Anton Chekhov

Ward Number Six

and Other Stories

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WARD NUMBER SIX
AND OTHER STORIES

ANTON CHEKHOV was born in 1860 in south Russia, the son of a poor grocer. At the age of 19 he followed his family to Moscow, where he studied medicine and helped to support the household by writing comic sketches for popular magazines. By 1888 he was publishing in the prestigious literary monthlies of Moscow and St Petersburg: a sign that he had already attained maturity as a writer of serious fiction. During the next 15 years he wrote the short stories—50 or more of them—which form his chief claim to world pre-eminence in the genre and are his main achievement as a writer. His plays are almost equally important, especially during his last years. He was closely associated with the Moscow Art Theatre and married its leading lady, Olga Knipper. In 1898 he was forced to move to Yalta, where he wrote his two greatest plays, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. The première of the latter took place on his forty-fourth birthday. Chekhov died six months later, on 2 July 1904.

RONALD HINGLEY, Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford, edited and translated The Oxford Chekhov (9 volumes), and is the author of *A Life of Anton Chekhov* (also published by Oxford University Press). He is the translator of four other volumes of Chekhov stories in the Oxford World's Classics: *The Russian Master and Other Stories*, *The Steppe and Other Stories*, *A Woman's Kingdom and Other Stories*, and *The Princess and Other Stories*. His translations of all Chekhov's drama will be found in two Oxford World's Classics volumes, *Five Plays* and *Twelve Plays*.

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ANTON CHEKHOV

Ward Number Six

and Other Stories

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
RONALD HINGLEY

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INTRODUCTION

Chekhov and the Short Story

CHEKHOV came of humbler social origins than the leading Russian fiction-writers of earlier generations: he was the third son, born in 1860, of a struggling grocer in the southern Russian port of Taganrog.

He was a lively boy: a gifted mimic, a keen attender of the gallery at his home-town theatre, a great practical joker. He read widely, and was fortunate in attending the local grammar school, where the study of Latin and Greek loomed large in the curriculum. Though these studies bored the boy—whose school marks tended to be average—his school provided him with a stimulating social framework within which to develop. It also helped to qualify him for entering Moscow University.

In 1879 the nineteen-year-old Chekhov moved more than six hundred miles north from Taganrog to settle in Moscow, after which that city and its environs remained his base for two decades. He qualified as a doctor in 1884, but was to practise only sporadically, having already become an established writer of short humorous sketches and tales. From the proceeds of these the undergraduate Chekhov had already been helping to support his family—including his once strict father (now often unemployed) and mother as well as a sister and two younger brothers.

Chekhov's first writings were published under a variety of comic pseudonyms in a variety of scurrilous comic magazines, and seem to have little in common with his mature work. Though he turned them out by the hundred, he had all along been unobtrusively experimenting with a more serious—at times tragic—approach. Meanwhile he was being awarded a sequence of literary promotions as his work found its way into increasingly respectable periodicals or newspapers published in the capital city, St. Petersburg: *Fragments* (1882), *The St. Petersburg Gazette* (1885), *New Time* (1886). Finally, in 1888, Chekhov breaks into one of the 'fat journals': literary monthlies in which nearly all the major works of Russian literature have first appeared in print.

With this event—the publication of the story *Steppe* in the *Northern Herald* in 1888—Chekhov has been accepted, in effect, as an author who might hope to claim a permanent place in Russian literature.

Henceforward most of his longer stories are first issued in one or other of the 'fat journals' as a prelude to publication in book form. He is now concentrating on quality rather than quantity. He has also transformed his humorous approach, for though humour always remains a basic ingredient in his technique it is no longer cultivated for its own sake.

In 1890 Chekhov suddenly astounds his friends by undertaking a one-man expedition across Siberia to the convict settlement on the island of Sakhalin. He conducts a painstaking sociological survey and publishes the results in *Sakhalin Island*: a treatise as well as a travelogue, and a landmark in Russian penological literature.

In 1892 Chekhov buys a country estate at Melikhovo, about fifty miles south of Moscow, and embarks on the most fruitful period of his work as a short-story writer—all but two of the items in this volume belong to his Melikhovo period. But he is increasingly incapacitated by tuberculosis. Compelled to winter in the south on doctors' orders, he builds a villa near the Crimean resort of Yalta in 1899 and abandons Melikhovo while continuing to return to Moscow as his health permits. His output of short stories declines, but he is now first making his mark as a dramatist with the successful production of his four-act plays *The Seagull* and *Uncle Vanya* by the newly founded Moscow Art Theatre. In 1901 Chekhov marries the actress Olga Knipper, a member of the Art Theatre Company. Between his marriage and his death in 1904 he writes two plays specially for the Art Theatre: *Three Sisters* and—his last work—*The Cherry Orchard.*

Chekhov did not belong to the heroic epoch of Russian fiction: that of Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. With the grand age of the Russian novel—the reign of the Emperor Alexander II (1855–81)—he was involved only in the sense of witnessing it from afar as a provincial schoolboy.

Alexander II's reign had begun with general optimism and sweeping social reforms sponsored by the Emperor himself, among which the Emancipation of the Serfs had been the most important—it was enacted in 1861, when Chekhov (whose paternal grandfather had actually been a serf) was a mere babe in arms. As a schoolboy Chekhov was made aware, without becoming keenly interested, of political opposition to the Russian autocracy such as was now first finding serious organized expression. It was now that oppositionists of a more modern type than had hitherto surfaced in Russia—whether termed

liberals, radicals or revolutionaries—first made themselves felt as a collective force, albeit on a small scale. Resistance to the Reforming Tsar (and for not reforming fast enough) culminated in his assassination on 1 March 1881 by a group of extremists. This momentous event coincided fairly closely with the deaths of Dostoyevsky and Turgenev, as also with the end of Tolstoy's major period as a novelist. The assassination was, accordingly, a literary as well as a political landmark, simultaneously signalling the end of the old heroic era and the beginning of a new and less flamboyant period.

Chekhov's début as a writer came at just this time: it was in the Reforming Tsar's last year of life, to be precise, that he first began to publish his work.

With Alexander II's sudden death the age of reform and generous hopes—already in sad decline—seemed to have ended for the foreseeable future, and the political police moved in to crush the small but virulent revolutionary movement. Meanwhile the assassinated Emperor's successor, Alexander III, was embarking on 'counter-reforms' designed to put the clock back and protect the autocracy against the activities of political terrorists such as those who had blown his father to pieces. Despite all curbs on political and social reform, however, Russia under the new Tsar never developed into the police state which the world still seems to insist on conceiving it. Admittedly the peasants' condition remained unenviable, and they were exposed to terrible famines and epidemics. Equally unenviable was the plight of the urban proletariat, which still remained comparatively small in numbers. Of such sufferings Chekhov's own works provide eloquent illustration. But, as they also show, at least the professional section of society, to which he himself belonged as a doctor and author, suffered from few indeed of the disadvantages associated with a police state. Despite the existence of a literary censorship (a continual nuisance) and despite many another handicap, the Russian intellectual of the last two decades of the nineteenth century enjoyed—provided always that he did not belong to the rump of active revolutionary conspirators insignificant until the mid-1890s—a degree of real freedom for which later generations and societies may well envy him.

Himself no admirer of the autocratic system and on occasion its outspoken critic, Chekhov was even less sympathetic to revolutionary conspiracy. Not that this issue loomed prominently in his consciousness. As is abundantly clear from his voluminous surviving letters (over four thousand), and also from the many memoirs of his contemporaries,

the emphasis was on quite other matters. Here was a lively, vigorous society—not least in Moscow: Chekhov's spiritual home at times, and an exhilarating milieu in which to write, paint, carouse, make love, gossip and argue about the meaning of existence over a combination of oysters, champagne, sturgeon, vodka, beer or tea in one of the many *traktiry* (taverns) in which Muscovite intellectuals seemed to spend half their time. Nor did the continued espousal of reactionary policies by Nicholas II, who came to the throne in 1894, succeed in suppressing the general feeling of excitement.

In enjoying these amenities fairly extensively, until frustrated by ill health, Chekhov was a man of his age. Yet he was conscious all the time of those less fortunate than himself, and more effectively conscious than many a contemporary who posed as champion of the poor and downtrodden. Eloquent in words—as witness those numerous artistic works in which he depicts the plight of the unprivileged—Chekhov was also a man of action, working as doctor, health officer, builder of schools, patron of libraries and so on.

Though chosen (as noted in the Preface) for their excellence as short stories, the items in the present selection well typify Chekhov and his period by covering a wide spread of contemporary Russian settings. The Russian countryside provides the background for *Neighbours* and *Ariadne*, while provincial towns—characteristically anonymous—supply the stage for *Ward Number Six* and *Doctor Startsev*. In *A Dreary Story* and *The Butterfly* Moscow (loved and hated by Chekhov) appears to be the scene, though unavowedly so, while the capital, St. Petersburg, figures memorably as the setting of *An Anonymous Story*. Less typically, Chekhov permits himself an excursion outside Russian national territory in the last-named story, and also in *Ariadne*. In each case his description of foreign parts seems to accord with a formula evolved in another context: that 'abroad is a bloody place'. Such was, incidentally, Chekhov's own frequent but by no means invariable reaction to his travels outside the Russian Empire.

So much for the geographical background. As for the social setting, we have provided a less characteristic spread, since—as stated above—stories focused on the life of the peasants have been omitted, as have studies of merchants, the urban lower middle class and the industrial worker. The main emphasis in this volume is on the gentry and on the professional class which Chekhov himself entered as a young man by becoming a doctor and self-supporting writer. Within that category

the range is fairly wide. In *Ariadne* and *Neighbours* the dramatis personae belong to the landowning milieu, while high officialdom is unforgettably described in *An Anonymous Story*. The academic world dominates *A Dreary Story*, as do artistic circles *The Butterfly* and—on a pathetic provincial level—*Doctor Startsev*.

