nothing. They silently put down their packs and silently went out into the street. Their *isba* was the third from the beginning of the village, and it appeared to be the poorest and the oldest; the second was no better, but the first had an iron roof and there were curtains to the windows. This *isba* was not railed in, but stood alone, and served as a tavern. All the *isbas* were built in a row, and the whole village, quiet and pensive with willows, elders and mountain ashes, that looked out of its gardens, had a pleasant aspect.

Beyond the peasants' holdings the land fell away in a steep and craggy descent to the river, and in many places huge stones appeared above the clayey soil. On this incline between the stones and the holes, which had been dug out by the potters, footpaths wound about and heaps of broken crockery—some brown, some red—had been thrown away, while at the bottom a broad, flat, bright green meadow that had already been mown and where the peasants' herds were now grazing, stretched

along the river bank. This river, lying about a verst from the village, wound about with beautifully bushy banks, and beyond it there was again a broad meadow with grazing herds, and long files of white geese and then again, as on this side, steeply ascending banks, and on the hill-top another village and a church with five cupolas and a little farther away a gentleman's residence.

"You have a nice place here," Olga said, looking towards the church and crossing herself. "The Lord has given abundance!"

Just at that moment the church bells began ringing for vespers (it was the eve of Sunday). Below two little girls, who were carrying a pail of water, looked round at the church and stopped to listen to the ringing of the bells.

"This is just the time for dinner in the Slavyansky Bazaar . . ." Nikolai said meditatively.

Sitting at the top of the steep incline Nikolai and Olga saw the sunset, and how the sky, all golden and crimson, was reflected in the river in the windows of the church, and in the whole of the air, which was mild and calm and indescribably clear, such as is never known in Moscow. When the sun had set and the herds, bleating and lowing, had passed homewards and the geese had flown past from the other side—all was silent, the quiet light faded away in the air and the darkness of night began rapidly to approach.

In the meantime the old people had come home; Nikolai's father and mother were lean, bent, toothless and much of the same height. The other women, Nikolai's sisters-in-law, Marya and Fekla, who had been working at the landowner's on the other side of the river, had also come in. Marya, his brother Kiryak's wife, had six children; Fekla, the wife of brother Denis, who was serving as a soldier, had two. When

Nikolai came into the *isba* and saw the whole family—all these big and small bodies that moved about on the *polàty*,[1] in cradles and in all the corners of the room, when he saw with what avidity the old man and the women ate their black bread, dipping it in water, he realized that it was to no purpose that he, an invalid, without money and with a family, had come there—quite to no purpose !

" And where is brother Kiryak ? " he asked, when he had greeted all the others.

" He is serving the merchant as watchman in the wood," his father replied. " He's not a bad muzhik, but drinks too much."

" He's no earner ! " whined the old woman tearfully. " Our muzhiks are a sad lot, they bring nothing to the house, they only take from it. Kiryak drinks, and the old man (why hide away sin ?) also knows the way to the tavern. The Queen of Heaven is angry with us ! "

In honour of the guests the samovar was put on. The tea smelt of fish and the sugar had been nibbled and looked grey ; cockroaches crawled about the bread and the crockery ; it was loathsome to drink, and the conversation was loathsome too—all about want and illness. But before they had time to drink a single cup, a loud drawn-out drunken shout was heard outside :

" Ma-arya ! "

" It sounds like Kiryak," the old man said ; " talk of the devil and he will appear."

They all remained silent. A few minutes later the same shout, coarse and protracted as if coming from under the earth, was heard again.

" Ma-arya ! "

Marya, the elder of the two daughters-in-law, grew

[1] Polàty is the shelf over a Russian stove in peasants' huts on which they sleep.

pale, and cowered down close to the stove; it was strange to see on the face of this broad-shouldered, strong and ugly woman an expression of fear. Her daughter, the girl who had been sitting on the stove and had appeared so indifferent, suddenly began to cry loudly.

"Shut up, you pest!" Fekla, a pretty woman, also strong and broad-shouldered, shouted at her. "Never fear, he won't kill her!"

Nikolai learned from his father that Marya was afraid to live in the woods with Kiryak, and that whenever he was drunk he always came for her, and beat her unmercifully, making much row at the same time.

"Ma-arya!" the shout was heard again close to the door.

"Dear parents, protect me for Christ's sake!" Marya implored, gasping for breath as if she had been cast into very cold water. "Protect me, dear parents. . . ."

All the children that were in the *isba* began to cry, and Sasha, seeing them cry, began to cry too. A drunken cough was heard at the door, and a tall, black-bearded muzhik, in a winter cap, came into the *isba*; perhaps because his face could not be seen by the dim light of the little lamp he seemed terrible. It was Kiryak. Going up to his wife he raised his arm and struck her in the face with his fist; she, however, did not utter a sound, being stunned by the blow, but only sat down and instantly blood began to flow from her nose.

"What a shame! what a shame!" the old man muttered as he climbed on to the stove; "before our guests too! What a sin!"

But the old woman sat in silence, all huddled up, thinking of something. Fekla rocked the cradle. . . .

Evidently considering himself terrible, and being proud of it, Kiryak seized Marya by the arm and dragged her to the door roaring like a wild beast, in order to appear still more terrible, but at that very moment he suddenly saw their guests and stopped.

"So, you have arrived . . ." he said, releasing his wife. "My own brother and his family . . ."

He crossed himself before the icon, staggering, and opening wide his drunken, bloodshot eyes he continued:

"Our brother and his family have come to the paternal home . . . from Moscow, to be sure. The first capital, that is, the city of Moscow, the mother of cities. . . . Forgive me. . . ."

He sank down on a bench near the samovar and began to drink tea, sipping it up noisily from the saucer, while there was general silence. He drank about ten cups of tea, and then his head sank on to the bench and he began to snore.

They prepared to lie down to sleep. Nikolai, as he was an invalid, was sent to the stove to the old man; Sasha lay down on the floor, while Olga and the other women went to the barn.

"Ay, ay! my dear," she said as she lay down on the hay next to Marya, "tears won't help to wash away sorrow! One must bear it, that's all. In the Scriptures it is written, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Ay, ay! My dear!"

And then in an undertone and a sing-song voice she began to tell her about Moscow, about her life there and that she had been a maidservant in a boarding-house.

"In Moscow the houses are big, and made of stone," she said; "numbers and numbers of churches, some forty thousand, my dear, and everywhere gentlefolk live in the houses, such pretty ones, and such proper ones too!"

Marya said she had never been to Moscow, not even to their own district town ; she could not read or write, and did not know any prayers, not even " Our Father." Both she and Fekla, the other sister-in-law, who was now sitting at a little distance from them listening, were very undeveloped, and could understand nothing. They both disliked their husbands ; Marya was afraid of Kiryak, and when he remained with her she trembled with fear, and each time got a headache, as he smelt so strongly of vodka and tobacco. And Fekla, when asked if she was not dull without her husband, answered with indifference :

" A plague on him ! "

They talked and talked and then were quiet.

It was cool there, and near the barn a cock never ceased crowing at the top of his voice, and prevented them from sleeping. When the bluish morning light peeped through all the chinks Fekla rose quietly and went out, and then the patter of her bare feet was heard as she ran away somewhere.

II

Olga went to church and took Marya with her. They were both gay as they went down the steep footpath to the meadow. Olga was pleased with the liberty, and Marya felt that her sister-in-law was a near relative. The sun rose. A sleepy hawk flew over the meadow close to the ground, the river looked gloomy, mist hovered in places over it, but on the other side over the hill there was a streak of light, the church gleamed

brightly, and in the nobleman's garden the rooks cawed furiously.

"The old man's not so bad," Marya said, "but granny's strict, she's always quarrelling. Our corn lasted till the carnival; now we buy flour in the tavern, well, and she's angry at it; we eat too much, she says."

"Ay, ay, my dear! Bear it, that's all. It is written, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'"

Olga spoke gravely, in a sing-song voice, and her gait was rapid and bustling, like that of pilgrims. Every day she read the Gospel; she read it aloud, like a deacon, and much of what she read she did not understand; but the holy words touched her to tears, and such words as "forasmuch" and "peradventure" she pronounced with a sweet sinking of the heart. She believed in God, in the Virgin Mary and in the saints; she believed that one must not wrong anybody in the world—neither the common people, nor the foreigners, nor the gipsies, nor the Jews, and that there would even be woe to those who had no pity for animals; she believed that all this was in the Holy Book, and therefore when she pronounced the words of the Scriptures, even the incomprehensible ones, the expression on her face became compassionate, tender and serene.

"Where were you born?" Marya asked.

"In the Vladimir Government, but I was taken to Moscow when I was only eight years old."

They reached the river. On the opposite bank close to the water a woman was undressing.

"It's our Fekla," said Marya, recognizing her; "she's been to the nobleman's place, on the other side of the river. To the steward's. She's a shameless creature, and terribly abusive!"

Fekla, black-browed with unloosed hair, still young and firm as a girl, threw herself from the bank into the

river and began to kick about her legs in the water, splashing the water in waves all around her.

"Shameless, terribly shameless!" Marya repeated.

A rickety footbridge of logs had been thrown across the river, and just under it in the clear water there was a shoal of broad-headed mullet. The dew glittered on the green bushes that looked at themselves in the water. A warm breeze began to blow; it was delightful! What a lovely morning! And probably life in this village would be equally delightful, if there had not been want —terrible perpetual want—from which there was no means of escape. Now it was only necessary to look back at the village for all the memories of yesterday to be recalled—and all the enchanted happiness that appeared to lie around disappeared in a moment.

They came to the church. Marya remained near the door, and did not venture to go any farther. She did not even dare to sit down, although the bells would only ring for the liturgy at nine o'clock, so she stood all the time.

When the Gospel was being read the people began to move aside to let the family of the landlord pass; two girls in white frocks and broad-brimmed hats came in; they were accompanied by a stout, rosy-cheeked boy in a sailor suit. Their appearance touched Olga; at the first glance she had made up her mind that they were decent, well-educated and handsome people. Marya, on the other hand, looked at them askance, gloomily and sadly as if they were not people, but some sort of monsters that might crush her if she did not get out of their way.

And whenever the deacon sang anything in his bass voice, she seemed to hear the shout: "Ma-arya!" and she trembled.

III

The arrival of the guests was soon known in the village, and already after the liturgy many people assembled in the *isba*. The Leonychevs and the Matveichevs and the Il'ichovs came to hear the news of their relatives, who were in service in Moscow. All the Zhukovo young fellows, who knew how to read, were sent to Moscow and placed there as waiters or boots (just as all who came from the village on the other side of the river were given situations as bakers). Long since (it was still in the days of serfdom), when Luk Ivanovich, a Zhukovo peasant, now become almost a legendary character, had held the post of chief butler in one of the Moscow clubs, it had been the custom for him to take as his assistants only young men from his own village ; and they again, when once they rose to responsible positions, sent for their relatives and found them situations in taverns and restaurants ; so it came to pass that from that time the village of Zhukovo was never spoken of by the surrounding villagers otherwise than as Servantville or Waiterville. Nikolai, in his turn, was taken to Moscow when he was eleven years old and Ivan Makarich, one of the Matveichevs, who was at that time box-opener in the "Hermitage" garden, had found him a place. And now turning to the Matveichevs, Nikolai said in a didactic tone :

"Ivan Makarich was my benefactor, and it is my duty to pray to God for him night and morning, as it was owing to him that I have become a good man."

"My dear friend," a tall old woman, Ivan Makarich's

sister, said in a lachrymose tone, "is there nothing to be heard of him, the darling?"

"Last winter he was serving at Aumont's, and there was a report that this season he was in some garden in the suburbs. . . . He's getting old! Formerly it often happened he would bring home ten roubles a day from his summer jobs, but now things are quiet everywhere and the old man can just make shift."

The old women and the young wives looked at Nikolai's legs, shod with felt boots, and at his pale face, and said sadly:

"You're no breadwinner, Nikolai Osipich, you're no breadwinner either! How can you be!"

Everybody was affectionate with Sasha. She was more than ten years old; but she was short for her age and very thin, and judging by her appearance one would have given her not more than seven years. Among the other sunburnt girls with badly cut hair, dressed in long faded smocks, she, with her pale face, large dark eyes and a red ribbon in her hair, appeared to them amusing, like some little animal that had been caught in the fields and brought home to the *isba*.

"She can read," Olga boasted, looking tenderly at her daughter. "Read, my little girl," she said, and she took her Bible out of the corner. "Read, and these orthodox people will listen."

The Bible was an old one, a heavy book in leather binding, with well-thumbed pages, and it gave out a scent as if monks had entered the *isba*. Sasha raised her eyebrows, and began to read in a loud, drawling voice:

"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother . . ."

"The young child and his mother," Olga repeated, and all bowed their heads with emotion.

" And flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word . . ."

At these words Olga could restrain herself no more, but began to weep. And looking at her Marya sobbed also, and then Ivan Makarich's sister sobbed too. The old man coughed and began to fidget and look for some sweets to give his granddaughter, but he could find nothing, and only waved his hand. When the reading was finished the neighbours departed, all being affected and very pleased with Olga and Sasha.

As it was a holiday the whole family remained at home all day. The old woman, whom her husband, her daughters-in-law and the grandchildren all called Granny, tried to do everything herself ; she heated the stove and put on the samovar, she even went out for a half-day's work and then grumbled that she was worn out with work. All day long she was troubling about something : that somebody would eat an extra bit, that the old man and her daughters-in-law should not remain idle. At one moment she thought she heard the tavern-keeper's geese coming into her kitchen garden from behind, and she ran out of the *isba* with a long stick, and then shouted shrilly for half an hour near her cabbages, which were as withered and wizened as she was herself ; at another time she thought that a crow was trying to catch her chickens, and she rushed after the crow with a shower of abuse. She was angry, and grumbled from morning to night, and often raised such a clamour that the passers-by stopped to listen.

She did not behave affectionately towards her old man ; she called him a lie-a-bed and a pest. He was a thoughtless, unreliable muzhik, and probably if she did not constantly urge him on, he would not work at all, but would only sit on the stove and talk. He told his son long stories about his enemies, complained of being

wronged by his neighbours every day, till it was tiresome to listen to him.

"Yes," he said, putting his arms a-kimbo. "Yes. . . . A week after Holy Cross Day I sold some hay for thirty kopecks per pood, of my own accord. . . . Yes. . . . Good. . . . Well then, in the morning I carted the hay, of my own accord, doing no harm to anybody; in an evil hour I met Antip Sedelnikov, the bailiff, coming out of the tavern. 'Where are you taking it, you—this, that and the other?' and he boxed my ears."

Kiryak had a bad headache, and he was ashamed that his brother had seen him drunk the night before.

"That's what vodka does. Oh, my good Lord!" He mumbled, shaking his aching head. "For God's sake forgive me, brother and sister. I'm ashamed of myself."

In honour of the holiday a herring had been bought in the tavern and a soup had been made of its head. At midday they all sat down to drink tea, and they drank much and long, till they perspired, and they appeared to swell out from the tea, and it was only after drinking tea that they ate the soup all out of the same bowl. Granny hid the herring away.

In the evening the potter lit his oven on the incline to bake his pots. Below on the meadow the girls danced in a ring and sang. The young men played on the accordion; and on the other side of the river another kiln was burning and girls sang on the meadow, and in the distance this singing sounded harmonious and soft. In and around the tavern the muzhiks were making a row, they sang drunken songs each for himself, and swore in such a way that Olga could only shudder and say:

"Oh, good gracious!"

She was surprised that oaths were heard the whole time, and that it was the old men, for whom it was high

time to die, who swore the loudest and the longest. And the children and the young girls heard these oaths, and were not in the slightest degree disconcerted by them; it was evident they were used to them from the cradle.

It was past midnight, the kilns had burnt out on both sides of the river and the muzhiks still caroused in the tavern. The old man and Kiryak, both drunk, walking arm in arm and knocking against each other, came towards the barn were Olga and Marya were sleeping.

"Leave her in peace," the old man was trying to persuade him. "Leave her in peace! She's a quiet woman. . . . It's a sin. . . ."

"Ma-arya!" Kiryak shouted.

"Leave her. . . . Sin. . . . She's not a bad woman."

They both stood for about a minute near the barn and then went on.

"I love the sweet-scented flow-ers," the old man began suddenly to sing in a high-pitched, piercing tenor voice. "I love in the mead-ows to cull."

Then he spat, swore in very bad language and went into the *isba*.

IV

Granny posted Sasha in her kitchen-garden, and ordered her to see that the geese did not get in. It was a hot August day. The tavern-keeper's geese could have got into the garden from the back, but they were now occupied with the work of picking up oats near the

tavern, talking peacefully together, and it was only the gander who lifted his head up high as if to see if the old woman were not coming along with her stick. Other geese could have come from the bottom of the garden; but they, too, were now grazing far away on the other side of the river that stretched out through the meadows like a long white garland. Sasha stood there for a short time, then she got tired, and, seeing that no geese came, she went away to the top of the valley.

There she found Marya's eldest daughter, Motka, who was standing motionless on a huge stone and looking at the church. Marya had had thirteen children, but only six were still alive, all girls, not a single boy, and the eldest of them was eight years old. Motka, in a long smock and barefooted, was standing in the burning sun which baked straight on her head, but she did not notice this, and stood there as if petrified. Sasha went and stood alongside of her, and, looking at the church, she said:

"God lives in the church. People have lamps and candles, but God has little icon lamps—red, green and blue—that burn like little eyes. At night God walks about the church, and with Him are the Holy Virgin and Saint Nikolai—top—top—top. And the watchman is afraid! Ay, ay, my dear!" she added, in imitation of her mother. "And when the end of the world comes all the churches will be borne to heaven."

"And . . . all . . . the . . . bells?" Motka asked in a bass voice, drawling out each word.

"And the bells too. At the end of the world the good people will go to heaven, and the angry people will burn in eternal fire that will never go out, my dear. God will say to my mama and to Marya: 'You have never injured anybody, and therefore go to the right into heaven'; but to Kiryak and to Granny He will say: 'And you go

to the left into the fire.' And all who ate meat during Lent will also be put into the fire."

She looked up into the sky, opening her eyes very wide, and said :

"Look into the sky without winking—you will see angels there."

Motka looked into the sky, and a minute passed in silence.

"Do you see them ?" Sasha asked.

"I don't see anything," Motka said in her bass voice.

"But I see them. . . . Tiny little angels are flying about the sky with wee wings—tiny, tiny, just like gnats."

Motka thought for a short time with her eyes fixed on the ground, and then she asked :

"Will Granny burn ?"

"She will, my dear."

From the stone on which they were standing to the very bottom there was a smooth gentle incline covered with soft green grass, which you wanted to touch with your hand or lie upon. Sasha lay down and rolled to the bottom. Motka, with a serious, severe face, taking a long breath, also lay down and rolled after her, and in doing so she tore her smock to her shoulders.

"How funny it was !" Sasha said, quite delighted.

Both went up the slope in order to roll down again, but at that moment they heard a familiar shrill voice. Oh, how terrible it was ! Granny, toothless, bony, hump-backed, with short grey hair that was blown about by the wind, and a long stick in her hand, was driving the geese out of the kitchen-garden and shouting :

"All the cabbages are trampled on, the ungodly, may you all die, you thrice accursed, you pests, may you go to perdition !"

She saw the little girls, threw down her stick, picked up some rods and seizing Sasha's neck in her strong bony fingers that were like vices, she began to whip her. Sasha cried with pain and fright, and at that moment the gander, waddling from one leg to the other and stretching out his neck, came up to the old woman hissing out something, and when he returned to his flock all the geese greeted him approvingly with: Go—go—go! Then Granny began to whip Motka, and Motka's smock was torn again. With a feeling of despair, and crying bitterly, Sasha went into the *isba* in order to complain; she was followed by Motka also crying, but in bass tones and without wiping away her tears, and her face was soon as wet as if she had dipped it into water.

"Good Lord!" Olga exclaimed in astonishment, when they both rushed into the *isba*. "Queen of Heaven!"

Sasha began to tell her what had happened, and at the same moment Granny came in with piercing cries and abuse. Fekla got angry too, and there was a great row in the *isba*.

"It's nothing, it's nothing," said Olga, pale and agitated, stroking Sasha's head. "She . . . Granny, it's a sin to be angry with her. Never mind, my darling."

Nikolai, who was already harassed by this constant noise, hunger, these fumes and stench, who hated and despised poverty, who was ashamed, before his wife and daughter, of his father and mother, sat on the stove with his legs dangling down, and said in an irritable, tearful voice, addressing his mother:

"You must not beat her! You have no right to beat her!"

"Well, you lie-a-bed, rotting there on the stove!" Fekla shouted angrily at him. "What the deuce has brought you here, you drones!"

Sasha, Motka and the other girls, as many as they were, huddled up together on the stove, behind Nikolai's back, and from that place listened to all this in silence, with fear, and the beating of their little hearts could be heard. When there is a sick member of a family who has been long and hopelessly ill, there are such hard moments when all who are near to him wish timidly and secretly, in the depths of their souls, for his death ; only children are afraid of the death of a near relative, and at the very thought of it always feel terror. And now the girls, holding their breath, looked at Nikolai with sad expressions on their faces, and thought that he would soon die, and they wanted to cry and to say to him something affectionate and compassionate.

He pressed up to Olga as if seeking her protection, and said to her in a low trembling voice :

" Olga, darling, I can't remain here. I have no strength. For God's sake, for the sake of Christ in Heaven, write to your sister, Klavdia Abramovna, beg her to sell or pawn all she has, and to send us money, and we will go away from here. Oh, Lord ! " he continued sadly, " if we could only get a glimpse of Moscow ! Could I but see Mother Moscow again, if only in a dream ! "

When evening came on, and it grew dark in the *isba*, it became so melancholy there that it was difficult to say a word. Angry Granny dipped rye breadcrusts in water and sucked them long ; she sucked them for a whole hour. Marya milked the cow, brought in a pail of milk and placed it on a bench ; then Granny poured the milk out of the pail into jugs, also slowly without hurrying, and it was evident that now, during the fast of the Assumption, nobody would drink milk, and it would all remain untouched. She only left a little, just a few drops on a saucer for Fekla's baby. When she and

Marya had gone to carry the jugs to the cellar, Motka suddenly gave a start, crawled down from the stove, and going up to the bench on which Granny's wooden bowl with the crusts was standing, she sprinkled some drops of milk from the saucer on them.

When Granny came back to the *isba* she again began sucking her crusts, and Sasha and Motka, sitting on the stove, looked at her and they were pleased that she had broken the rules for fasting, and would now go to hell. They were comforted, and lay down to sleep, and as Sasha fell asleep she dreamed of the Last Judgment: A large oven like the potter's kiln was burning, and the devil, with horns like a cow's and as black as coal, was driving Granny into the fire with a long stick, like the one she had used just before for driving the geese away.

V

At about eleven o'clock on the evening of the Feast of the Assumption the girls and the young men were merry-making below in the meadow, when suddenly a hue and cry was raised by them, and they all rushed towards the village; for the moment those who were sitting at the top of the bank could not understand what had happened.

"A fire! a fire!" A despairing scream rose from the bottom. "We are burning."

Those who were sitting above looked round, and they saw a terrible, an extraordinary sight. Above the thatched roof of one of the last *isbas* there was a column

of fire of about seven feet in height; this column whirled round and round, casting sparks on all sides like a fountain of fire. Instantly the whole roof was ablaze, and the cracking of fire could be heard.

The brightness of the moon grew dim, and the whole of the village was illuminated by a trembling red light; black shadows spread over the ground, and a smell of burning filled the air. All those who had run up the hill were quite out of breath, and could not speak from shivering; they knocked up against each other and fell down, as unaccustomed to the bright light they saw badly and did not recognize one another. It was terrible. And far the most terrible thing was that over the flames in the smoke pigeons were flying, and that in the tavern, where as yet they did not know of the fire, the muzhiks continued to sing and play on the accordion as if nothing had happened.