As these stories richly illustrate, Chekhov particularly liked to draw his heroes from the profession of medicine in which he himself had qualified but which he practised only occasionally (very rarely, incidentally, does he make a writer his hero). How little the mature Chekhov dealt in stereotypes, how rarely—if ever—he essentially repeated himself when creating new characters, the various doctors in the present volume richly illustrate. The saintly Dr. Dymov of *The Butterfly* becomes a victim of his own inability to assert himself and of his devotion to his profession. By contrast, Dr. Ragin of *Ward Number Six* is—ideologically speaking—a villain, or at least a non-approved figure. He is shown unavowedly espousing Tolstoy's doctrine of non-resistance to evil—a doctrine which Chekhov had briefly shared before rejecting it and embodying his changed attitude in this and other stories as well as in his correspondence. Between these two types falls Doctor Startsev, hero of the story of the same name, for he changes from hero to villain in the course of the narrative. But the fullest portrait of all—and the most remarkable of all Chekhov's innumerable fictional doctors—is the professor-hero whose litany of uninterrupted laments constitutes *A Dreary Story*. This is one of the most astonishing works ever penned by a Russian writer: on one level a hymn to the futility of existence, and yet a work which produces anything but the 'dreary' effect advertised in its title.

How, we may now ask, does Chekhov fit into the general pattern of nineteenth-century Russian literature? His is the last big name among the great Russian masters. He was the last great representative of the 'realist' school which has origins in the work of Pushkin and Lermontov, but which really began—according to a commonly accepted view—with Gogol, continuing with Turgenev, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and others.

Realist authors were concerned—some more, some less—to describe Russia contemporary to themselves, evoking a feeling of authenticity by a plain, factual, functional descriptive technique, emphasizing character rather than plot and showing sympathy with all manner of men: even with such unfashionable targets for compassion as the rich

and virtuous as well as with those more conventionally patronized: the poor, the downtrodden and the criminal. Determined to be more than mere story-tellers, all cultivating in some degree the role of prophets, teachers or guides, they surveyed the Russian and general human condition with high seriousness and deep concern. Some of them (notably Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Saltykov-Shchedrin) were at times actively engaged in propagating specific philosophical, social, political or religious doctrines. Others—such as Turgenev, Leskov and Goncharov—considered the doctrines and social problems of their time from a less committed angle, yet often seemed to feel bound by an obligation at least to include these weighty issues in their thematic material.

Chekhov shared with these formidable predecessors a preference for subject-matter taken from contemporary Russian life experienced at first hand. He too tended to emphasize character rather than plot. He showed comparably wide human sympathies, he was similarly concerned with the Russian and general human predicament. He was, however, far less committed than his great predecessors to the propagation, illustration or exposition of specific social, political, philosophical and religious panaceas. He differed from them also in adopting a less heavy and detailed descriptive technique. Hardly, indeed, did he need such a technique since he possessed an uncanny flair for conjuring up a human personality, a social setting or an entire complex situation with one or two deft strokes—as when (in *Ariadne*) he sums up the boredom of jaded tourists with the magnificent phrase 'like gorged boa-constrictors, we only noticed things that glittered'.

Adept at knowing what to leave unsaid, Chekhov is laconic, terse, pointed. He proceeds by hints, suggestions and telling silences. Where his great predecessors had orchestrated major climaxes in multi-decker novels, Chekhov did not even find it necessary to write novels at all, for he could say more in twenty pages than many another could convey in eight hundred. Where they dealt in climaxes, he cultivated anti-climaxes. He was above all the master of the miscued effect, the misdirected pistol shot, the bungled seduction, the whimper which replaces the expected bang. Murder, lunacy, prostitution, felony . . . Chekhov by no means avoided such themes, as he himself liked to claim. On the contrary, he handled them expertly, with a deadly touch, while yet preserving his usual economy of means. His rare scenes of violence—such as Dr. Ragin's death in *Ward Number Six* and the slaughter of a religious maniac in *Murder*—are depicted with a lightness of touch

spectacularly un-Tolstoyan, un-Dostoyevskian and un-Gogolesque; but are no less horrific for that.

Himself well aware of the gulf separating him from the literary dinosaurs of Russia's past, Chekhov takes issue with them in occasional ironical passages of fiction, as is well illustrated by his story *The Duel*. From Pushkin's and Lermontov's time onwards almost all major Russian writers had gone out of their way to portray splendid duelling scenes, these armed clashes between individuals being superbly qualified to provide fictional conflicts of the most dramatic kind. How differently though, does the anti-dramatic Chekhov handle this same bloody theme! When, at the climax of his narrative, pistols have been duly produced at dawn, it turns out that neither the contestants nor their seconds have the faintest idea what to do next.

> A hitch occurred. . . . It transpired that none of those present had ever attended a duel in his life, and no one knew exactly how they should stand, or what the seconds should say and do. . . . 'Any of you remember Lermontov's description?' Von Koren asked with a laugh. 'Turgenev's Bazarov also exchanged shots with someone or other——'

That Chekhov's duel ends in fiasco—with one contestant firing into the air and the other put off his aim by a comic intruding cleric—need hardly be said.

In the present volume we find Chekhov once again pointing to the generation gap in Russian fiction. Zinaida, the heroine of *An Anonymous Story*, in effect gives up everything to follow her lover to the ends of the earth, and is thus a parody of the idealistic self-sacrificing girls whom Turgenev created in such large numbers. Unfortunately for her she does not find herself matched with one of Turgenev's no less numerous wishy-washy young men, but has a more modern lover to reckon with: the urbane and cynical Orlov, who explicitly states that he is not a Turgenev hero. He also goes out of his way to dissociate himself from Turgenev's Insarov; the heroic Bulgarian freedom-fighter in *On the Eve*, whose Russian lady-friend—the heroically self-sacrificing Helen—joins him in the battle to free his country from Turkish oppression. Orlov's is, as he points out, a different nature. 'Should I ever require to liberate Bulgaria I could dispense with any female escort.'

Such was the irony with which Cheknov occasionally referred to his great precursors, and he could go beyond mere ironic flashes. In

a private letter he once called Dostoyevsky's work long, immodest and pretentious. He seems to have held a fairly low opinion of Goncharov. And though an unstinting admirer of Tolstoy's art, he came to reject Tolstoy's teachings and didacticism. But Chekhov came nowhere near to any blanket condemnation of earlier Russian writers and their work. Nothing could have been further from the temperament of a man who was always generous in his praise of fellow-authors and quite incapable of disparaging others in order to boost himself. Throughout his life he showed a modesty astounding in anyone and especially remarkable in a creative artist. Certainly he did not regard himself as the superior of his chief precursors as writers of Russian fiction. Equally certainly, though, he knew that he was a different man using different techniques and operating in a different age.

What of Chekhov's outlook on life as expressed in his stories?

To this question no neat, all-embracing answer will ever be given. Chekhov was no builder of watertight philosophical systems, but even less was he a pure aesthete indifferent to the ethical or other non-artistic implications of his work. A few of his stories are explicitly didactic—especially those reflecting his brief and fictionally disastrous flirtation with Tolstoyism in the late 1880s. Others, by contrast, are mere 'slices of life' devoid of any homiletic element. More typical are items, of which all those in the present volume are samples, which fall between these two extremes. Here the author is doing more than just describing people and situations: he also seems to be saying something about how they ought—or at least about how they ought not—to behave.

Of the works in the present volume *Doctor Startsev* comes nearest to conveying such an author's message. It is typical of Chekhov in pillorying the futility of existence in the Russian provinces: a favourite theme. The town of S——, in which the story is set, is yet another of those anonymous Chekhovian provincial backwaters where the inhabitants do nothing but eat, drink, sleep, play cards, gossip, ill-treat their servants, indulge in frivolous litigation . . . and engender children who will continue the eating, drinking, sleeping, card-playing, ill-treating and litigating processes. Their futility is only further emphasized by such pathetic cultural activities as they can contrive: Mrs. Turkin's novels, her daughter's piano-playing, her husband's 'wit' and the posturings of their servant Peacock. What, indeed, 'could be said of a town in which the most brilliant people were so dim'?

Doctor Startsev is much more than a mere denunciation of provincial Russia. It is one of those many stories in which Chekhov shows worth-while human values succumbing to trivial vulgarity and petty everyday material cares—to what the Russians call *poshlost*. These perils can surface just as easily in the Russian countryside or St Petersburg as in the town of S——. They can also appear in Moscow, as *The Butterfly* shows. On Chekhov's characteristic use of symbolic consumables to stress his approval and non-approval of his characters this particular story provides an eloquent commentary, especially in the use made of food: the approved Dymov never seems to get anything to eat or drink, while his non-approved wife, her lover and their artistic friends are tainted by numerous food associations from caviare and grouse to wine and cabbage stew. Similarly, in *Ward Number Six*, the discredited Doctor Ragin is for ever nibbling gherkins and swilling vodka and beer.

It is, incidentally, often Chekhov's women who drag down the more idealistic men to the level of *poshlost* and vulgar domesticity—especially by the non-approved activity of making jam. The Professor's wife in *A Dreary Story* with her tendency to fuss about food and money; Ariadne, who has to be served with roast beef and boiled eggs in the middle of the night; Zinaida in *An Anonymous Story*, with her frills and fusses and copper saucepans . . . all these are typically female intruders on a male world comparatively unmaterialistic.

And yet Chekhov himself enjoyed his food, his drink, and even his female company—at least until his later years, when illness made inroads on his appetites. Nor, despite the high-minded implications of many of his stories, was he any philosophical idealist. He was, rather, a materialist with a straightforward, typically Victorian belief in human progress: to which we must hasten to add that this belief tended to sag and recede at times—and that it was in any case no 'burning faith', as some memoirists and critics have maintained. By training a scientist, Chekhov on the whole contented himself with observed fact, and if he showed any passion in his thinking it was in rejecting metaphysical and religious speculations. Similarly, he avoided the extravagances of artistic experimentation and 'modernism' which (one would hardly suspect from his own work) were coming into fashion during his mature years as a writer. Nor did he hold fanatical political views such as have been so tediously and catastrophically fashionable among Russian intellectuals of his own and other periods. Still less, though, would it be fair to repeat the criticism often levelled

at Chekhov during his lifetime: that he was a-political, a-philosophical, and lacked principles of any kind. The accusation infuriated him, and he rightly thought it ill-founded. Chekhov held a variety of convictions, they fluctuated as his life developed, they were often mutually inconsistent—in other words, they resembled the views or convictions of many another educated and intelligent man who has never sought to work out an all-embracing system of belief. To claim that his views on life are all-important to his writings is as misleading as to maintain that they have no bearing on his work at all. In discussing such matters critics would do well to cultivate the restraint and common sense of the man whom they often misrepresent.