"Uncle Semen's house is on fire!" somebody shouted in a loud coarse voice.

Marya rushed about in front of her *isba*, weeping, wringing her hands, with chattering teeth, although the fire was far away, quite at the other end of the village; Nikolai came out in his felt boots, the children rushed out in their smocks. The iron plate near the village police officer's *isba* was being struck. Boom, boom, boom . . . floated in the air, and this constant persistent sound made the heart sink and grow cold. The old women stood with icons in their hands. The sheep, calves and cows were driven out of the yards, trunks, sheepskins and barrels were carried out. The black stallion who was not sent out with the drove because he kicked and wounded the other horses, was now let loose; he began neighing and pawing the ground, then he ran through the village a couple of times, and suddenly stopping near a cart began to kick it with his hind legs.

The church bells were rung on the other side of the river.

It was so hot near the burning *isba* and so light that one could distinctly see every blade of grass on the ground. On one of the trunks that they had had time to bring out, Semen, a red-haired muzhik with a big nose, was seated; he was in a jacket, and his cap was drawn well over his ears; his wife lay groaning with her face to the ground, unconscious. An old man of about eighty years, short and with a large beard, who looked like a gnome, not of that village, but who evidently had something to do with the fire, walked backward and forward without a cap, with a white bundle in his hand; the fire was reflected on his bald pate. The bailiff, Antip Sedelnikov, a swarthy black-haired man of a gipsy type, went up to the *isba* with an axe and smashed in the windows one after the other—for some unknown reason—and then he began to chop down the porch.

"Women, water!" he shouted. "Bring the engine! Look sharp!"

The same muzhiks who but a moment before had been carousing in the tavern, now dragged forward the fire engine. They were all drunk, stumbled and fell, and they all had a helpless expression on their faces and tears in their eyes.

"Girls, water!" shouted the bailiff, who was also drunk. "Look sharp, girls!"

The women and the girls ran down the hill to the spring and lugged pails and buckets of water up the hill, and having emptied them into the engine they ran down for more. Olga and Marya, Sasha and Motka all carried water. Women and boys pumped; the hose hissed and the bailiff directed the hose now through the door and then through the windows, stopping the stream of water with his fingers which only made the hose hiss all the more.

"You're a brick, Antip!" approving voices could be heard on all sides. "Go it!"

And Antip pushed into the passage, almost into the flames, and called out from there:

"Pump! Work hard, good orthodox people, for it's a great misfortune."

The muzhiks stood in crowds around, doing nothing, gaping at the fire. Nobody knew what to do, nobody was capable of doing anything, and on all sides there were stacks of corn, hay, barns and heaps of dry faggots. Kiryak and old Osip, his father, both a little the worse for drink, were standing there too. And as if to excuse his idleness the old man said to the woman who was lying on the ground:

"Old friend, why are you despondent? The *isba* is insured—what do you want more?"

Semen, addressing himself first to one and then to another, was telling them how the fire had begun.

"That old man with the bundle, one of General Zhukov's house servants. . . . He used to be man-cook at our General's, may God rest his soul. He came in the evening. 'Let me stay the night,' says he. . . . Well, of course, we had a glass together. . . . The old woman began to fuss around the samovar . . . she wanted to treat the old fellow to tea, so in an evil hour she put the samovar to boil in the passage and you see the flame from the chimney went straight up to the roof . . . to the straw . . . and there we have it! We ourselves were nearly burnt. And the old man's cap is burnt; what a misfortune!"

The iron plate was struck without intermission, and the bells were rung often in the church beyond the river. Olga, quite out of breath, ran up and down in the bright light of the fire, looking with terror at the red sheep and at the pink pigeons that flew about in the smoke.

It appeared to her that this ringing was a sharp dart that had entered her soul, that the fire would never be over, and that Sasha was lost. . . . And when the ceiling of the burning *isba* fell in with a great crash she became so weak from the thought that the whole village would certainly burn down, that she was unable to haul up any more pails of water, but sat down at the top of the declivity, putting her pail at her side ; next to her and below her the other women were sitting, singing loudly as if round a corpse.

Then suddenly from the other side of the river the stewards and the labourers from the municipal farm arrived in two carts, bringing a fire engine with them. A young student in an unbuttoned white tunic rode up on horseback ; he was very young. They began to hack at the *isba* with hatchets ; they placed a ladder against the burning walls, and five men climbed up it, headed by the student, who shouted in a shrill, hoarse voice and in a tone that seemed to denote that to extinguish fires was for him a habitual occupation. They pulled the logs of the *isba* asunder ; they destroyed the cow-house, and carried the wattles and the nearest stacks farther away.

" Don't let them break it ! " fierce voices shouted from the crowd. " Don't let them ! "

Kiryak went towards the *isba* with a determined look, as if he wanted to prevent the new-comers from destroying it, but one of the workmen turned him round and gave him a blow on the neck. A laugh was heard the workman struck him again ; Kiryak fell and crawled away on all fours into the crowd.

Two pretty girls in hats—probably the student's sisters—came from over the river. They stood some way off, looking at the fire. The logs that had been separated burnt no longer, but they were still smoking

profusely; the student working with the hose directed the stream of water now on the beams, now on the muzhiks and now on the women, who were bringing water.

"George!" the girls called to him reproachfully and anxiously. "George!"

The fire was over. It was only when they began to disperse that they noticed day was breaking, that everybody looked pale and somewhat swarthy—it always appears so in early morning, when the last stars are fading away from the sky. The muzhiks laughed as they separated, and joked about General Zhukov's mancook and his cap that was burnt; they wanted to get up another fire for fun, and it seemed as if they were sorry the fire was already over.

"You extinguished the fire well, sir," Olga said to the student. "You ought to come to us in Moscow. There are fires nearly every day there."

"Are you then from Moscow?" one of the young ladies asked her.

"Yes, that's so. My husband served in the Slavyansky Bazaar. And this is my daughter," she said, pointing to Sasha, who was cold and clinging to her. "She's also a Moscow girl, Miss!"

Both girls said something in French to the student, and he gave Sasha a twenty-kopeck piece. Old Osip saw this, and his face brightened up with hope.

"We must thank God, your honour, there was no wind," he said, addressing himself to the student, "otherwise we would all have burnt down in an hour. Your honour, kind ladies," he added in an abashed and lower tone, "the dawn is cold . . . a drop to warm one . . . for half a bottle from your graces . . ."

Nothing was given to him, and he shuffled homewards grunting. Olga stood and watched the two

vehicles crossing the river by the ford, and the gentlefolk walking across the meadow; their carriage was waiting for them on the other side of the river. When she came home she said to her husband:

"Oh, such nice people! Oh, and so handsome too! The young ladies were just like little cherubs."

"May they burst!" Fekla, who was half asleep, mumbled spitefully.

VI

Marya considered herself unhappy, and said she longed to die; Fekla, on the contrary, found this life very much to her liking: all this poverty, this dirt and this never-ceasing abuse. She ate what was set before her without criticism; she slept anywhere and on anything; she emptied the slops at the very porch; she would pour them out from the threshold of the door, though afterwards she herself would have to walk through the puddle with her bare feet. From the very first day she felt hatred for Olga and Nikolai, just because this life did not please them.

"We shall see what you Moscow nobles will eat here," she said malevolently. "We shall se-ee!"

One morning—it was already in the beginning of September—Fekla brought up from below two pails of water. She was strong and pretty, and looked rosy from tihe cold air; at that moment Marya and Olga were stting at the table, drinking tea.

"Tea and sugar!" Fekla said jeeringly. "What fine ladies!" she added as she put down the pails.

"So they've started the fashion of drinking tea every day. Just squint at them—has the tea not puffed you out?" she continued, looking with hatred at Olga. "She's been fattened up in Moscow, that bloated-faced lump of grease."

She swung her yoke round and hit Olga on the shoulder, so that the two sisters-in-law could only clasp their hands and exclaim:

"Oh, good gracious!"

Then Fekla went to the river to wash the linen, and the whole way she abused them so loud that she was heard in the *isba*.

The day passed. The long autumn evening came on. In the *isba* they wound silk; they all wound silk with the exception of Fekla; she went to the other side of the river. They took the silk from the nearest factory, though by this work the whole family earned but little—only about twenty kopecks a week.

"Things were better under the masters," the old man said as he wound the silk. "You worked, you ate, you slept all in the proper time. For dinner you had cabbage soup and thick gruel, and in the evening also cabbage soup and thick gruel. Cucumbers and cabbages were in plenty; you could eat as much as your heart desired. And there was more strictness too. Everyone did his duty."

Only one little lamp was lighted in the *isba*, and it burned dimly and smoked. When anybody shaded the lamp a great shadow fell on the window, and the bright moonlight could be seen. Old Osip related leisurely how they had lived before the emancipation, when in those very places where they now dwelled so dully and poorly they used to hunt with hounds, with harriers and with spaniels, and during the battue the muzhiks were treated to vodka, and how whole cartloads of game

used to be sent to Moscow to the young masters, how the evildoers were punished with rods, or were sent to the Tver estates and the good people were rewarded. And Granny had something to relate too. She remembered everything, entirely everything. She told about her mistress, a kind, God-fearing woman, who had a dissipated, licentious husband, and whose daughters all got married, God only knows how: one was married to a drunkard, the second married a commoner and the third was carried off secretly (Granny herself, who was at that time only a girl, helped in the abduction), and they all soon died of grief, as their mother did too. And as she remembered all this, Granny shed some tears.

Suddenly somebody knocked at the door, and they all jumped.

"Uncle Osip, give me a night's lodging!"

A little bald-headed man entered the *isba;* it was General Zhukov's man-cook, the same man whose cap had got burnt. He sat down, listened and also began to remember and to relate various stories. Nikolai, sitting on the stove with his legs dangling down, listened and asked all about the dishes that used to be prepared for the masters. They talked about chopped cutlets, chops, various soups and sauces, and the man-cook, who also remembered everything very well, mentioned dishes that were not made now; there was, for instance, a dish that was made of bullocks' eyes and was called "wake up in the morning."

"And did you make cutlets *à la maréchal?*" Nikolai asked.

"No."

Nikolai shook his head reproachfully and said:

"Fine cooks you were then!"

The girls sitting and lying on the stove looked down without uttering a sound; there appeared to be a great

number of them—like cherubim in the clouds. These stories pleased them; they sighed, shuddered and grew pale now with delight, now from terror, and they listened to Granny, whose stories were more interesting than any of the others, without breathing, being afraid to move.

They lay down to sleep in silence; and the old people, excited and agitated by their stories, thought how good youth had been which, no matter how spent, leaves recollections in the memory only of the living, the joyful, the touching, and how terribly cold is that death which is not far off—it is better not to think of it! The icon lamp went out! The darkness, the two windows sharply lighted up by the moon, the stillness and the squeaking of the cradle for some reason only brought back the consciousness that life was already over, that there was no possibility of bringing it back. . . . You doze, you forget yourself, then suddenly somebody touches you on the shoulder, or blows upon your cheek—sleep has vanished, the body seems stiff from lying and the thoughts of death always come to the mind; you turn on the other side—you have forgotten about death, but thoughts of old times, dull, compelling thoughts of want, of food, of the rise in the price of flour; but a short time after you again remember that life is over and you cannot bring it back. . . .

"O Lord!" the cook sighed.

Somebody tapped very, very gently at the window. It was probably Fekla, who had come home. Olga got up, yawning, and whispering a prayer she opened the door of the room, then she unbolted the passage door. But nobody was to be seen, there was only a cold wind blowing in the street, and it was bright with moonlight. From the open door she could see the street, quiet and deserted, and the moon that floated in the sky.

"Who is there?" Olga called.

"I," came the answer. "It is I."

Near the door, pressed to the wall, Fekla stood quite naked. She was trembling with cold, her teeth chattered, and in the bright moonlight she appeared very pale, handsome and strange. The shadows that fell upon her and the brilliancy of the moonlight on her skin seemed specially to bring into view and to mark out sharply her dark eyebrows and her young and firm bosom.

"On the other side some impudent fellows undressed me, sent me home thus . . ." she said. "I came home without any clothes . . . just as my mother bore me. Bring me something to put on."

"Come into the *isba!*" Olga said in a low voice. She also began to shiver.

"The old people might see me."

Indeed, Granny was already getting uneasy and grumbled, and the old man asked: "Who is there?" Olga brought her own smock and petticoat and dressed Fekla. Then they both came into the *isba* quietly, trying not to make a noise when they shut the doors.

"Oh, it's you, slippery wench!" Granny grumbled angrily, guessing who it was. "May you, night-bird be . . . is there no perdition for you!"

"Never mind, never mind," Olga whispered as she wrapped Fekla up; "never mind, my dear!"

It was quiet again. Everybody slept badly in the *isba;* something importunate prevented each one from sleeping: the old man had pains in the back, Granny—trouble and bad temper; Marya—fear; the children—the itch and hunger. Now, too, sleep was troubled, they turned from side to side, they talked in their sleep, they got up to drink.

Suddenly, Fekla began to squall aloud in a coarse

voice; but she instantly restrained herself, and only sobbed from time to time, always quieter and fainter until she was quite still. Occasionally the striking of the clock on the other side of the river could be heard; but the clock had a strange way of striking: it struck five and then three.

"O Lord!" the cook sighed.

Looking at the window it was difficult to understand if it was still moonlight or already dawn. Marya rose and went out, and one could hear her milking the cow in the yard and saying: "Stea-dy!" Granny also went out. It was still dark in the *isba*, but the various objects could already be distinguished.

Nikolai, who had not slept all night, crawled down from the stove. He took his dress-coat out of the green trunk, put it on, and going to the window he stroked the sleeves, took hold of the tails and smiled. Then he took the coat off carefully, put it away in the trunk and lay down again.

Marya returned and began to light the stove. She was evidently still not quite awake, and she only shook off her sleepiness as she moved about. She was probably dreaming something, or last night's stories came to her mind, as she stretched herself voluptuously before the stove and said:

"No, it's better to be free!"

VII

The master, that was how the inspector of the rural police was called in the village, arrived. Already a week before, the time of his coming and its object was

known in the village. There were only forty houses in Zhukovo, but the arrears of the state and rural taxes amounted to more than two thousand roubles.

The inspector stopped at the tavern. He drank two glasses of tea there, and then went on foot to the bailiff's *isba*, around which a crowd of defaulting peasants were already assembled. The bailiff, Antip Sedelnikov, notwithstanding his youth—he was but little more than thirty years of age—was strict, and he always sided with the authorities, though he himself was poor and not exact in the payment of his taxes. It was evident he enjoyed being bailiff, and he liked the consciousness of his power, which he could only display by strictness. He was feared in the village meetings, and obeyed; if he suddenly happened to come upon a drunken man in the street or near the tavern, he would tie his arms behind his back and send him to the lock-up. Once he had even sent Granny to the lock-up, because she had come to the meeting instead of Osip and had begun to use abusive language, and he kept her there for twenty-four hours. He had never lived in town and he never read books, but somehow he had acquired various learned words and liked to make use of them in conversation, and for this also he was respected, though not always understood.

When Osip, his tax-book in hand, entered the bailiff's *isba*, he found the inspector, a lean old man with long white whiskers, in a grey jacket, seated at a table in the fore corner of the room, making some sort of notes. The *isba* was very clean, the walls were gay with pictures cut out of magazines, and in the most visible place, near the icons, there was a portrait of Battenberg, the former Prince of Bulgaria. Near the table Antip Sedelnikov was standing with folded arms.

"He is in arrears for one hundred and nineteen

roubles, your honour," he said when it came to Osip's turn. "Before Easter he paid a rouble and has not given a kopeck since."

The inspector raised his eyes to Osip and asked:

"Why is this, brother?"

"Show God-like mercy, your honour," Osip began in an agitated voice; "permit me to say this last summer the Lyntorets *barin** said: 'Osip,' said he, 'sell your hay. . . . Sell it,' said he. Why not? I had about a hundred poods for sale, the women had mowed it in the glen. . . . Well, we struck a bargain. . . . All was settled in good faith. . . ."

He complained of the bailiff, and constantly turned to the muzhiks as if to ask them to bear witness; his face grew purple, he perspired, and his eyes became sharp and wicked.

"I don't understand why you are telling me all this," the inspector said. "I ask you . . . I ask you why don't you pay up your arrears? None of you pay, and I have to answer for you."

"I haven't the power."

"These words are of no consequence, your honour," the bailiff said. "These Chikildéevs are certainly an impecunious class, but only have the goodness to ask the others, the real cause is—vodka. They are a mischievous lot."

The inspector wrote something and said to Osip quietly in a level voice, as if he were asking for water:

"Be off."

He soon drove away, and when he got into his cheap cart and coughed, even by the expression of his long, thin back it was evident that he no longer remembered Osip or the bailiff or the arrears of the Zhukovo villagers, but was thinking of his own affairs. He had not had

* Gentleman, nobleman.

time to drive a verst from the village before Antip Sedelnikov had carried the samovar out of the Chikildéevs's *isba*, followed by Granny crying out in a voice that strained her breast :

" I'll not give it ! . . . I'll not give it to you, you damned rascal ! "

He walked quickly, taking long strides, and the old woman ran after him, almost falling, breathless, humpbacked and furious ; her kerchief had fallen from her head on to her shoulders, her grey hair in which there were greenish tints spread out in the wind. Suddenly she stopped and like a real rioter began to beat herself on the breast with her fists and shout still louder in a sing-song voice and almost sobbing :

" Orthodox people, who believe in God ! Dear friends, they have wronged me ! Kinsfolk, they have oppressed me. Oy, oy dearies, protect me ! "

" Granny, Granny," the bailiff said severely, " have some sense in your head."

It was quite dreary in the Chikildéevs's *isba* without the samovar. There was something humiliating in this deprivation—something insulting—it was as if suddenly the *isba* had been deprived of its honour. It would have been better if the bailiff had taken away the table, all the benches, all the pots—it would not have felt so empty. Granny shouted, Marya cried and the little girls, looking at her, began to cry too. The old man, feeling guilty, sat in a corner quite downcast and was silent. Nikolai was silent too. Granny loved him and was sorry for him, but now she forgot her pity and fell upon him suddenly with abuse, with reproaches, showing him her fist under his very nose. She shouted that he was to blame for everything ; indeed, why had he sent too little money when he boasted in his letters that he earned in the Slavyansky Bazaar as much as fifty roubles

a month ? Why had he come there and with his family too ? If he died, who would pay for his funeral ? . . . It was pitiful to look at Nikolai, Olga and Sasha.

The old man grunted, then he took up his cap and went to the bailiff's. It was already getting dusk. Antip Sedelnikov was soldering something near the stove, blowing out his cheeks ; the *isba* was fumy. His children, puny and unwashed, no better than the Chikildéev children, were romping on the floor ; his ugly freckled, large-stomached wife was winding silk. It was an unfortunate, wretched family, and it was only Antip who looked young and handsome. On the table five samovars were standing in a row. The old man crossed himself before the portrait of Battenberg, and said :

" Antip, show God-like mercy, give us the samovar ! For Christ's sake ! "

" Bring three roubles, then you will get it."

" I can't do it ! "

Antip blew out his cheeks, the fire hummed and hissed and was reflected in the samovars. The old man crushed his cap in his hands and said after thinking awhile :

" Give it me ! "

The swarthy bailiff seemed quite black and looked like a wizard ; he turned to Osip and said sternly and quickly :

" All depends on the chief of the Zemstvo. At the administrative assembly on the twenty-sixth of this month you can state verbally or in writing the cause of your dissatisfaction."

Osip did not understand anything, but he was satisfied with this answer and went home.

About ten days later the inspector returned ; he remained about an hour and went away again. At that

time the weather was cold and windy; the river had long since been frozen over, but there was no snow, and the people were worried at not having proper roads. One holiday towards evening the neighbours came to sit with Osip and gossip. As it was a sin to work they had no light, but talked in the dark. There was some news, and rather unpleasant news too. For instance, in two or three of the households fowls had been seized for the arrears and sent to the office of the District Administration, where they had died as nobody had fed them. Sheep had also been seized, and while they were being conveyed with their legs tied and changed from one cart to another in every village, one had died. And now they were settling the question whose fault it was.

"The Zemstvo! *" Osip said. "Whose else!"

"Certainly the Zemstvo!"

The Zemstvo was blamed for everything—for the arrears and for oppression and for the poor crops, though not one of them knew what the Zemstvo really was. This dated from the time when the rich peasants, who owned factories, shops and inns, had become members of the district council and were dissatisfied, and had begun to abuse the Zemstvo in their factories and taverns.

They complained that God did not send snow. They required to cart wood, and how were they to do it when the roads were all hillocks? Formerly some fifteen or twenty years ago, and even earlier, the conversations in Zhukovo had been much more interesting. Then each old man looked as if he were keeping a secret, that he knew something, and was expecting something. They had talked of a charter printed in gold letters, of divisions of property, of new lands, of treasures, they hinted at something. Now the Zhukovo peasants had no secrets;

* The provincial representative assembly.

all their life was open to the sight of everybody, and they could only talk of their want of food, and that there was no snow. . . .

They sat silent awhile. Again remembering the fowls and the sheep they began to decide who was in fault.

"The Zemstvo," Osip said dejectedly. "Who else!"

VIII

Their parish church was six versts off, in Kosogorov, and the peasants only went there out of necessity for christenings, marriages and funerals; to worship they went to the church on the other side of the river. On holidays when it was fine the girls put on their Sunday-best and went there in large parties to the liturgy, and it was a pleasure to see them going across the meadow in their red, yellow and green dresses; when the weather was bad they all remained at home. From those who had not had time to go to confession and the sacrament during Lent, the priest, when he went the round of the *isbas* at Easter, took fifteen kopecks.

The old man did not believe in God, because he scarcely ever thought of Him; he admitted the supernatural, but he thought that such things could only concern the women. When religion or the miraculous was spoken of before him and a question was asked him, he scratched his head and answered unwillingly:

"Who can tell!"

Granny believed but in a somewhat vague manner, everything was mixed up in her mind, and she scarcely

began to think about sin and death and the salvation of the soul, when want and troubles monopolized her thoughts and she instantly forgot about what she was thinking. She could not remember any prayers, and usually at night before lying down she stood before the icons and whispered :

" Holy Mother of Kasan ! Holy Mother of Smolensk ! Holy Mother of Troeruchitsa ! "

Marya and Fekla crossed themselves ; they went to confession and the communion every year, but they did not understand anything. The children were not taught any prayers, they were never told anything about God, they had no principles instilled into their minds, but they were forbidden to eat meat or any animal products on fast days. In the other families it was much the same : there were few who had any faith, few who understood, but at the same time they all loved the Holy Scriptures tenderly and reverently ; but they had no books, there was nobody to read or to explain to them, and therefore they respected Olga, who sometimes read the Gospels to them, and as a mark of this respect they said " you " instead of " thou " to her and to Sasha.

Olga often went to the churches in the neighbouring villages, to the festivals of their patron saints, and even to the district town, where there were two monasteries and twenty-seven churches. She was absent-minded, and while she was away on these pilgrimages she quite forgot her family, and only when she returned home she suddenly made the joyful discovery that she had a husband and a daughter, and then she would beam on them and say smiling :

" God has been gracious to me ! "

All that happened in the village appeared to her horrible, and it troubled her. The muzhiks got drunk on St. Elijah's Day, they got drunk on the Feast of

the Assumption, they got drunk on Holy Cross Day. The Feast of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin was the festival of the Zhykovo parish church, and in honour of this the muzhiks drank for three days. They drank away fifty roubles that belonged to the commune, and then went round to all the houses to collect more money for vodka. On the first of these days the Chikildéevs slaughtered a sheep and ate mutton in the morning, at dinner and in the evening ; they all ate much of it, and the children even got up at night in order to eat more. All three days Kiryak was very drunk, he had got rid of his cap and boots for drink, and he had beaten Marya so unmercifully that they had to throw water on her to bring her to. Afterwards they were all very much ashamed and disgusted.