Chekhov's stories are by no means as shapeless as is commonly suggested. In the present volume *The Butterfly*, *Ward Number Six* and *Doctor Startsev* all have a well-defined plot, constructed with considerable balance and symmetry, and culminating with the death—actual or spiritual—of a main character. By contrast, other stories do indeed fizzle out in accordance with the formula so often applied to Chekhov: 'life goes on. . . .' One such tale is *Neighbours*, where the very pointlessness of the action or non-action *is* the main point of a saga which also hinges on a characteristic ironical twist: the man who so eloquently denounces his sister's ineffectual lover is his spiritual twin, being just as futile as the object of his tirades.

As the superb harangues in this story so richly illustrate, Chekhov by no means always depends on mere hints and pregnant silences. The eloquent over-statement of a case is often as important to the characterization of his figures as is the frequent use of deadly understatement. *A Dreary Story* is all harangue—and nowhere is its submerged irony more telling than in the passages where the Professor so violently carps at a university colleague . . . for continually carping at *his* university colleagues.

Arrivals, departures and journeys seem to have had a particular significance for Chekhov, almost every one of whose mature stories offers such a change of scene. One function of these episodes, without which no story or play of Chekhov's seems complete, is to extend a work's frame of reference by taking it temporarily out of its immediate spatial context. The same function is also performed in a different way by the frequent evocation of distant noises such as bands playing, church bells or drunken shouting. Similarly, Chekhov will extend his temporal frame of reference by constant harkings back to the past: often to the

period when one or other of the characters was a child. ('Long ago, when he had been a small boy, his mother had. . . .') The same function is also performed by the many occasions on which characters look forward—hopefully, but often so pathetically—to the future when everything is somehow going to be wonderful, and when those of them who have never yet done a stroke of work will—they unconvincingly predict—devote their days to honest toil. ('Life in X years will be wonderful. . . .')

Illusions about the future, regrets for the past, high hopes collapsing among jam jars, fried onions and copper saucepans, the incongruities and inconsistencies of human beings, their mannerisms, their selfishness and their unselfishness, their tendency to say far too much or far too little, their inability—whether silent or garrulous—to communicate effectively with each other . . . these are some of the elements which make up Chekhov's thematic arsenal. His artistic aim—as he himself kept repeating—was simply to reflect the world as he saw it. And though life could never, in his portrayal, be fitted to a single all-embracing pattern, it was not altogether lacking in patterns and parts of patterns either. An observer rather than an inventor, dependent on watchful personal experience rather than on a fertile creative imagination, he had the knack of noticing ordinary aspects of human behaviour such as had existed—but existed unrecorded—ever since civilization began. Chekhov observed and registered, often embedding in his record some strong implicit bias of his own, while yet leaving the reader unharassed by overt homilies and exhortations.

Rarely did he operate this technique more movingly and effectively than in the seven samples of his work which now follow.

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The Russian Master and Other Stories, translated and edited by Ronald Hingley.

A CHRONOLOGY OF ANTON CHEKHOV

All dates are given old style.

1860 16 or 17 January. Born in Taganrog, a port on the Sea of Azov in south Russia.

1876 His father goes bankrupt. The family moves to Moscow, leaving Anton to finish his schooling.

1879 Joins family and enrols in the Medical Faculty of Moscow University.

1880 Begins to contribute to *Strekoza* ('Dragonfly'), a St. Petersburg comic weekly.

1882 Starts to write short stories and a gossip column for *Oskolki* ('Splinters') and to depend on writing for an income.

1884 Graduates in medicine. Shows early symptoms of tuberculosis.

1885–6 Contributes to *Peterburgskaya gazeta* ('St. Petersburg Gazette') and *Novoye vremya* ('New Time').

1886 March. Letter from D. V. Grigorovich encourages him to take writing seriously.

First collection of stories: *Motley Stories*.

1887 Literary reputation grows fast. Second collection of stories: *In the Twilight*.

19 November. First Moscow performance of *Ivanov:* mixed reception.

1888 First publication (*The Steppe*) in a serious literary journal, *Severny vestnik* ('The Northern Herald').

1889 31 January. First St. Petersburg performance of *Ivanov:* widely and favourably reviewed.

June. Death of brother Nicholas from tuberculosis.

1890 April–December. Crosses Siberia to visit the penal settlement on Sakhalin Island. Returns via Hong Kong, Singapore and Ceylon.

1891 First trip to western Europe: Italy and France.

1892 March. Moves with family to small country estate at Melikhovo, fifty miles south of Moscow.

1895 First meeting with Tolstoy.

1896 17 October. First—disastrous—performance of *The Seagull* in St. Petersburg.

1897 Suffers severe haemorrhage.

1897–8 Winters in France. Champions Zola's defence of Dreyfus.

1898 Beginning of collaboration with the newly founded Moscow Art Theatre. Meets Olga Knipper. Spends the winter in Yalta, where he meets Gorky.

17 December. First Moscow Art Theatre performance of *The Seagull*: successful.

1899 Completes the building of a house in Yalta, where he settles with mother and sister.

26 October. First performance by Moscow Art Theatre of *Uncle Vanya* (written ?1896).

1899–1901 First collected edition of his works (10 volumes).

1901 31 January. *Three Sisters* first performed.

25 May. Marries Olga Knipper.

1904 17 January. First performance of *The Cherry Orchard*.

2 July. Dies in Badenweiler, Germany.

THE BUTTERFLY

I

ALL Olga's friends, everyone she knew well, came to her wedding. 'Just look at him,' she told her friends. 'There's something about him; isn't there?'

And she nodded towards her husband as if trying to explain just why she was marrying so simple, so very ordinary, so utterly undistinguished a man.

The bridegroom, Osip Dymov, was a rather junior doctor on the staff of two hospitals: a temporary registrar in one, and an assistant pathologist in the other. He saw his patients and worked in his ward from nine till noon every day, then took the horse-tram to his other hospital in the afternoon and performed autopsies on deceased patients. His private practice was negligible, worth about five hundred roubles a year. That's all. What else can one say about him? Whereas Olga, her friends and her cronies were not quite ordinary people. Each one of them was somehow distinguished and somewhat famous, was already something of a name and was reckoned a celebrity. Or even if he wasn't quite a celebrity yet, he at least showed brilliant promise. There was an established and extremely gifted actor from the 'straight' theatre: an elegant, intelligent, modest man with a superb delivery who had taught Olga elocution. There was an opera singer, a jolly fat man who sighed that Olga was ruining herself. If she hadn't been lazy, he told her, if she had taken herself in hand, she might have become a distinguished singer. Then there were several artists, headed by the genre-painter, animal-painter and landscapist Ryabovsky, a very handsome, fair young man of about twenty-five who had exhibited successfully and had sold his last picture for five hundred roubles. He touched up Olga's sketches and used to say that she might possibly come to something. Then there was a 'cellist whose instrument sobbed and who openly declared that Olga was the only woman he knew who could play an accompaniment. And there was also an author, young but already famous, who wrote short novels, plays and stories. Who else was there? Well, there was a Vasily Vasilyevich: squire, landowner, amateur illustrator and vignettist with a great feel for the old Russian style, for the folk ballad and for epic. On paper, china and smoked

plates he could work absolute miracles. In this spoilt, free-and-easy, Bohemian milieu—admittedly sensitive and modest, but conscious of such as doctors only at times of illness—the name Dymov cut no ice whatever. In this ambience he seemed an alien, superfluous, shrunken figure, tall and broad-shouldered though he was. He looked as if he had borrowed someone else's coat, and his beard seemed like a shop-assistant's. Had he been a writer or artist, though, they would have called his beard Zolaesque.

With Olga's flaxen hair, the actor said, and in her wedding dress, she much resembled a shapely young cherry-tree festooned with delicate white blossom in spring.

'Now, just listen to me,' Olga told him, clutching his hand. 'How did all this happen so suddenly? Well, listen, won't you? The thing is, my father worked at the same hospital as Dymov. When poor Father fell ill Dymov watched at his bed-side day and night. Such self-sacrifice! Now, listen, Ryabovsky. And you'd better listen too, Mr. Author, this is most interesting. Come closer. What self-sacrifice, what true sympathy! I stayed up every night too and sat with Father, when suddenly—what do you know?—the handsome prince is at my feet! Brother Dymov's in love, head over heels! Funny things do happen, I must say. Well, he took to calling after Father's death, or we would meet in the street. Then, one fine evening, suddenly—hey presto! He's proposing! You could have knocked me down with a feather! I cried all night and fell fiendishly in love myself. And now I'm Mrs. Dymov, as you see. There's something tough and rugged about him, isn't there, a sort of bear-like quality? You see him in three-quarter face now and badly lit, but when he turns just you look at that forehead. Ryabovsky, what say you to that forehead?

'We're discussing you, Dymov,' she shouted to her husband. 'Come here. Hold out your honest hand to Ryabovsky. That's the spirit. Now, be friends.'

With a good-natured, unsophisticated smile Dymov held out his hand to Ryabovsky.

'How do you do?' he said. 'There was a Ryabovsky in my year at college. I don't suppose he's a relative of yours?'

II

Olga was twenty-two years old, Dymov thirty-one. They settled down splendidly after their wedding. Olga plastered all the drawing-

room walls with sketches—her own and other people's, framed and unframed—while assembling around grand piano and furniture a picturesque clutter of Chinese parasols, easels, gaudy rags, daggers, busts and photographs. She stuck folksy wood-cuts on the dining-room walls, she hung up bast sandals and sickles, and she stood a scythe and rake in the corner, thus creating a dining-room *à la russe*. The bedroom walls and ceiling she draped with dark cloth to create a cavernous effect, also hanging a Venetian lantern over the beds and placing a figure with a halberd by the door. A very cosy little nook the young people had, or so everyone thought.

Olga rose at eleven o'clock each day and played the piano. Or, if the sun was shining, she painted in oils. Then, at about half past twelve, she drove to her dressmaker's. She and Dymov were very hard up, so she and her dressmaker were put to ingenious shifts to enable her to appear frequently in new dresses and make a bit of a splash. Out of an old, dyed frock, very often—or from scraps of tulle, lace, plush and silk costing nothing—some miracle of seductiveness, some dream of a dress would emerge. From her dressmaker's Olga usually drove to an actress friend to cull the theatre news and incidentally to wangle a ticket for a first night or benefit performance. From the actress she would drive to some artist's studio or picture exhibition, and then to one of her celebrities to ask him home, pay a visit or just gossip. She found a joyous welcome everywhere, being splendid, charming, very special, people told her.

Her celebrities and 'great men', as she called them, accepted her as a friend and equal, predicting with one accord that her gifts, taste and intellect would take her a very long way indeed if she didn't try to do too much at once. She sang, played the piano, painted, modelled, took part in amateur dramatics: and all this with great style, not just any old how. Whether she made lanterns for the illuminations, put on fancy dress or tied someone's cravat, the effect was always highly artistic, graceful and charming. But the brightest of her talents was a knack of striking up acquaintance with celebrities and hitting it off with them. Someone only had to make a bit of a name and get himself talked about for her to meet him and make friends with him that very day and invite him home. Every new contact was a red letter day to her. She adored notabilities, exulted in them and dreamt about them each night. She craved for them with a thirst which nothing could slake. The old ones disappeared and were forgotten, and new ones took their place, but soon growing used to them too, or disappointed, she began eagerly

seeking new and ever newer great men . . . and, finding them, began the search afresh. One wonders why.

She would have a meal with her husband at about half past four. His good nature, common sense and kindness had her in transports of joy. She kept jumping up, impulsively hugging his head, bestrewing him with kisses.

'You're so clever, Dymov, you're such a fine man,' she would say. 'But you do have one great defect. You take no interest whatever in art. Music, painting . . . you reject them both.'

'I don't understand them,' was his gentle reply. 'I have worked at science and medicine all my life, and I've had no time to be interested in the arts.'

'But I say, that's absolutely awful, Dymov.'

'Why so? Your friends know nothing of science and medicine, but you don't hold that against them. Everyone has his own line. I don't understand landscapes and operas, but if highly intelligent people give their whole lives to them and other intelligent people pay vast sums for them, then they must be important, as I see it. I don't understand, but not understanding doesn't mean rejecting.'

'Let me shake your honest hand!'

After their meal Olga would visit friends, then go to a theatre or concert and come home after midnight. So it went on every day.

On Wednesdays she was 'at home'. Hostess and guests did not play cards or dance on these occasions, but diverted themselves with various artistic activities. The actor recited, the singer sang, the artists sketched in albums (of which Olga had many), the 'cellist played and the hostess herself also sketched, modelled, sang and played accompaniments. In the gaps between recitals, music and singing there was talk and argument about literature, theatre and painting. Ladies were not present since Olga considered all women dreary and vulgar, actresses and her dressmaker excepted. Not one party passed without the hostess trembling at every ring.

'It is *he*,' she would say triumphantly, understanding by 'he' some new invited celebrity.

Dymov would not be in the drawing-room, nor would anyone remember his existence. But at exactly half past eleven the dining-room door would open and he would appear, smiling his good-natured, gentle smile.

'Supper is served, gentlemen,' he would say, rubbing his hands.

Then all would go into the dining-room, where they always saw the

same array on the table: a dish of oysters, a joint of ham or veal, sardines, cheese, caviare, mushrooms, vodka and two carafes of wine.

'My dear *maître d'hôtel*,' said Olga, throwing up her hands in ecstasy. 'You're too, too adorable! Look at that forehead, gentlemen. Turn your profile, Dymov. See, gentlemen: the face of a Bengal tiger, but a kindly, charming expression like a fawn. Now, isn't he perfectly sweet?'

The visitors ate and looked at Dymov.

'He really is a splendid chap,' they thought, but soon forgot him and went on talking about theatre, music and painting.

The young couple were happy and everything went swimmingly. The third week of their married life was not altogether serene, though —it was rather the opposite. Dymov caught erysipelas in hospital, spent six days in bed and had to have his magnificent black hair shaved to the scalp. Olga sat by him weeping bitterly, but when he felt better she put a white kerchief round his cropped head and began to paint him as a Bedouin. That was great fun, they both found. Then, a day or two after he had recovered and gone back to his hospital work, a new misfortune befell him.

'I'm out of luck, my dear', he said at dinner one day. 'I did four post-mortems today and I went and scratched two fingers. I only noticed when I got home.'

Olga was scared, but he smiled and said it was nothing, and that he often cut his hands when dissecting.

'I get carried away, my dear, and don't concentrate.'

Olga was worried. She feared blood poisoning and prayed about it every night, but all was well and their quiet, happy life resumed its course free from worry and alarm. The present was wonderful and spring was at hand, already smiling from afar and promising a thousand delights. They would live happily ever after! For April, May and June there was a holiday cottage some distance from town. There would be walking, sketching, fishing and nightingales, and then, from July right through till autumn, a painting party on the Volga, in which trip Olga would take part as an indispensable member of their society. She had already had two linen travelling dresses made, and she had bought paints, brushes, canvases and a new palette for the journey. Ryabovsky visited her almost daily to see how her painting progressed. When she showed him her work he would thrust his hands deep into his pockets, purse his lips and sniff.

'Quite so,' he would say. 'That cloud of yours is a bit off, the light's wrong for evening. The foreground's rather chewed up and

there's something, you know, not quite. . . . And your cottage has choked on something, it's more than a bit squeaky. And you should dim out that corner a shade. But altogether it's not so dusty. Nice work.'

And the more obscurely he spoke the more easily Olga understood him.

III

On Whit Monday afternoon Dymov bought some food and sweets, and set off to visit his wife at their cottage. Not having seen her for a fortnight, he missed her terribly. While in the train and then while searching a huge wood for the cottage, he felt famished and exhausted, looking forward to an informal supper with his wife, after which he would flop into bed and sleep. It cheered him up to look at the bundle in which he had wrapped caviare, cheese and white salmon.

By the time that he had found and identified his cottage the sun was setting. An ancient maid said that the mistress was out, but would be home directly for sure. The cottage was extremely unprepossessing, its low ceilings papered with writing-paper and its floors uneven and cracked. It had only three rooms. In one stood a bed, in another chairs and window-sills were bestrewn with canvases, brushes, greasy paper, and with men's overcoats and hats, while in the third Dymov found three strange men. Two were dark with little beards, while the third was clean-shaven and fat: an actor, apparently. A samovar hissed on the table.

'Can I help you?' boomed the actor, surveying Dymov frigidly. 'Looking for Olga, are you? Then wait, she'll be here any moment.'

Dymov sat and waited. One of the dark men gave him a few sleepy, languid glances and poured himself some tea.

'Perhaps you'd like a glass?' he asked.

Dymov was thirsty, and hungry too, but refused tea, not wanting to spoil his supper. Soon he heard footsteps and a familiar laugh, the door slammed and Olga swept into the room in a wide-brimmed hat with a box in her hand, followed by jolly, rosy-cheeked Ryabovsky carrying a huge parasol and camp-stool.

'Dymov!' shrieked Olga, flushing with joy.

'Dymov!' she repeated, laying head and both hands on his chest. 'Can it be you? Why have you been so long? Why, why, why?'

'But I never have time, my dear. I'm always busy, and when I am free the railway timetable never fits.'

'Now, I'm so glad to see you! I dreamt of you all night long, I was afraid you might be ill. Oh, if you did but know how sweet you are, you've come just in the nick of time, you'll be my salvation: only you can do it!

'We're having a quite fantastic wedding here tomorrow,' she went on, laughing and tying her husband's tie. 'A young telegraph clerk at the station's getting married, one Chikeldeyev. He's a good-looking boy, er, by no means unintelligent, and there's something rugged about his face, you know, a sort of bear-like quality. He could model a young Viking. We holiday visitors are all taking an interest in him and we have promised to be at his wedding. He's not well off, he has no relatives, he's a bit bashful and to let him down would be unforgivable, of course. Just think, the wedding will be after the service and then everyone will troop off from church to the bride's house. We'll have the copse, see? We'll have bird-song, sunlit patches on grass and all of us as variegated blobs against a bright green background: quite fantastic, in French impressionist style.

'But what can I wear in church, Dymov?' Olga asked with a tearful simper. 'I have nothing here, literally nothing: no dress, no flowers, no gloves. You must save me. The very fates bid you rescue me, your arrival shows it. Take your keys, dear man, go home and get my pink dress from the wardrobe. You remember it, it's hanging in front. Now, on the right of the closet, on the floor, you'll see two cardboard boxes. When you open the top one you'll find tulle all over the place and various bits and pieces, and underneath those some flowers. Take all the flowers out carefully, try not to crush them, darling, and I'll choose the ones I want later. And buy me some gloves.'

'All right,' said Dymov. 'I'll go back tomorrow and send them.'

'*Tomorrow?*' Olga stared at him in amazement. 'But you won't have time tomorrow: the first train leaves here at nine in the morning and the wedding's at eleven. No, darling, you must go tonight, tonight without fail, and if you can't come yourself tomorrow you must send the stuff by messenger. Come on, now, hurry up! There's a passenger train due in directly. Don't miss it, darling.'

'Very well.'

'Oh, how I hate letting you go,' said Olga, and tears came to her eyes. 'Oh, silly me, why ever did I promise that telegraph clerk?'

Dymov gulped a glass of tea, seized a roll, smiled gently and made for the station. His caviare, cheese and white salmon were consumed by the two dark men and the fat actor.

IV

One quiet, moonlit July night Olga stood on the deck of a Volga steamer, gazing alternately at the water and the picturesque banks. Ryabovsky stood by her side. The black shadows on the water were not shadows, he told her, but phantoms. This enchanted water with its eerie glitter, this unplumbed sky, these sad, pensive banks eloquent of our life's vanity and of some higher world of everlasting bliss . . . they were sights to make one swoon, die, become a memory. The past was vulgar and dreary, the future was meaningless, and this superb, unique night would soon end and melt into eternity. So why live?

Lending an ear, now to Ryabovsky's voice, now to the night's stillness, Olga thought that she was immortal and could never die. Turquoise-hued water such as she had never seen before, sky, banks, black shadows, mysterious joy flooding her inmost being . . . these things said that she would be a great artist and that out there, beyond that far horizon, beyond this moonlit night, in the vastness of space, she was heading for success, fame and a place in people's hearts.