However, in Zhukovo, in this Servantville, there was once a real religious solemnity. It was in August, when in the whole of that district the Life-giving Icon was carried around from village to village. The day the icon was expected in Zhukovo was calm and overcast. Already in the morning the girls had gone off in their smartest and brightest dresses to meet the icon and they brought it to the village about evening in a procession with crosses and banners and singing, and at that moment the bells of the church beyond the river were rung. A large crowd of their own and people from other villages filled the street ; there was noise, dust, crush. . . . The old man, Granny and Kiryak all stretched out their arms towards the icon, looking at it eagerly and murmuring with tears in their eyes :

" Mediatrix, Mother ! Mediatrix ! "

Everybody seemed suddenly to have understood that between earth and heaven there is no void, that not everything had been seized by the rich and strong, that there is still defence from wrongs, from slavish bondage,

from grievous, unbearable want, from the terrible vodka.

"Mediatrix, Mother!" sobbed Marya. "Mother!"

A Te Deum was celebrated, the icon was carried away and all went on as before, and again coarse, drunken voices were heard in the tavern.

Death was only feared by the rich muzhiks; and the richer they became the less they believed in God and in the salvation of the soul. It was only out of fear of their earthly end, and to be on the safe side, that they placed candles before the icons and had Te Deums celebrated. The poorer muzhiks had no fear of death. The old man and Granny were told to their face that they had lived too long, that it was time for them to die and they did not mind it. Fekla did not hesitate to say before Nikolai that when Nikolai died, her husband Denis would get his discharge and would return home. Marya had not only no fear of death, but she regretted it was so long in coming, and she was glad when any of her children died.

Though they did not fear death, they were all exaggeratedly afraid of every illness. A mere trifle—a derangement of the stomach, or a slight chill, sufficed to cause Granny to wrap herself up, lay down on the stove and begin to groan aloud without intermission: "I am dy-ing!" The old man would then hurry off for the priest, and Granny received the communion and extreme unction. They very often talked about colds, about worms, about tumours that crawl in the stomach and rise to the heart. They were mostly afraid of chills, and therefore even in summer they dressed warmly and lay on the stove to get hot. Granny was very fond of being doctored, and often went to the hospitals, where she said she was not seventy, but fifty-eight years old. She was afraid that if the doctor knew her

real age, he would not cure her, but would tell her that it was time for her to die, and not to be cured. She usually started early in the morning for the hospital, taking two or three of the girls with her, and only returned in the evening, cross and hungry—with some sort of drops for herself and an ointment for the girls. Once she took Nikolai with her, who afterwards for two weeks took drops and said he felt better.

Granny knew all the doctors, assistant surgeons and wonder-healers for thirty versts around, and not one of them pleased her. On the Feast of the Intercession, when the priest went the round of the *isbas* with the cross, the precentor told her that a little old man was living in the town near the prison, who had formerly been a military assistant surgeon, and who performed very great cures, and he advised her to consult him. Granny followed his advice. After the first snow had fallen she drove to town and brought back with her a little old man, a long-bearded, long-coated convert, whose whole face was covered with blue veins. Just at that time there were some travelling jobbers at work in the *isba:* an old tailor in terrible spectacles was cutting out a waistcoat from some old rags, and two young lads were felting some wool into boots. Kiryak, who had been dismissed for drunkenness and who now lived at home, was sitting near the tailor mending a horse-collar. The *isba* was crowded, stuffy and smelly. The convert examined Nikolai and said it was necessary to cup him.

He applied the cupping-glasses, and the old tailor, Kiryak and the girls stood looking on, and it appeared to them that they saw the malady coming out of Nikolai. Nikolai also watched the cupping-glasses that were stuck to his breast, filling little by little with dark blood, and he felt that really something seemed

to be coming out of him, and he smiled with pleasure.

"It's a good thing," the tailor said. "God grant it may do him good."

The convert applied twelve cupping-glasses and another twelve, then he drank tea and drove away; Nikolai began to shiver; his face grew pinched and, as the women said, was squeezed into a fist; his fingers became blue. He wrapped himself up in his blanket and in his sheepskin coat, but he grew colder and colder. Towards evening he began to despond. He begged to be laid on the floor, he begged the tailor not to smoke, then he became quiet under the sheepskin and towards morning he died.

IX

Oh, what a hard, what a long winter!

Already at Christmas the muzhiks had no more corn and they had to buy flour. Kiryak, who now lived at home, made rows every evening, causing terror to everybody, and of a morning he suffered from headache and shame, and it was pitiful to look at him. All day long and all night long the lowing of the hungry cows could be heard. It pierced the hearts of Granny and Marya. As if on purpose, day after day there was hard frost and there were snowdrifts on all sides. The winter had no end: on Lady Day there was a real winter blizzard and snow fell on Easter Sunday.

But, despite all this, the winter came to an end. In the beginning of April the days were warm, but the

nights were still frosty ; the winter would not relax its grip ; however, one warm day got the better of it—streams began to flow and the birds commenced singing. All the meadows and the bushes along the banks were submerged by the spring waters, and the whole of the space between Zhukovo and the other bank was transformed into a large lake on which, here and there, flocks of wild ducks fluttered. The spring sunset, all aflame with gorgeous clouds, displayed something new and extraordinary every evening, just the sort of incredible tints and clouds that you do not believe when you see them afterwards reproduced in a picture.

The cranes flew by so fast—so fast, crying sadly—as if they were calling you to follow them. Standing at the edge of the valley Olga looked long at the flood, at the sun, at the bright church that seemed to have grown younger, and tears flowed from her eyes, and she had catchings of her breath, because she wished passionately to go away somewhere—anywhere, if even to the end of the world. It had already been settled that she should return to Moscow, and take a place as maid, and that Kiryak should accompany her to look for a situation as house-porter or any other job. Oh, if she could but get away quicker !

When it had become dry and warm they prepared to start. Olga and Sasha with birch-bark wallets on their backs and wearing bast shoes, left the village as soon as it was light ; Marya went with them to accompany them part of the way. Kiryak was unwell and remained at home for another week. For the last time Olga prayed, looking towards the church and thinking of her husband ; she did not cry, but her face wrinkled up, and became as ugly as the face of an old woman. During the winter she had grown thin and plain and slightly

grey, and instead of her former prettiness and pleasant smiles her face had acquired the humble, sad expression of one who has experienced sorrow, and there was something dull and inanimate in her look as if she did not hear. She was sorry to leave the village and the muzhiks. She remembered how Nikolai had been borne to the grave and prayers for the dead had been ordered to be said before each *isba*, and how everybody had wept in sympathy for her grief. During the summer and the winter there were hours and days when it appeared to her that these people lived worse than cattle, and that it was terrible to live with them. They were coarse, dishonest, dirty, unsober ; they lived in discord, they were constantly quarrelling, because they feared and suspected, and had no respect for each other. Who keeps the taverns and encourages drunkenness ? The muzhik. Who squanders and drinks away the money belonging to the schools and the churches ? The muzhik. Who robs, who sets his neighbour's house on fire, who gives false evidence in the courts of justice against his neighbour for a bottle of vodka ? Who is the first to go against the muzhik in the meetings of the Zemstvo and other assemblies ? The muzhik. Yes, it was terrible to live with them, but still they were human beings, who suffer and weep as other people do, and there is nothing in their life for which one could not find a justification. Hard labour, which caused the whole body to ache at night, severe winters, meagre harvests, overcrowding, and there is no help and nowhere from whence it can be expected. Those who were richer and stronger than the others could not give any assistance, as they themselves were coarse, dishonest, drunken and abused each other as abominably as the rest. The pettiest officials or clerks treated the muzhiks like vagabonds, and they said " thou " even to the village senior and

the elders of the church to denote their inferiority, and these officials believed they had a right to do so. How can there be help or a good example from people who themselves are covetous, greedy, corrupt and lazy, who only come into the village to injure, defraud and terrify the people? Olga remembered the pitiful, abashed appearance of the old people when, in winter, Kiryak was led away to be flogged. Now she was sorry for all these people, painfully sorry, and she constantly turned to look back at the village as she went away.

Having accompanied them for about three versts, Marya took leave and then kneeling down she fell with her face to the ground and began to lament aloud:

"Again I remain alone! Oh, my poor head, poor unfortunate me! . . ."

She continued long to wail in this way, and for a long time, when Olga and Sasha looked back, they saw her still on her knees, clasping her head in her hands, and bowing to somebody on one side, while the rooks flew over her head.

The sun rose high in the sky, and it became hot. Zhukovo remained far behind. They enjoyed the walk and Olga and Sasha soon forgot the village and Marya; they were gay and everything interested them. Now it was a tumulus, now a row of telegraph posts that followed each other, going nobody knows where and disappearing on the horizon, and the wires murmured mysteriously; then in the distance they saw some small farm-house surrounded by verdure, spreading around an odour of moisture and hemp, and for some reason they thought happy people must live there; then it was the skeleton of a horse that lay solitary and white in a field. The larks sang indefatigably, the quails called to each other and the corn-crake uttered its

harsh note that really sounded like somebody drawing back an old iron bolt.

By midday Olga and Sasha reached a large village. Here in the broad street they met the little old man, General Zhukov's cook. He was very hot, and his perspiring bald head shone in the sunlight. At first Olga and he did not recognize each other, but when they had passed they looked back and knew who they were, but went on their way without exchanging a word. Stopping before the *isba* that seemed to her to be the newest and richest Olga bowed before the open windows, and said in a loud, shrill sing-song voice :

" Orthodox Christians, give alms, for Christ's sake, as much as you can ! May your parents enjoy eternal rest in the Heavenly Kingdom ! "

" Orthodox Christians," Sasha sang out, " give alms for Christ's sake, as much as you can, Heavenly Kingdom. . . ."

ANNA ROUND THE NECK

I

THERE were not even light refreshments after the wedding. The young couple had each a glass of wine, redressed and drove to the station. Instead of a gay wedding ball and supper, instead of music and dancing—a journey of two hundred versts to perform their devotions at a sacred shrine. Many people approved of this saying, that for Modestus Alekseich, who was already an official of high rank and no longer young, a noisy wedding might appear not quite seemly; it was tiresome to listen to music when a bureaucrat of fifty-two got married to a young girl of just eighteen years. It was also said that Modestus Alekseich, a man of principles, had really arranged this journey to a monastery in order to make his young wife understand that, even in matrimony, he awarded the first place to religion and morality.

The young couple were accompanied to the station. A crowd of colleagues and relations stood, with champagne glasses in their hands, waiting for the train to start in order to shout: "Hurrah!" and Pëtr Leontich, the bride's father, in a top-hat and a schoolmaster's dress-coat, already drunk and very pale, stretched towards the window, his glass in his hand, and said in an imploring voice:

"Anuta! Anya! Anya, just one word!"

Anya bent out of the window towards him, and he whispered something to her, pouring out on her a strong smell of brandy, and blowing into her ear—but nothing could be understood—he made the sign of the cross over her face, breast and hands; his breathing shook and tears shone in his eyes. Anya's brothers, Petya and Andryusha, gymnasium boys, pulled him from behind by his coat-tails and whispered shamefacedly:

"Papochka, enough! . . . Papochka, don't! . . ."

When the train started, Anya saw her father run a few steps after the coach, with unsteady gait and spilling his wine. What a pitiful, kind and guilty face he had!

"Hur-rah!—ah!" he shouted.