She gazed unwinking into distance for some time, her fancy picturing crowds, lights, solemn music, triumphant shouts, herself in a white dress, flowers strewn on her from all around. She also reflected that by her side, leaning his elbows on the ship's rail, stood a truly great man, a genius, one of God's elect.

His present achievements were superb, fresh, extraordinary, but what he would achieve in time, with the mature development of his peculiar gifts . . . that would be something spectacular, something ineffably sublime, as could be seen by his face, his way of expressing things, his attitude to nature. He had his own special language for describing shadows, evening tints and moonlight, so that his power over nature cast an irresistible spell. He was a very handsome man, very much of an individual. Independent, free, a stranger to everything pedestrian, he seemed to live the life of a bird.

'It's a bit chilly,' said Olga with a shiver.

Ryabovsky wrapped his cloak round her.

'I feel I'm in your power,' he said mournfully. 'I'm your slave. Why are you so bewitching tonight?'

He gazed at her, he could not take his eyes off her and those eyes so scared her that she feared to look at him.

'I love you madly,' he whispered, breathing on her cheek. 'Say the word and I'll end my life.

'I'll abandon art,' he muttered with violent emotion. 'Love me, love me——'

'Don't say such things.' Olga closed her eyes. 'That's terrible. What about Dymov?'

'And what about Dymov? Why Dymov? What do I care for Dymov? There's Volga, moon, beauty, there's my love, my ecstasy, but there's no such thing as Dymov. Oh, I don't know anything, I don't care about the past. Just give me one second, one fleeting moment.'

Olga's heart was thumping. She tried to think about her husband, but all her past life—her wedding, Dymov, her At Homes . . . it all seemed so small, worthless, dull, superfluous and far, far away.

What *did* Dymov matter, actually? Why Dymov? What did she care about Dymov? Did such a phenomenon really exist? Or had she just imagined him?

'For so simple, so very ordinary a man the happiness which he has already received is quite adequate,' she thought, covering her face with her hands. 'Let them condemn me, let them curse me back there, but I'll ruin myself just to annoy them, I'll just jolly well wreck my life. One must experience everything in this world. God, how frightening, and how marvellous!'

'Well, what do you say?' muttered the artist, embracing her and hungrily kissing the hands with which she feebly tried to push him away. 'Do you love me? You do, don't you? Oh, what a night, what a fantastic night!'

'Yes, what a night!' she whispered, gazing into his eyes now bright with tears. Then she looked quickly round, embraced him and kissed him firmly on the lips.

'We're approaching Kineshma,' said someone on the far side of the deck.

Heavy footsteps were heard as the waiter came past them from the bar.

'Waiter!' said Olga, laughing and crying for joy. 'Would you bring us some wine?'

Pale with emotion, the artist sat on a bench and gazed at Olga in grateful adoration, then closed his eyes.

'I'm tired,' he said, smiling languidly.

He leant his head against the rail.

V

The second of September was a warm, calm, but overcast day. A thin early-morning mist drifted over the Volga, and at nine o'clock it began to drizzle. There was no chance of the sky clearing. Over morning tea Ryabovsky told Olga that painting was the most ungrateful and boring of the arts, that he was not an artist and that only idiots thought he was any good. Then suddenly, with absolutely no warning, he snatched up a knife and made scratches on his best sketch. After his tea he sat gloomily by a window, gazing at the Volga. No longer did the river glisten. It was dim and lustreless, it had a cold look to it. Everything around seemed to presage a melancholy, gloomy autumn. Sumptuous, green-carpeted banks, brilliantly reflected sunbeams, translucent blue distance . . . nature seemed to have taken everything showy and flamboyant from the Volga and packed it away until the coming spring, while crows flew above the river taunting its nakedness with their raucous caws. Hearing their noise, Ryabovsky reflected that he had gone to seed, that he was no good any more, that everything in this world is conditional, relative, idiotic—and that he should never have become involved with this woman.

He was in a bad mood, in other words, and felt depressed.

Olga sat on the bed behind a screen, running her fingers through her lovely flaxen hair and imagining herself first in her drawing-room, then in her bedroom, then in her husband's study. Her fancy bore her to the theatre, to her dressmaker's, to her famous friends. What were they up to now? Did they remember her? The season had started and it would have been time to think about her soirées. And what of Dymov? Dear old Dymov! How tenderly, in what childlike, pathetic terms his letters begged her to hurry home! He sent her seventy-five roubles each month, and when she wrote that she had borrowed a hundred roubles from the others he sent her the hundred too. How kind, how generous a man! Olga was weary of travelling, she was bored, she wanted to get away as fast as she could: away from these peasants, away from that damp river smell. She wanted to shed the sensation of physical impurity which she always felt while living in peasant huts and wandering from village to village. If Ryabovsky hadn't promised the others to stay till the twentieth of the month she could have left today, which would have been wonderful.

'Ye gods, will the sun *never* shine?' groaned Ryabovsky. 'How can I get on with my sunny landscape if it's not sunny?'

'But there is that cloud scene you're doing,' said Olga, coming out from behind the screen. 'With the wood in the right foreground, remember, and a herd of cows and some geese on the left. Now would be the time to finish that.'

'Oh, really!' Ryabovsky frowned. 'Finish it! Do you really think I'm such an ass that I don't know my own mind?'

'How you have changed towards me,' sighed Olga.

'And a very good thing too.'

Olga's face trembled, she moved away to the stove and burst into tears.

'Crying! Oh, this really is the limit. Stop it. I have umpteen reasons for tears, but you don't find me crying.'

'Reasons?' sobbed Olga. 'The chief one is that you're fed up with me.

'Yes,' she said, bursting into sobs. 'You are ashamed of our affair, truth to tell. You keep trying to hide it from the others, though it can't be concealed and they've known all about it for ages.'

'I ask only one thing of you, Olga,' begged the artist, laying his hand on his heart. 'Just this: stop tormenting me, that's all I want from you.'

'But swear you still love me.'

'Oh, this is sheer hell,' Ryabovsky muttered through clenched teeth and jumped to his feet. 'I'll end up throwing myself in the Volga or going mad. Leave me alone.'

'Then why don't you kill me?' shouted Olga. 'Kill me!'

She sobbed again and went behind the screen. Rain swished on the thatch, Ryabovsky clutched his head and paced the room. Then, with the resolute air of one bent on proving a point, he put on his cap, slung his gun over his shoulder and left the hut.

For some time after he had gone Olga lay on the bed crying. Her first thought was to take poison so that Ryabovsky should find her dead when he came back, but then her fancies swept her into her drawing-room, into her husband's study. She saw herself sitting quite still by Dymov's side, enjoying physical calm and cleanliness, she imagined hearing Masini in the theatre one evening. And a pang of longing for civilization, for the bustle of the city, for famous people, plucked at her heart. A local woman came into the hut and began slowly lighting the stove so that she could cook dinner. There was a fumy smell, and the air filled with blue smoke. The artists arrived in muddy top-boots, their faces wet with rain. They looked over their sketches and consoled themselves by saying that the Volga had a charm of its own, even in bad weather. The cheap clock on the wall ticked monotonously. Cold flies crowded and buzzed in the corner by the

icons, and cockroaches were heard scuttling in the thick portfolios under the benches.

Ryabovsky came home at sunset and flung his cap on the table. Pale, exhausted, in muddy boots, he sank on to a bench and closed his eyes.

'I'm tired,' he said, and twitched his brows, trying to lift his eyelids.

Olga wanted to be nice to him and show that she wasn't angry, so she went up, silently kissed him and ran a comb through his fair hair. She wanted to do his hair properly.

'What's this?' he asked, starting as if from a cold touch.

He opened his eyes. 'What's going on? Oh, leave me alone, for heaven's sake.'

Pushing her away, he moved off—looking disgusted and dismayed, she felt. Then the peasant woman brought him a bowl of cabbage stew, carrying it with great care in both hands, and Olga saw the stew wetting her thumbs. The dirty woman with her tightly belted stomach, the stew so greedily gulped by Ryabovsky, the hut, this whole way of life so adored at first for its simplicity and Bohemian disorder . . . it all struck her as perfectly odious now. She suddenly felt insulted.

'We must separate for a bit,' she said coldly, 'or else we may quarrel seriously out of sheer boredom. I'm fed up with this, I shall leave today.'

'How, pray? By broom-stick?'

'It's Thursday today so there's a boat at half past nine.'

'Eh? Yes, quite so. All right then, you go,' said Ryabovsky gently, wiping his mouth on a towel instead of a napkin. 'You're bored here, you're at a loose end and it would be most selfish of me to keep you. So go, and we'll meet after the twentieth.'

Olga cheerfully packed her things, her cheeks positively glowing with pleasure. Could it really be true, she wondered, that she would soon be painting in a drawing-room, sleeping in a bedroom, dining with a cloth on the table? She felt relieved and was no longer angry with the artist.

'I am leaving you my paints and brushes, Ryabovsky dear,' said she. 'You can bring me anything I leave behind. Now, mind you aren't lazy when I'm gone, and don't mope. You do some work. You're a good chap, Ryabovsky old sport.'

Ryabovsky kissed her good-bye at ten o'clock—this was so that he needn't kiss her on the boat in front of the others, she thought—and took her to the landing-stage. The steamer soon came and bore her off.

Two and a half days later she arrived home. Breathless with excitement, she went into her drawing-room without removing hat or rain-

coat and thence into her dining-room. Dymov was sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves with his waistcoat unbuttoned and was sharpening a knife on a fork. There was a grouse on the plate in front of him. At the time of entering her apartment Olga had been quite sure that she must keep her husband in ignorance and that she possessed the requisite wit and strength to do so, but now that she saw his broad, gentle, happy smile and his eyes alight with pleasure, she felt that deceiving the man would be mean, odious, out of the question—and as far beyond her as bearing false witness, robbing or murdering. So she made a sudden decision to tell him all. She let him kiss and embrace her, then knelt before him and covered her face.

'Now, what is it, my dear?' he asked gently. 'Did you miss me?'

She lifted her face, red with shame, and looked at him guiltily and beseechingly, but fear and embarrassment stopped her telling the truth.

'It's all right', she said. 'It's nothing——'

'Let's sit down,' he said, lifting her up and seating her at the table. 'There you are. Have some grouse. My poor darling, you're famished.'

She eagerly breathed in the air of home and ate the grouse, while he watched her tenderly and smiled happily.

VI

Half-way through winter Dymov evidently began to suspect that he was a deceived husband. It was as if *he* was the guilty party, for he could no longer look his wife in the face, nor did he smile happily when they met. So as to be alone with her less he often asked his colleague Korostelyov in for a meal. This was a small, close-cropped person with a wrinkled face who kept buttoning and unbuttoning his jacket in embarrassment when talking to Olga, and would then start tweaking the left side of his moustache with his right hand. Over their meal both doctors would talk about how an upward displacement of the diaphragm is sometimes accompanied by pulse irregularities, about how widespread compound neuritis is nowadays, and about how Dymov had found cancer of the pancreas when performing yesterday's autopsy on a cadaver bearing a diagnosis of pernicious anaemia. Both apparently discussed medicine only to give Olga the chance to remain silent, and hence to avoid lying. After the meal Korostelyov would sit at the piano.

'Ah me, old chap,' Dymov would sigh. 'Ah, well. Play something melancholy.'

Hunching his shoulders and splaying his fingers, Korostelyov would strike a few chords and start singing in his tenor voice:

'Do you know any place in all Russia
Where no suffering peasantry groans?'

Dymov would sigh again, prop his head on his fist and sink into thought.

Olga had been behaving most indiscreetly of late. Each morning she woke up in an appalling temper, with the notion that she no longer loved Ryabovsky and that the affair was over, thank God. By the time that she had finished her coffee she was fancying that Ryabovsky had taken her husband from her, that she was now bereft of both husband and Ryabovsky. Then she would recall her friends' talk about how Ryabovsky was working on something outstanding for exhibition, a mixture of landscape and genre *à la* Polenov—visitors to his studio were in ecstasies about it. But that work had been done under *her* influence, had it not? It was her influence, by and large, that had changed him so much for the better. So beneficent, so vital was this influence that he might well come to grief should she abandon him. She also recalled that he had worn a kind of grey, flecked frock-coat and a new tie on his last visit.

'Am I handsome?' he had asked languorously.

Elegant he indeed was with his long curls and blue eyes, and very handsome too—unless that was just an illusion—and he had been nice to her.

After many rememberings and imaginings, Olga would dress and drive to Ryabovsky's studio in a great pother. She would find him cheerful and delighted with his picture, which really was marvellous. He would skip about and fool around, returning joke answers to serious questions. Olga was jealous of that picture, she hated it, but she would stand in front of it without speaking for five minutes out of politeness, then sigh like one contemplating a holy relic.

'No, you've never done anything like this before,' she would say quietly. 'It's positively awesome, actually.'

Then she would implore him to love her, not to desert her, and she begged him to pity poor, unhappy her. She would weep and kiss his hands as she insisted on him swearing that he loved her, arguing that he would go astray and come to grief without her good offices. Then, having spoilt his mood, feeling degraded, she would drive off to her dressmaker's or to an actress friend to wangle a theatre ticket.

Should she miss him in his studio she would leave a note swearing to poison herself without fail if he did not come and see her that day. He would panic, go along and stay to a meal. Ignoring her husband, he spoke to her rudely and she repaid him in kind. Each found the other a drag, a tyrant, an enemy. Growing angry, they failed to notice in their rage that both were being indiscreet, that even crop-headed Korostelyov knew what was going on. After the meal Ryabovsky was quick to say good-bye and leave.

'Where are you off to?' Olga would ask him in the hall, looking at him with hatred.

Scowling, screwing up his eyes, he would name some woman known to them both, obviously mocking her jealousy and trying to annoy her. She would go to her bedroom and lie on the bed, biting the pillow and sobbing aloud in her jealousy, vexation, humiliation and shame. Dymov would leave Korostelyov in the drawing-room and come into the bedroom, embarrassed and frantic.

'Don't cry so loudly, my dear,' he would say gently. 'Why should you? You must say nothing about it. You mustn't let on. What's done can't be undone, you know.'

Not knowing how to tame this bothersome jealousy, which even gave her a headache, and thinking that matters might still be mended, she would wash, powder her tear-stained face and rush off to see the woman friend in question. Not finding Ryabovsky, she went to a second, then a third.

She was ashamed of going about like this at first, but then it became a habit and there were times when she toured all her female acquaintanceship in a single evening—looking for Ryabovsky, as everyone very well knew.

She once told Ryabovsky that 'that man' (meaning her husband) 'overwhelms me with his magnanimity.'

Such a liking did she take to this sentence that she always used it on meeting artists who knew of her affair with Ryabovsky.

'That man overwhelms me with his magnanimity,' she would say with a sweeping gesture.

Her routine remained that of the year before. There were the Wednesday soirées. The actor recited, the artists sketched, the 'cellist played, the singer sang and at half past eleven without fail the dining-room door opened.

'Supper is served, gentlemen,' Dymov would smile.

As of old, Olga sought great men and found them—but then found

them wanting and sought more. As of old, she came home late each night. Dymov would no longer be asleep as in the previous year, though, but sat in his study doing some work. He went to bed at about three o'clock and rose at eight.

One evening, when she was standing in front of her pier-glass before going to the theatre, Dymov came into the bedroom in his tails and white tie. He smiled gently and looked his wife in the eye as delightedly as of old. He was beaming.

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

'And did you succeed?' Olga asked.

He chuckled and craned his neck to see his wife's face in the mirror, for she was still standing with her back to him, doing her hair.

He chuckled again. 'I shall very likely be offered a lectureship in general pathology, you know. It's in the air.'

His beatific, beaming expression showed that if Olga were to share his joy and triumph he would forgive her everything, both present and future, and would dismiss it from his mind. But she didn't know what a lectureship was or what general pathology was. And besides, she was afraid of being late for the theatre, so she said nothing.

He sat there for two minutes, then went out with a guilty smile.

VII

It was a very disturbed day.

Dymov had a bad headache. He took no breakfast, stayed away from hospital and just lay there on his study sofa. Olga set off for Ryabovsky's at about half past twelve as usual to show him her still-life sketch and ask why he hadn't visited her on the previous day. She didn't think the sketch was very good and she had only done it to give herself an excuse for visiting the artist.

Entering his apartment without ringing, and removing her galoshes in the hall, she heard the sound of someone running quietly through the studio and the rustle of a woman's dress. She quickly peeped inside and just glimpsed a flash of brown petticoat whisking past to vanish behind the large picture draped down to the floor with black calico, easel and all. That a woman was hiding there was beyond doubt —Olga herself had taken refuge behind that picture often enough! Obviously much embarrassed, Ryabovsky held out both hands as if surprised at her arrival.

'Aha, delighted to see you,' he said with a forced smile. 'And what news do we bring?'

Olga's eyes brimmed with tears and she felt bitterly ashamed. Not for a million roubles would she have consented to speak before that strange woman, her rival: the false creature who now stood behind the picture, probably giggling at her discomfiture.

'I have brought you a sketch,' she said timidly in a thin little voice, her lips trembling. 'A still life.'

'Aha, a sketch?'

The artist picked up the sketch. As he examined it he went into the next room, affecting a disinterested air.

Olga followed him submissively.

'A *nature morte*, the finest sort,' he muttered, seeking a rhyme. 'Resort, port——'

From the studio came the sound of hurried steps and the rustle of a skirt. So the creature had left. Olga felt like shouting aloud, hitting the artist with a blunt instrument and leaving, but she could see nothing for tears and she was overwhelmed with shame, feeling as if she were no longer Olga, no longer an artist, but a small insect.

'I'm tired,' said Ryabovsky languidly, looking at the sketch and shaking his head to conquer his drowsiness. 'It's all very charming, of course, but a sketch today, a sketch last year and another sketch in a month's time . . . I wonder you don't get bored with it. I'd give up painting if I were you and take up music really seriously, or something. You're no artist, after all, you're a musician. I say, I am tired, you know. I'll have tea served, shall I?'

He left the room and Olga heard him giving orders to his servant. To avoid farewells and explanations, and above all to avoid bursting into tears, she darted into the hall before Ryabovsky came back, put on her galoshes and went into the street. There she breathed more easily and felt free once and for all: free from Ryabovsky, from painting, from the load of shame which had so overwhelmed her in the studio. It was all over.

She drove to her dressmaker's and then to see the actor Barnay, who had only arrived the day before. From Barnay she went to a music shop, brooding the while on how she would write Ryabovsky a cold, harsh letter full of her own dignity. That spring or summer she and Dymov would go to the Crimea, where she would shake off the past once and for all and start a new life.

Reaching home late that night, she sat down in the drawing-room without changing her clothes in order to write her letter. Ryabovsky

had said that she was no good at painting, so she would revenge herself by telling him that he painted the same picture year in year out and said the same thing day in day out, that he was stagnating, and that he would achieve nothing beyond what he had already achieved. She also felt like telling him how much he owed to her good offices, whereas if he behaved badly it was only because her influence was paralysed by sundry dubious personages such as the one who had hidden behind the picture today.

'My dear,' Dymov called from the study, not opening the door. 'My dear!'

'What is it?'

'Don't come into my room, dear, just come to the door. Look, I must have caught diphtheria at the hospital the day before yesterday, and now I'm feeling awful. Send for Korostelyov as quick as you can.'

Olga always called her husband by his surname, as she did all the other men she knew. She disliked the name Osip because it reminded her of Gogol's Osip. And wasn't there that jingle about the old fellow called Osip, who 'grew hoarse from a surfeit of gossip', or something vaguely like that? Now, however, Olga shouted: 'That's not possible, Osip!'

'Send for him, I'm in a bad way,' Dymov said behind the door, and was heard going back to the sofa and lying down.

'Send for him.' His voice had a hollow ring.

Cold with fear, Olga wondered whatever the matter could be. 'Why, this is dangerous!' she thought.

For no special reason she took a candle and went into her bedroom, where, as she tried to work out what to do, she chanced to glimpse herself in the pier-glass. Her pale, frightened face, her jacket with its high sleeves, the yellow flounces at her breast, her skirt with the stripes running in unorthodox directions . . . these things made her seem horrible and disgusting in her own eyes. She felt a sudden stab of pity: for Dymov, for his boundless love of her, for his young life and even for this orphaned bed in which he had not slept for so long, and she remembered his usual smile, so gentle and so meek. She wept bitterly and wrote a note imploring Korostelyov to come. It was two o'clock in the morning.