The young couple remained alone. Modestus Alekseich looked round the compartment, arranged their things in the racks and then sat down opposite his young wife, smiling. He was an official of middle height, somewhat stout, puffy and very well fed, with long whiskers, but no moustache, and his round shaven, sharply outlined chin resembled a heel. The most characteristic trait of his face was the absence of a moustache, and this freshly shaven, bare place gradually merged into fat cheeks that trembled like jellies. His demeanour was sedate, his movements slow, his manner suave.

"At this moment I can't help remembering a certain circumstance," he said, smiling. "Five years ago when Kosorotov received the order of Saint Anna of the second class and came to thank for it His Excellency expressed himself thus: 'Consequently you now have three annas: one in your buttonhole and two round your neck.' And I must tell you that just at that time Kosorotov's wife, a very quarrelsome and giddy woman,

who was called Anna, had just returned to him. I trust, when I receive Anna of the second class, His Excellency will have no cause to say the same thing to me."

He smiled with his small eyes. And she also smiled, being troubled at the thought that at any moment this man might kiss her with his full, moist lips, and that now she had not the right to refuse to be kissed. The sleek movements of his bloated body frightened her, she felt terrified and disgusted. He rose, slowly took off his orders, his dress-coat and waistcoat and put on his dressing-gown.

"That's all right," he said, sitting down next to Anya.

She remembered how painful the marriage ceremony had been, when it had appeared to her that the priest, the guests and all the people who were in the church looked at her sadly; why, why had she, such a pretty, nice girl, married this elderly, uninteresting gentleman? That morning she had still been in raptures that everything had been settled so well; but during the marriage ceremony and now, while sitting in the railway coach, she felt culpable, deceived and ridiculous. Now she was married to a rich man, and still she had no money, her bridal dress had been made on credit, and to-day, when her father and brothers had seen her off, she had perceived by their faces that they had not a kopeck in their pockets. Would they have any supper to-day? And to-morrow? And now for some reason she seemed to see her father and the boys sitting hungry and experiencing the same sadness as they had felt the first evening after her mother's funeral.

"Oh, how unhappy I am!" she thought. "Why am I so unhappy?"

With the awkwardness of a sedate man who is unaccustomed to the treatment of women, Modestus Alekseich put his arm round her waist and patted her on the shoulders, and she thought of money, of her mother and of her death. When her mother died, her father, Pëtr Leontich, a teacher of calligraphy and drawing in the gymnasium, took to drinking, and they began to feel want; the boys had no boots or galoshes, their father was summoned before the magistrate, there was an execution in their flat and an inventory was made of their furniture. . . . What shame! Anya had to look after her drunken father, darn her brothers' stockings, go to market, and when her beauty, youth and elegant manners were admired, it appeared to her that the whole world saw her cheap hat and the hole in her shoes that was smeared with ink. At night there were tears and troublesome thoughts that she could not get rid of, the dread that very soon, owing to his weakness, her father would be dismissed from the gymnasium, and that he would not be able to endure this and would die like her mother. But then some ladies of their acquaintance had begun to take an interest in her and to look out for a good husband for her. Very soon Modestus Alekseich had been found; he was neither young nor handsome, but he had money. He had about a hundred thousand roubles in the bank and he owned a patrimonial estate which he had leased to somebody. He was a man of principles, and he was in His Excellency's good books; it would be quite easy for him, Anya was told, to get a note from His Excellency to the director of the gymnasium, or even to the curator, with instructions that Pëtr Leontich was not to be dismissed. . . .

While she was thinking of all these details the sound of music and the noise of voices suddenly burst through

the window. The train had stopped at a small wayside station. Beyond the platform somebody in the crowd was playing gaily on an accordion, accompanied by a cheap squeaking fiddle, and from the other side of the tall birches and poplars, from the country houses which were flooded with moonlight came the sounds of a military band : there was a ball in one of them. Crowds of the inhabitants and people from town, who had come down to breathe the pure air, were walking about the platform. Among others was Artynov, the owner of this country resort and a very rich man. He was tall, stout and dark-haired, with the face of an Armenian and goggle eyes, and he was dressed in a strange costume. He wore a Russian shirt which was unbuttoned on the chest, top-boots with spurs, and a long mantle that hung from his shoulders and trailed on the ground like a train. Following him were two large greyhounds, with their sharp muzzles hanging low.

Tears still glistened in Anya's eyes, but she no longer remembered her mother, nor money, nor her wedding ; she was pressing the hands of some gymnasium boys and officers, old acquaintances of hers, laughing gaily and saying quickly :

" How do you do ! How are you ? "

She went out on to the platform, into the moonlight, and stood there in such a way that everybody could see her in her magnificent new dress and hat.

" Why are we standing here ? " she asked.

" This is a siding," she was answered. " The post train is expected."

Noticing that Artynov was looking at her, she half closed her eyes coquettishly and began to speak French in a loud voice, and because her own voice sounded so

well, because music was heard and the moon was reflected in the pond, because Artynov, that well-known Don Juan and rake, was looking at her covetously, and because all were gay she suddenly felt happy. When the train started again and her friends the officers had saluted her as she left, she began to hum the polka, the sounds of which played by the military band somewhere behind the trees was wafted after her; she returned to her compartment with a feeling as if she had been convinced at this wayside station that she certainly would be happy despite everything.

The young couple remained in the monastery two days, and then they returned to town. Their flat was in a house belonging to the Crown. When Modestus Alekseich went to his office Anya played on the piano, or cried because she was dull, or lay down on the couch and read novels or looked through fashion magazines. At dinner Modestus Alekseich ate very much and talked about politics, about new appointments, promotions and gratuities, about its being necessary to work hard; about family life not being a pleasure, but a duty; he said that if you took care of the kopecks the roubles would take care of themselves, and that he placed religion and morality above everything else on earth. And holding his knife in his fist like a sword, he said:

"Every man must have his duties!"

Anya listened to him, was afraid and could not eat, and she usually rose from table hungry. After dinner her husband rested and snored loudly, and she went over to see her people. Her father and the boys looked at her in quite a strange manner; exactly as if just before she had come they had been blaming her for having married for money an unloved, unpleasant and tiresome man; her rustling dress, bracelets and, in general, her

ladylike appearance embarrassed and offended them ; in her presence they were a little confused and did not know what to say to her. She sat down and ate with them their cabbage soup, stiff gruel and potatoes fried in mutton dripping that smelt of tallow candles. With a trembling hand Pëtr Leontich took up a decanter and filled his glass, which he drank off quickly, with greediness, with repulsion, then he drank another and a third. . . . Petya and Andryusha, thin, pale little boys, with large eyes, took the decanter away, and said in an abashed voice :

" Don't, Papochka. . . Enough, Papochka. . . ."

Anya, too, was troubled and implored him not to drink any more ; but he suddenly flew out at them and thumped the table with his fist.

" I won't allow anybody to look after me ! " he shouted. " Youngsters, girl, I will turn you all out."

But in his voice there could be heard weakness and goodness, and nobody was afraid of him. After dinner he usually made himself smart ; with a pale face and a chin that had been cut when shaving ; stretching out his thin neck he would stand for half an hour before the mirror, trying to improve his appearance, now by combing his hair, or by twisting his black moustache, or by sprinkling himself with scents and carefully tying his cravat in a bow ; and then he put on his gloves, took his silk hat and went out to give private lessons. But if it was a holiday he remained at home and either painted or played on a harmonium, which hissed and wheezed ; he tried to draw from it harmonious and melodious tones, and sang in a low voice, or he was angry with the boys.

" Young scamps ! Villains, they have spoilt the instrument ! "

Of an evening Anya's husband played cards with those of his colleagues, who lived under the same roof in the house belonging to the Crown. During these card parties the wives of the officials also met; they were ugly, tastelessly dressed and as coarse as cooks, and then in their flats there began gossip and scandal that was as ugly and tasteless as they were themselves. It also happened that Modestus Alekseich took Anya to the theatre.

During the intervals he did not let her go from his side for a moment, but walked about the passages and the foyer arm in arm with her. When he bowed to anybody he whispered to Anya: "A councillor of State . . . received by His Excellency," or: "With a fortune . . . he has his own house. . . ." When they passed through the refreshment-room Anya wanted very much something sweet; she was very fond of chocolates and apple tarts, but she had no money, and she was afraid to ask her husband. He would take up a pear and press it with his fingers in an undecided way and ask:

"What is the price?"

"Twenty-five kopecks."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, putting the pear in its place; but as it was awkward to go away from the buffet without buying something he ordered a bottle of soda water and finished the whole bottle himself, while tears appeared in his eyes and Anya hated him at that moment.

Or suddenly he would get quite red and say to her hurriedly:

"Bow to that old lady!"

"But I am not acquainted with her."

"All the same. She is the wife of the Director of the Court of Exchequer! Don't you hear, I tell you to

bow!" he grumbled insistently. "Your head won't fall off."

Anya bowed, and her head really did not fall off, but it was painful. She did everything her husband required, and was angry with herself that he had duped her like the veriest little fool. She had married him only for money, and now she had even less than before her marriage. Formerly her father would give her from time to time a twenty-kopeck piece, but now she never had a grosh. She could not take it by stealth, nor ask for money; she was afraid of her husband and trembled before him. It appeared to her that she had borne the fear of this man in her soul for very long. At one time in her childhood the power that appeared to her the most terrible and inspired the greatest fear was the director of the gymnasium, who seemed to approach like a cloud or a steam engine ready to crush her; another similar power about which they often talked in the family, and which for some reason they feared, was His Excellency; there were besides some dozen other powers, though smaller ones, and among them were the teachers of the gymnasium, with their shaven moustaches, strict, inexorable, and now at last there was Modestus Alekseich, a man with principles, who even in face resembled the director. In Anya's imagination all these powers were blended in one, in the form of a terrible, huge, white bear that moved towards the weak and guilty people, like her father, and she feared to say anything in contradiction to him; but with a forced smile and expressions of feigned pleasure she suffered his coarse caresses and defiling embraces that only caused her horror.

Only once Pëtr Leontich had ventured to ask him for a loan of fifty roubles in order to settl a əvery unpleasant debt, but what suffering it had caused!

"Very well, I will give it," Modestus Alekseich had said after reflection, "but I warn you that I will never again help you until you leave off drinking. Such a weakness is shameful for a man who is in government employ. I cannot refrain from reminding you of the universally known fact that many very capable men have been ruined by this vice, while by temperance they might, perhaps, in time have attained high rank."

This was followed by long periods: "according as . . ." "in consequence of this state . . ." "in consideration of what has been said." Poor Pëtr Leontich suffered from the humiliation, and felt a strong desire to drink.

The boys, too, who came to see Anya usually in torn boots and threadbare trousers, had also to listen to precepts.

"Every man must have his duties!" Modestus Alekseich told them.

But he gave them no money. At the same time he gave Anya rings, bracelets and brooches, saying it was as well to have these things for a black day. And he often opened her chest of drawers to verify if all these things were safe.

II

Meanwhile winter had begun. Long before Christmas the local newspapers announced that the usual winter ball would "be given" on the 29th of December in the

Hall of the Nobility Club. Every evening when the card-playing was over Modestus Alekseich whispered excitedly with the wives of the officials, looking anxiously at Anya, and afterwards he paced the room from corner to corner for a long time immersed in thought. At last, late at night, he stopped before Anya and said :

" You must have a ball dress made for yourself. Do you understand ? But, please, consult Marya Grigorevna and Natalya Kuzminishna."

And he gave her a hundred roubles. She took the money ; but when she ordered her dress she did not consult anybody ; she only spoke to her father about it, and tried to imagine how her mother would have dressed for the ball. Her late mother had always been dressed in the last fashion, and had always taken great pains with Anya and had dressed her very elegantly—like a doll—and she had taught her to speak French and to dance the mazurka admirably (before she had got married she had been a governess for five years). Like her mother Anya could make a new dress out of an old one, clean her gloves with benzene, hire jewellery for the evening, and, like her mother, she also knew how to screw up her eyes, burr, get into pretty poses, become enraptured when necessary, or look sad and enigmatic. And from her father she had inherited her dark hair and eyes, her nervousness and her habit of always dressing very carefully.

When Modestus Alekseich, without his coat, came into her room half an hour before they had to start for the ball, in order to fix his order round his neck in front of her pier-glass, he was so enchanted with her beauty and the elegance of her fresh and airy toilette that he combed his whiskers with self-satisfaction, saying :

"So that's how my wife is . . . that's how you are! Anyuta!" he continued, suddenly falling into a solemn tone. "I have made you happy, and to-day you can make me happy. I beg you to get introduced to His Excellency's wife! For God's sake do! Through her I can get the post of first secretary!"

They drove to the ball. Here they were at the Hall of the Nobility at the entrance door with its door-keeper. The antechamber was full of clothes-pegs, fur-coats, sleeping lackeys and bare-necked women, covering themselves with their fans as a protection from the draught; there was a smell of gas and soldiers. When going up the staircase on her husband's arm, Anya heard the sounds of music and saw the reflection of the whole of herself in the huge mirror illuminated by numberless lights, a feeling of joy, and the same presentiment of happiness that she had felt on the moonlit night at the wayside station, awoke in her soul. She walked proudly, with self-confidence, for the first time she felt herself no longer a girl but a married lady, and involuntarily she imitated her late mother in her gait and manner. And for the first time in her life she felt herself rich and free. Even the presence of her husband did not embarrass her, as from the moment she crossed the threshold of the Club she guessed instinctively that the vicinity of her old husband would in no way depreciate her; but, on the contrary, it would stamp her with the piquant mysteriousness that is very attractive to men. The band already resounded in the large hall, and dancing had begun. After their apartments in the government house Anya was bewildered by the impressions of light, of many colours, of music and of noise. She cast a glance over the hall, thinking: "Oh, how delightful!" and she instantly spotted all her friends

amid the crowd, all those people she had met formerly at parties or on her promenades, all those officers, teachers, lawyers, officials, landowners, His Excellency, Artynov and the society ladies smartly decked out and very *décolletée*, both the pretty and the ugly, who were already taking their places in the kiosks and pavilions of the Charity Bazaar, to begin the sale for the poor. A huge officer in epaulettes—she had made his acquaintance in the Old Kiev Street when she was still a gymnasium girl and now she could not even recall his name—appeared before her as if he had sprung out of the earth and invited her for a waltz, and she flew away from her husband. It seemed to her as if she were sailing in a boat in a severe storm, and her husband had remained far away on the bank. . . . She was a passionate dancer, she danced with enthusiasm waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, passing from hand to hand, becoming dizzy from the music and the noise, mixing up French and Russian words, burring, laughing, not thinking of her husband nor of anybody nor of anything. She had success with the men ; that was quite evident—it could not have been otherwise—she was breathless with excitement, she pressed her fan convulsively in her hand and wanted to drink. Her father, in a crumpled dress-coat which exhaled an odour of benzene, came up, offering her a plate with a red ice in his outstretched hand.

" You are bewitching to-day," he said, looking at her enraptured ; " never before have I regretted so much that you married with so much haste. . . . Why ? I know you did it for our sake, but . . ." with trembling hands he took a packet of rouble notes out of his pocket and said : " To-day I received my fee for lessons, I can repay your husband my debt."

She thrust her plate into his hand and, seized by

somebody, she was carried off, and he had a glimpse of her far away, while she, looking over her partner's shoulder, saw her father gliding over the floor with his arm round a lady's waist and twirling with her through the room.

"How charming he is when he is sober!" she thought.

She danced the mazurka with the same huge officer. Walking along in an important and heavy manner, looking like a carcass in uniform, slightly leading with raised shoulders and expanded breast, and hardly stamping with his feet, he appeared very unwilling to dance, while she fluttered beside him exciting him with her beauty and bare neck; her eyes shone provokingly, her movements were passionate, while he became more and more indifferent and stretched out his hand to her graciously like a king.

"Bravo! Bravo!" the public shouted.

Little by little the huge officer was also carried away; he became animated, excited; he succumbed to the enchantment, he was carried away and moved lightly, youthfully, while she only shrugged her shoulders and looked slyly at him, as if now she were the queen and he her slave, and at that moment it seemed to her that the whole hall was looking at them, that all the people were spellbound and envied them. The huge officer had scarcely had time to thank her, when the people around suddenly made way and the men held themselves up stiffly in a strange manner and let their arms fall to their sides. It was His Excellency, in a dress-coat with two stars on his breast, who was coming towards her. Yes, His Excellency was really coming to her, because he looked straight at her and smiled sweetly, at the same time chewing his lips, as he always did when he saw a pretty woman.

"Very pleased, very pleased . . ." he began. "I shall order your husband to be put under arrest in the guard-house for having hidden away such a treasure from us for so long. I have come to you with a commission from my wife," he continued, giving her his hand. "You must help us. H'm-m, yes, we must award you the prize of beauty . . . as they do in America. . . . H'm-m. . . . The Americans. . . . My wife is waiting for you with impatience."

He led her to one of the huts, to an elderly lady who had a face in which the lower part was disproportionately large, so that it looked as if she had a big stone in her mouth.

"Help us," she said through the nose in a drawling voice. "All the pretty women are working for the Charity Bazaar, but for some reason you alone are amusing yourself. Why don't you want to help us?"

She went away and Anya took her place near the silver samovar and the teacups. Brisk trade began at once. Anya took not less than a rouble for a cup of tea, and she made the huge officer drink three cups. Artynov, the rich man with the goggle eyes, came up to her stall. He was suffering from breathlessness, but he no longer wore the strange costume in which Anya had seen him in the summer; he was now in evening dress, like all the other men. Without removing his eyes from Anya he drank a glass of champagne and paid a hundred roubles for it, then he had a cup of tea and gave another hundred, and all this was done in silence, as he was suffering from asthma. Anya invited purchasers to come in, and she took their money from them, being firmly convinced that her smiles and glances could afford these men nothing but great pleasure. She already understood that she was created solely for this

noisy, brilliant, laughing life with music, dancing, admirers, and her former fear, of the power that was approaching and threatened to crush her, appeared to her absurd ; she feared nobody any longer, and she only regretted that her mother was not there to rejoice with her at her success.

Pëtr Leontich, already pale, but still firm on his legs, came to the hut and asked for a glass of cognac. Anya blushed, fearing he would say something unsuitable (she was already ashamed that she had such a poor, such an ordinary father) ; but he emptied his glass, threw a ten-rouble note, which he took from his pocket, on to the counter and went away in an important manner, without having said a word. A little later she saw him with his partner dancing in the *grand rond*, and now he was rather tottery and was calling out something, to the great confusion of his partner, and Anya remembered at a ball, that had taken place three years before, he had also tottered and had called out in the same way ; it had finished by the policeman having to take him home to bed, and the next day the Director had threatened to dismiss him. How untimely were these recollections !

When the fires of the samovars had gone out in the huts, and the weary benefactresses had handed over their receipts to the elderly lady with the stone in her mouth, Artynov gave his arm to Anya and led her into the hall, where supper was served for all who had taken part in the Charity Bazaar. There were about twenty people at the supper, hardly more, but it was very noisy. His Excellency proposed the toast : " This luxurious dining-room is the right place to drink to the prosperity of the cheap dining-rooms that are the object of to-day's Bazaar." The Brigadier-General proposed that they should drink " to the power before which

even the artillery is powerless," and everybody rose to click glasses with the ladies. It was very, very gay! . . .

The sky was already getting light when Anya was escorted home, and the cooks were going to market. Joyous, intoxicated, full of new impressions and tired out she undressed, fell on her bed and was instantly fast asleep. . . .

It was past one next day when her maid woke her and announced that Mr. Artynov had come to pay her a visit. She dressed quickly and went into the drawing-room. Soon after Artynov left, His Excellency arrived to thank her for having taken part in the Charity Bazaar. He looked at her sweetly, chewing his lips, kissed her little hand, asked permission to come again and departed, and she stood in the middle of the drawing-room amazed and enchanted, unable to believe in this change in her life, this wonderful change had taken place so quickly; at that very moment her husband, Modestus Alekseich, came into the room. . . . And he, too, stood before her now with that ingratiating, slavishly respectful expression, which she was accustomed to see on his face in the presence of the strong and the illustrious; and with rapture, with indignation, with contempt, already confident that she would not have to suffer for it, she said, pronouncing each word distinctly:

"Go away, blockhead!"

After that Anya never had a single free day, as she took part in picnics, drives and plays. Every day she only returned home towards morning, and lay down in the drawing-room on the floor, and then she told everybody touchingly that she slept under flowers. She required very much money now, but she was no longer afraid of Modestus Alekseich, and she spent his money

as if it were her own ; she did not ask, or demand, she simply sent him her bills or little notes : " pay the bearer two hundred roubles " or " pay immediately a hundred roubles."

At Easter Modestus Alekseich received the order of St. Anna of the second class. When he went to thank for it, His Excellency put his newspaper aside and sat down deeper into his arm-chair.

" Consequently, you have now three Annas," he said as he looked at his white hands and pink nails, " one in your buttonhole and two round your neck."

Out of caution Modestus Alekseich put two fingers to his lips, in order not to laugh aloud, and said :

" Now it only remains to await the appearance of a little Vladimir in the world. May I venture to ask Your Excellency to be godfather."

He hinted at a Vladimir of the fourth class, and he already imagined how he would relate everywhere to his friends this joke that was so successful by its ready wit and boldness, and he was preparing to say something equally good, but His Excellency was again entirely absorbed in his newspaper and only nodded his head.

And Anya was always driving about with three horses, she went with Artynov to his shooting-box, she took part in one-act plays, she was at supper-parties ; but she went more and more seldom to her own people. They always dined alone now. Pëtr Leontich drank more than formerly ; he had no money, and long since the harmonium had been sold for debt. Now the boys never allowed him to go alone into the street, and always followed him, to save him from falling. When it happened that Anya flew past them in the Old Kiev Street, driving with a pair of horses and a side-horse and

Artynov on the coach-box instead of a coachman, Pëtr Leontich would take off his top-hat and when about to call to her, Petya and Andryusha would seize him by the arms, and say :

" Don't, Papochka ! Enough, Papochka ! "

THE PROPOSAL

A STORY FOR YOUNG GIRLS

VALANTIN PETROVICH PEREDERKIN, a young man of pleasing appearance, put on his evening dress and his sharp-pointed, patent leather shoes, armed himself with his opera hat and with difficulty suppressing his emotion drove to the house of Princess Vera Zapiskina.

It is a thousand pities, reader, that you do not know the Princess Vera, that sweet, enchanting creature, with arch blue eyes and wavy silken curls.

The waves of the sea break on the rocks, but the waves of her hair, on the contrary, would break and scatter in fragments the hardest stone. One would have to be a feelingless dolt to resist her smile, or the charm that exhales from her small but graceful figure. Ah, one would have to be a wooden doll not to feel in the seventh heaven when she speaks, or laughs, or shows her flashing white teeth!

Perederkin was received.

He sat down opposite the Princess and, feeling helpless with emotion, began;

"Princess, can you listen to me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Princess—forgive me—I don't know where to begin. It is so unexpected for you . . . so sudden. . . . You will not be offended?"

He pulled his pocket-handkerchief out of his pocket

and mopped his face, while the Princess smiled sweetly and looked inquiringly at him.

"Princess," he continued, "from the moment I saw you for the first time my soul was filled with an unconquerable desire. . . . This desire gives me no peace by night, or day . . . and if it is not satisfied I . . . I shall be miserable."

The Princess lowered her eyes meditatively.

Perederkin hesitated, and then continued:

"You, of course, will be surprised . . . you are above everything earthly, but . . . for me you are the most suitable . . ."

Silence.

"More especially as my estate touches yours. . . . I am rich. . . ."

"But what is it all about?" the Princess asked quietly.

"What it is all about, Princess," Perederkin exclaimed with emotion, rising from his seat, "I entreat you, do not refuse. . . . Do not ruin my plans by your refusal. My dear, let me propose. . . ."