VIII

When Olga came out of her bedroom at about half past seven, her head heavy from lack of sleep, her hair unbrushed, ugly, and guilty-looking, some gentleman with a black beard—a doctor, apparently—

went past her into the hall. There was a smell of medicine. Near the study door Korostelyov stood twisting the left side of his moustache with his right hand.

'I can't let you go in, I'm sorry,' he told Olga grimly. 'It's catching. And actually there's no point, he's delirious anyway.'

'Is it really diphtheria?' Olga whispered.

'It should be a criminal offence, actually, asking for trouble like that,' muttered Korostelyov without answering Olga's question. 'You know how he caught it? He sucked some diphtherial membrane from a boy's throat on Tuesday, through a tube. Whatever for? It was so stupid, sheer folly——'

'Is it dangerous? Very?' asked Olga.

'Yes, it's the malignant kind, they say. We should really send for Schreck.'

There arrived a red-haired little man with a long nose and a Jewish accent, then a tall, stooping, shaggy individual who looked like an archdeacon, then a very stout, bespectacled young man with a red face. These were doctors coming to take their turns at their colleague's bedside. Korostelyov had done his stint, but stayed on instead of going home, positively haunting the flat. The maid served tea to the doctors on watch and was constantly running to the chemist's. There was no one to tidy the rooms. It was quiet and gloomy.

Olga sat in her bedroom and thought how God was punishing her for deceiving her husband. A silent, uncomplaining, mysterious creature, robbed of individuality by its very gentleness, characterless, weak from superfluity of kindness, was dumbly suffering without complaint somewhere in there on the sofa. And were it to complain, even in delirium, the doctors at the bedside would know that the fault was more than just diphtheria alone. They could ask Korostelyov: he knew all about it, and it was not for nothing that he looked at his friend's wife as if she were the true, the chief culprit, the diphtheria being merely her accomplice. Oblivious now of that moonlit evening on the Volga, of declarations of love, of their romantic life in the peasant's hut, she remembered only that an idle whim, sheer self-indulgence, had made her smear herself all over, hand and foot, with sticky filth that would never wash off.

'Oh, how horribly false I have been,' she thought, remembering her turbulent affair with Ryabovsky. 'Damn, damn, damn all that!'

At four o'clock she joined Korostelyov for a meal. He ate nothing, just drank red wine and frowned. She too ate nothing. At times she

prayed silently, vowing to God that, should Dymov recover, she would love him again and be a faithful wife. At times she lost track of things and gazed at Korostelyov.

'How boring,' thought she, 'to be an ordinary, utterly obscure nonentity, besides having a wrinkled face and no social graces.'

At other times she felt that God would strike her dead that very instant because she had never once been in her husband's room, fearing infection. There was also a general sensation of hopelessness, a certainty that her life already lay in ruins beyond all hope of recovery.

After the meal it grew dark. Olga went into the drawing-room and Korostelyov slept on a couch with a gold-embroidered silk cushion under his head. He snored raucously and rhythmically.

The doctors came to do their stint and went away again without noticing this disarray. A snoring stranger asleep in the drawing-room, the sketches on the walls, the quaint furnishings, the mistress of the house with her dishevelled hair and slovenly dress . . . none of that aroused the faintest interest now. One of the doctors chanced to laugh at something, and his laugh had a ring strange, timid and positively unnerving.

When Olga returned to the drawing-room Korostelyov had woken up and sat smoking.

'He has diphtheria of the nasal cavity,' he said in a low voice. 'His heart's not too good either. Things are pretty bad, really.'

'Then send for Schreck,' said Olga.

'He's been. It was he who noticed that the infection had passed to the nose. What is Schreck, anyway? He's nothing, really, Schreck isn't. He's Schreck, I'm Korostelyov—and that's that.'

Time dragged on terribly slowly. Olga lay fully-clothed on her unmade bed and dozed. She fancied that the whole apartment was jammed from floor to ceiling with a huge chunk of iron, that if only one could remove this iron everyone would be happy and cheerful. Then she woke and realized that it was not iron that weighed her down, it was Dymov's illness.

'*Nature morte*, port,' she thought, lapsing into forgetfulness again. 'Sport, resort—. And what of Schreck? Schreck, greck, Greek, shriek—. But where are my friends now? Do they know we're in trouble? Lord, help us, save us! Schreck, greck——'

And again the iron appeared. Time dragged terribly, a clock on the ground floor kept striking. The door-bell was continually ringing as doctors arrived. The housemaid came in with an empty glass on a tray.

'Shall I make the bed, ma'am?' she asked, and went out after receiving no answer.

The clock struck downstairs, Olga dreamt of rain on the Volga and once again someone came into the bedroom: a stranger, it seemed. Olga jumped up and saw that it was Korostelyov.

'What's the time?' she asked.

'About three.'

'Well, what is it?'

'What indeed? I've come to tell you that he's sinking.'

He gulped, sat by her on the bed and wiped his tears with his sleeve. Unable to grasp it all at once, she turned cold all over and began slowly crossing herself.

'He's sinking,' he repeated in a shrill voice and sobbed again. 'He's dying because he martyred himself.

'What a loss to science!' he said bitterly. 'Compared with the rest of us he was a great man, he was quite outstanding. What gifts!

'What hopes we all had for him,' Korostelyov continued, wringing his hands. 'Lord above us, he was a real scientist—you don't find his sort any more. Osip, Osip Dymov, how could you? Oh, oh, my God!'

Frantic, Korostelyov covered his face with both hands and shook his head.

'And what moral strength!' he went on, his anger mounting. 'That kind, pure, loving heart as clear as crystal. He served science, he died for science. He slaved away day in day out, nobody spared him—and a young scholar, a budding professor, had to tout for private patients and spend his nights translating to pay for these . . . disgusting rags!'

Korostelyov glared at Olga with hatred, snatched the sheet in both hands and tore it angrily as if he blamed the sheet.

'He didn't spare himself and no one spared him. Oh, what's the use of talking?'

'Yes, he was quite outstanding,' said a deep voice in the drawing-room.

Olga remembered their life together from beginning to end in all its details and she suddenly saw that he really had been an outstanding, rare person: a great man compared with everyone else she had known. Recalling what her dead father and all his doctor-colleagues had thought of Dymov, she realized that they had all seen him as a future notability. Walls, ceiling, lamp, the carpet on the floor . . . all seemed to wink at her sardonically.

'You're too late now,' they seemed to say. 'You've lost your chance.'

She rushed wailing out of the bedroom, darted past some stranger in the dining-room and ran to her husband's study. He lay quite still on the sofa, covered to the waist with a quilt. His face was terribly thin and sunken, with a greyish-yellow hue never seen on living man. Only the forehead, black brows and familiar smile showed that this was Dymov. Olga quickly felt his chest, forehead, hands. His chest was still warm, but his forehead and hands were disagreeably cold. And his half open eyes gazed at the quilt, not at Olga.

'Dymov!' she called aloud. 'Dymov!'

She wanted to tell him that there had been a mistake, that all was not yet lost, that life could still be wonderfully happy, that he was a rare, an outstanding, a great man—and that she would worship him all her life, adore him, revere him and do him homage.

'Dymov!' she called, feeling his shoulder, unable to believe that he would never wake again. 'Dymov! Answer me, Dymov!'

In the drawing-room Korostelyov was speaking to the maid.

'It's perfectly simple. Go to the church lodge and ask for the alms-house women. They'll wash the body, they'll lay it out and do whatever needs doing.'

WARD NUMBER SIX

I

In the hospital courtyard stands a small building surrounded by a jungle of burdock, nettle and wild hemp. The roof is rusty, the chimney half collapsed. The porch steps have rotted and are overgrown with grass, and only a few traces of plaster are left. The front faces the hospital and the rear looks into open country, cut off from it by a grey hospital fence with nails on top. Those nails with spikes uppermost, the fence, the hut itself . . . all have the melancholy, doomed air peculiar to hospital and prison buildings.

Unless you are afraid of nettle stings, let us take the narrow path to this shack and see what goes on inside. Opening the first door we enter the lobby, where great stacks of hospital rubbish are piled by walls and stove. Mattresses, tattered old smocks, trousers, blue-striped shirts and useless, dilapidated footwear . . . all this junk is dumped around any old how, mouldering and giving off an acrid stench.

On the rubbish, a pipe always clenched between his teeth, lies the warder Nikita, an old soldier with faded chevrons. He has a red nose and a stern, haggard visage to which pendulous eyebrows give the look of a prairie sheepdog. Short of stature, he appears gaunt and sinewy, but has an air of authority and knows how to use his fists. He is one of those dull, self-assured, punctilious simpletons who believe in discipline above all things and who are therefore convinced that people need hitting. He hits them on face, chest, back or anywhere handy, being firmly convinced that this is the only way to keep order in the place.

Next you enter a large, capacious room which is all the hut consists of, apart from the lobby. Its walls are daubed with dirty blue paint, the ceiling is caked with soot as in a chimneyless peasant hut, and you can tell that these stoves smoke and fill the place with fumes in winter. The windows are disfigured by iron bars on the inside, the floor is grey and splintery, and there is such a stink of sour cabbage, burnt wicks, bedbugs and ammonia that your first impression is of entering a zoo.

The room contains beds which are screwed to the floor. Sitting or lying on them are people in navy-blue hospital smocks and old-fashioned nightcaps: the lunatics.

There are five in all. Only one has genteel status, the rest being of the lower orders. The nearest to the door is a tall, lean working-class fellow with a glistening ginger moustache, tear-filled eyes and a fixed stare, who sits resting his head in his hands. He grieves all day and night, shaking his head, sighing, smiling a bitter smile. He seldom joins in any conversation and does not usually answer questions. At feeding time he eats and drinks like an automaton. His excruciatingly racking cough, emaciation and cheeks with red spots seem to be symptoms of incipient tuberculosis.