Valantin Petrovich sat down again hastily, and bending towards the Princess, whispered:

"The proposal is a most profitable one. In one year we shall sell a million poods of tallow. Let us start on our adjoining estates a limited liability company for tallow-boiling. . . ."

The Princess reflected for a moment and then answered:

"With pleasure."

The reader who expected a melodramatic ending will be disappointed.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT

IVAN PETROVICH REQUIEMOV grew pale, he extinguished the lamp and began in an agitated voice:

"Not a glimmer of light pierced the thick darkness that hung over the earth, when I returned home on Christmas Eve, 1883, from the house of a friend, who is now dead, where we had all remained late holding a spiritistic séance. For some reason the small by-streets, through which I had to go, were not lighted, and I had to make my way groping in the dark. I was living at the time in Moscow, near the church of the Assumption on the Tombtsa, in a house belonging to the government official Cadaverov, consequently in one of the most obscure parts of the Arbat. My thoughts as I walked home were heavy and oppressive. . . .

"'Your life is drawing to an end. . . . Repent. . . .'

"These were the words Spinoza, whose spirit we had been able to call up, had addressed to me at the séance. I had asked for them to be repeated, and the saucer had not only repeated them, but had added 'to-night.' I am no believer in spiritism, but the thoughts of death, even a hint of it, always makes me melancholy. Ladies and gentlemen, death is inevitable, it is a daily occurrence, but nevertheless the thought of it is repugnant to man's nature. Now, when I was surrounded by cold, impenetrable darkness, when before my eyes I could only see torrents of raindrops, when the wind howled plaintively above my head, and there was not

a single living soul anywhere near me, nor was a human sound to be heard, my soul became filled with an undefined, unaccountable dread. I, a man free from prejudices, hastened along, fearing to look back, or to the side. It seemed to me if I looked back I would inevitably see death like a spectre behind me."

Requiemov breathed heavily, he gulped down a glass of water, and continued:

"This undefined dread, you will understand, did not leave me even when having mounted to the fourth story of Cadaverov's house I opened the door and entered my room. It was dark in my modest dwelling. The wind moaned in the stove as if begging to be let into the warmth, and knocked at the door of the ventilator.

"'If Spinoza is to be believed,' I said to myself, smiling, 'I am to die to-night amid this lamentation. It certainly is eerie!'

"I lit a match. . . . A furious gust of wind passed over the roof of the house. The gentle wailing changed into wrathful roars. Somewhere below a half-detached shutter clattered and the door of my ventilator squeaked plaintively for help. . . .

"'It's bad for the houseless on a night like this,' I thought.

"But it was no time to give oneself up to such reflections. When the sulphur on the match I had lighted gave out a blue flame, and I cast my eyes round the room, I saw an unexpected and terrible sight. . . . What a pity the gust of wind had not reached my match! Then, perhaps I would have seen nothing and my hair would not have stood on end. I shrieked, I made a step towards the door, and filled with horror, despair and amazement I closed my eyes.

"There was a coffin in the middle of the room.

"The blue light burnt but a short time; still I had been able to discern the outlines of the coffin. . . . I saw the pink glimmer and sparkle of the brocade, I saw the gold galloon cross on the lid. There are things, ladies and gentlemen, that stamp themselves on your memory, though you have seen them only for an instant. So it was with this coffin. I only saw it for a second, but I can remember it in all its smallest details. It was a coffin for a person of middle height, and judging by its pink colour it was for a young girl. The rich brocade, the feet, the bronze handles—all denoted that the corpse was rich.

"I rushed headlong out of my room and without reasoning, without thinking, only feeling an inexpressible dread, I tore down the stairs. The corridors and the staircase were dark, my legs got entangled in the skirts of my long fur coat, and it was a marvel that I did not fall down and break my neck. When I found myself in the street I leaned against a wet lamp-post and began to get calm. My heart palpitated, my breathing was heavy . . ."

One of the listeners turned up the lamp and moved closer to the narrator, who continued:

"I would not have been surprised if I had found my room on fire, if a robber or a mad dog had been there. . . . I would not have been surprised if the ceiling had fallen down, if the floor had collapsed, if the walls had fallen in. . . . All that is natural and comprehensible. But how could a coffin have got into my room? Where did it come from? An expensive, a woman's coffin, evidently made for some young aristocrat—how could it have found its way into the wretched room of a small government official? Was it empty, or did it contain a corpse? . . . Who was she, this rich girl who had died so inopportunely, and was now

paying me this strange and terrible visit? A painful secret!

"'If this is no miracle it must be a crime,' shot through my head.

"I was lost in conjectures. During my absence the door had been locked and the place where I hid the key was known only to my most intimate friends. My friends could not have placed the coffin there! . . . It might also be supposed that the coffin had been brought to me by the undertakers owing to some error. They might have mistaken the house or gone to the wrong story or the wrong door, and had carried the coffin into the wrong flat. But who does not know that our coffin-makers will never leave a room until they have been paid for their work, or at least have received a good tip?

"'The spirits have foretold my death,' I thought. 'Can it be they who have taken the trouble to provide me with a coffin in due time?'

"Ladies and gentlemen, I do not believe nor have I ever believed in spiritism, but such a coincidence might even plunge a philosopher into a mystical frame of mind.

"'All this is stupid, and I am as cowardly as a school-boy,' I decided at last. 'It was only an optical illusion—nothing more! While walking home my frame of mind had been so gloomy that it is not surprising that my unstrung nerves made me see a coffin. . . . Of course, it was only an optical illusion! What else could it be?'

"The rain beat in my face, and the wind tore fiercely at my coat and cap. . . . I was cold and wet through and through. I had to go somewhere—but where? To return to my own room would expose me to the risk of again seeing the coffin, and it would be beyond my

strength to bear that sight. Without a single living soul near me, not hearing a single human sound, left alone face to face with that coffin in which perhaps a corpse was lying, I might lose my senses. On the other hand, to remain in the street under the torrents of rain and in the cold was impossible.

"I decided to go and pass the night at my friend Restov's room, who, as you all know, afterwards shot himself. At the time he was living in furnished rooms in the house belonging to the merchant Skullov, situated in the Dead Lane."

Requiemov wiped away the cold sweat that had appeared on his pale face, and, heaving a deep sigh, continued:

"I did not find my friend in. I knocked at his door, and at last being convinced that he was out, I felt about on the transom for the key, opened the door and went in. I threw my wet fur-coat on the floor, groped about in the darkness for the sofa and sat down to rest. It was dark. . . . The wind hummed sadly in the window ventilator. The cricket was singing its monotonous song in the stove. The bells in the Kremlin were ringing for the Christmas matins. I hastened to strike a match. But the light did not relieve me of my gloomy mood; on the contrary, a terrible, an inexpressible horror mastered me once more. I shrieked, staggered and rushed out of the room almost beside myself.

"In my friend's room, as in my own, I also saw a coffin!

"My friend's coffin was nearly twice the size of mine, and the brown material with which it was covered gave it an especially gloomy appearance. How had it got there? It could only be an optical illusion—how was it possible to doubt it. . . . There could not be coffins in every room! My nerves were evidently diseased.

. . . I had hallucinations. Wherever I might go now I would always see before me the terrible dwelling of the dead. Consequently I was mad, I was infected with something like 'coffin-mania' and the cause of my mental derangement was not far to seek: it was only necessary to remember the spiritistic séance and Spinoza's words. . . .

"'I am going mad!' I thought in terror, seizing my head in my hands. 'My God! My God! What am I to do?'

"My head was ready to burst, my legs failed me. . . . The rain poured down as if out of buckets, the wind pierced me through and through, and I had neither a fur-coat nor a cap. I could not go back to fetch them from the room . . . that was beyond my strength. . . . Dread clasped me firmly in its cold embrace. My hair stood on end, cold perspiration streamed down my face, although I believed that it was only hallucinations.

"What was I to do?" Requiemov continued. "I was out of my mind, and I risked catching a severe cold. Fortunately, I remembered that my good friend Godsacreov, who had but lately received his doctor's degree, was living not far from the Dead Lane. He had also been with us at the spiritistic séance. I hastened to him. . . . At that time he had not yet married the rich merchant's daughter, and was living in the fifth story of the house belonging to the State Councillor Graveyardin.

"At Godsacreov's my nerves were destined to be subjected to further torture. As I was mounting to the fifth story I heard a terrible noise. Somebody was running about upstairs, stamping heavily with his feet and slamming doors.

"'Help!' I heard somebody cry in a voice that pierced the very soul. 'Help! Porter!'

"A moment later a dark figure in a fur-coat and a crushed silk hat rushed down the stairs towards me.

"'Godsacreov,' I cried, recognizing my friend. 'Is it you? What is the matter?'

"When Godsacreov reached the landing on which I was standing he stopped and seized me convulsively by the hand. He was pale, he breathed heavily and trembled. His eyes wandered restlessly around, his chest heaved. . . .

"'Is that you, Requiemov?' he asked in a hoarse voice. 'Is it really you? You are pale, like one risen from the grave. . . . But no, are you not a hallucination? My God. . . . You look terrible! . . .'

"'But what's the matter with you? You look like a ghost!'

"'Och! wait, my dear fellow, let me recover my breath. . . . I am glad to have met you, if it really is you and not an optical illusion. That damned spiritistic séance. . . . It has so upset my nerves that, would you believe it, just now, when I came home, I saw in my room . . . a coffin!'

"I could not believe my own ears, and asked him to repeat what he had said.

"'A coffin, a real coffin!' the doctor repeated, sitting down on the steps quite exhausted. 'I am no coward, but the devil himself would be frightened if, after a spiritistic séance, he ran up against a coffin.'

"Stammering and confusedly I told the doctor about the coffins I had seen. . . .

"For a minute we looked at each other with staring eyes, and open-mouthed with astonishment. Then to convince ourselves that we were not dreaming we began pinching each other.

"'We both feel pain,' the doctor said, 'so at the present moment we are not asleep, and we are not

dreaming of each other. Therefore, my coffin and both your coffins were not optical illusions, but something that exists. What are we to do now, old man ? '

" We stood for a whole hour on the cold staircase, lost in guesses and conjectures ; we got terribly cold and at last decided to conquer our cowardly fear, arouse the man-servant on duty and go with him to the doctor's room. So we went. We entered the room, lit a candle and we really saw a coffin covered with white silver brocade with gold fringe and tassels. The man-servant piously crossed himself.

" ' Now we can find out,' the doctor said, still trembling in every limb, ' if the coffin is empty or if it is . . . inhabited ! '

" After long and quite comprehensible hesitation the doctor bent over the coffin and, pressing his lips together from fright and expectation, he tore off the lid of the coffin.

" We looked into the coffin and . . .

" The coffin was empty. . . .

" There was no corpse in it, but instead we found the following letter :

" ' DEAR GODSACREOV,

" ' You know that my father-in-law's business has got into a terrible mess. He is over head and ears in debt. To-morrow or the day after there will be an execution in his house, and this would entirely ruin his family and mine, and would ruin our honour too, which is more precious than anything else for me. At a family council we held yesterday we decided to hide everything valuable or of worth. As the whole of my father-in-law's property consists of coffins (he is, as you doubtless know, the best undertaker in town), we decided to hide away all the best coffins. I entreat you, as a friend,

to save our property and our honour! Hoping that you will help us to save our goods, I send you, dear old fellow, one coffin, with the request that you will hide it in your rooms, and keep it till called for. Without the assistance of our friends and acquaintances we are ruined. I hope that you will not refuse me this assistance, all the more as the coffin will not remain with you for more than a week. To everyone whom I consider as our sincere friend I have sent a coffin, trusting in their magnanimity and nobility.

"'Your affectionate,

'IVAN JAWIN.'

"For three months after that I had to undergo a cure for my shattered nerves, while our friend, the undertaker's son-in-law, saved both his honour and his property, and is now the owner of an undertaker's business; he arranges funeral processions, sells monuments and gravestones. His business, however, is not getting on very well, and every evening when I come home I always expect to find next to my bed a white marble monument or a catafalque."

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