Next comes a small, lively, very nimble old man with a pointed little beard and black curly hair like a Negro's. He ambles about the ward from one window to another in daytime, or squats on his bed Turkish-fashion, whistling irrepressibly like a bullfinch, humming and giggling. At night-time too he evinces the same infantile gaiety and liveliness, getting up to pray: to beat his breast with his fists and pluck at the door with his finger, in other words. This is Moses the Jew, a loon who lost his reason twenty years ago when his hatter's workshop burnt down.

Alone among the denizens of Ward Number Six he is permitted to leave the hut and even to go out of the hospital yard into the street. He has long enjoyed this privilege, probably because he is a veteran inmate: a quiet, harmless idiot and the town buffoon, long a familiar sight in the streets with his entourage of urchins and dogs. In his great smock, comic night-cap and slippers, sometimes barefoot and even untrousered, he walks the streets, stopping at gates and shops to beg. He gets kvass here, bread there, a copeck elsewhere—and so he usually returns to the hut well-fed and in funds, but Nikita confiscates all the takings for his own use. This the old soldier does roughly and angrily, turning out Moses's pockets, calling God to witness that he will never let the Jew out in the street again and saying that if there is one thing he can't stand it's disorder.

Moses likes to be helpful. He brings his ward-mates water, tucks them up when they are asleep, promising to bring them all a copeck from the street and make them each a new hat. He also spoon-feeds his left-hand neighbour, who is paralysed. This is not done through pity or from humanitarian considerations, but in imitation of—and in automatic deference to—his right-hand neighbour Gromov.

Thirty-three years of age, a gentleman, a former court usher and official of the twelfth grade, Ivan Gromov has persecution mania. He either lies curled up on his bed or paces from corner to corner as if

taking a constitutional. He very seldom sits. He is always excited, agitated and tense with some dim, vague premonition. The merest rustle in the lobby, a shout outside, is enough to make him lift his head and cock an ear. Someone has come for him, haven't they? It is him they're after, isn't it? At these times his face expresses extreme alarm and disgust.

I like his broad face with its high cheek-bones, always pale and unhappy, mirroring a soul racked by struggle and ever-present terror. His grimaces are weird and neurotic, but there is reason and intelligence in the subtle traits carved on his face by deeply felt suffering, and his eyes have a warm, healthy glint. I like him as a person polite, helpful and outstandingly delicate in his manner towards all except Nikita. If someone drops a button or spoon he leaps from his bed to pick it up. Every morning he wishes his fellow-inmates good day, and he bids them good night when he goes to bed.

Besides grimaces and unrelieved tension, his insanity also finds the following outlet. Some evenings he wraps himself in his smock, and starts pacing rapidly from corner to corner and between the beds, trembling all over, his teeth chattering. He acts as if he had a high temperature. His way of suddenly stopping to look at the others shows that he has something extremely important to say, but then he shakes his head impatiently and resumes his pacing, evidently considering that no one will heed or understand him. But soon an urge to speak swamps all other considerations and he unleashes an eager, passionate harangue. His speech is jumbled, feverish, delirious, jerky, not always comprehensible, but there is a fine ring about it, about his words and his voice. As he speaks you recognize both the lunatic and the man in him. It is hard to convey his insane babble on paper. He talks of human viciousness, of brutality trampling on justice, of the heaven on earth which will come to pass in time, of the bars on the windows which constantly remind him of the obtuseness and cruelty of his oppressors. The result is like a chaotic, untidy, miscellany of old songs: old, but not yet stale.

II

Twelve or fifteen years ago a civil servant called Gromov, a man of weight and substance, was living in a house which he owned on the town's main street. He had two sons, Sergey and Ivan. Sergey contracted galloping consumption in his fourth year at college. He died,

and this death seemed to herald a whole series of disasters which suddenly befell the Gromov family. A week after Sergey's funeral the old father was prosecuted for forgery and embezzlement, and died soon afterwards of typhus in the prison hospital. His house and all his effects were sold up at auction, Ivan and his mother being left utterly destitute.

While living in St. Petersburg and attending the university during his father's lifetime, Ivan had received sixty or seventy roubles a month and had not known what hardship was, but now he had to change his way of life abruptly. All day long he had to do coaching for a pittance and he had to take on copying work—yet still go hungry since he sent all his earnings to keep his mother. Ivan couldn't stand the life. He lost heart, fell ill and gave up the university to come home. Through his connections he obtained a job as teacher in the county school here in the little town, but he didn't get on with his colleagues, his pupils disliked him and he soon dropped it. Then his mother died. He was out of work for six months, living on bread and water, after which he became a court usher: a post which he held until dismissed through illness.

Even as a young man at college he had never looked healthy. He was always pale, thin and subject to colds, he ate little, he slept badly. One glass of wine went to his head and made him hysterical. He had always needed company, but his petulance and touchiness prevented him from making close contacts and friends. He always spoke with contempt of the townsfolk, whose crass ignorance and torpid, brutish lives were, he felt, loathsome and nauseating. He spoke in a loud, urgent, high-pitched voice, always furiously indignant or admiringly ecstatic, always sincere. Whatever you spoke about he always reduced it to a single theme: the town was a stuffy, boring place to live, society lacked higher interests, leading a dim, meaningless existence and varying it with brutality, crude licentiousness and hypocrisy. Scoundrels were well fed and well dressed, honest men ate crumbs. They needed schools, a local newspaper with an honest view-point, a theatre, public recitals, intellectual solidarity. Society must recognize its own nature and recoil from it with horror. In his judgements about people he laid things on with a trowel—seeing everything in black and white, acknowledging no intermediate shades. He divided humanity into honest men and scoundrels with nothing in between. Of women and love he always spoke with fervid enthusiasm, but he had never been in love.

Extreme though his views were, touchy as he was, he was popular in town, where he was fondly known as 'good old Ivan' behind his

back. His innate delicacy, helpfulness, decency and moral integrity inspired kindness, sympathy and sorrow, as also did his shabby old frock-coat, ailing appearance and family misfortunes. Besides, he was well educated and well read. He knew everything, according to the locals, and the town reckoned him a sort of walking encyclopaedia.

He read a great deal. He would sit in the club sometimes, nervously plucking at his beard and leafing through magazines and books, and showing by his expression that he was not so much reading as gulping the stuff down with barely time to chew it. Reading must have been one of his morbid symptoms since he pounced with equal zeal on whatever came his way, even last year's newspapers and calendars. At home he always lay down to read.

III

His coat collar turned up, Ivan Gromov was splashing his way through the mud of alleys and back lanes one autumn morning to collect a fine from some tradesman or other. He was in a black mood, as he always was in the mornings. In a certain alley he came across two convicts wearing foot-irons and escorted by four guards with rifles. Gromov had met convicts often enough before—they had always made him feel sympathetic and uncomfortable—but now this latest encounter had a peculiarly weird effect on him. Somehow it suddenly dawned on him that he himself might be clapped in irons and similarly hauled off to prison through the mud. He was passing the post office on his way home after paying this call when he met a police inspector of his acquaintance who gave him good day and walked a few steps down the street with him. This somehow struck Gromov as suspicious. At home he was obsessed by convicts and armed guards all day, and a mysterious psychic unease prevented him from reading and concentrating. That evening he did not light his lamp and he lay awake all night, brooding on the prospect of being arrested, clapped in irons and flung into jail. He had done nothing wrong so far as he knew and could vouch that he would never commit murder, arson or burglary in the future. But was it so difficult to commit a crime accidentally and against one's will? Can false accusations—can judicial miscarriages, for that matter—really be ruled out? And hasn't immemorial folk wisdom taught that going to jail is like being poor: there isn't much you can do to escape from either? Now, a judicial miscarriage was only too possible with present-day court procedures, and no wonder. People with a

bureaucratic, official relationship to others' woes—judges, policemen and doctors, for instance—eventually grow so callous through force of habit that they can react to their clients only on a formal level, much as they would like to do otherwise. In this respect they are just like the peasant who slaughters sheep and cattle in his backyard without noticing the blood. Having this formal, heartless attitude to the individual, a judge needs only one thing to deprive an innocent man of all his citizen's rights and sentence him to hard labour: enough time. Only give the judge time to carry out certain formalities, for which he is paid a salary, and that is the end of the matter. A fat hope, then, of finding justice and protection in this filthy little town a hundred and twenty miles from the railway! And how absurd to think of justice, anyway, in a society which welcomes every kind of brutality as a rational and functional necessity, while every merciful act—the acquittal of an accused person, for instance—provokes a great howl of indignation and vindictiveness!

Next morning Ivan Gromov rose from his bed aghast, his brow cold with sweat, now fully convinced that he was liable to be arrested any minute. If yesterday's irksome thoughts had remained with him so long, he reflected, there must be a grain of truth in them, they really couldn't have occurred to him for no reason whatever.

A police constable strolled past his windows: no accident, that. And over there two people had stopped near the house. They were not speaking. Now, why not?

Days and nights of agony began for Gromov. When anyone passed his windows or entered his courtyard he took them for spies and detectives. At noon a police inspector usually drove down the street in his carriage and pair. He was on his way to police headquarters from his near-by country estate, but Gromov always felt that he drove too fast, with a special air, and was evidently hastening to report that a most important criminal was in town. Gromov trembled at every ring and knock on the gate, and he suffered when he met any stranger visiting his landlady. On encountering policemen and gendarmes he would smile and whistle to convey an air of nonchalance. For nights on end he lay awake expecting to be arrested, but snoring aloud and sighing as if in slumber so that his landlady should think him asleep. If he couldn't sleep he must be suffering the pangs of conscience, mustn't he? Rather a give-away, that! Facts and common sense argued that all these phobias were neurotic nonsense, and that there was really nothing so terrible about arrest and prison, if you took the broad view

and had a clear conscience. But the more intelligent and logical his reasoning, the stronger and more harrowing became his mental anguish. He was like a certain hermit who wanted to hew himself a home in virgin forest, but the more forcefully he plied his axe the more densely and vigorously did the trees burgeon around him. In the end Gromov saw how useless it all was, gave up reasoning altogether and yielded to utter despair and terror.

He began seeking seclusion and avoiding people. His job had always been uncongenial, but now it became downright unbearable. He was afraid of trickery: of having a bribe slipped surreptitiously into his pocket and then being caught, of making a chance error tantamount to forgery with official papers, or of losing someone else's money. Never, oddly enough, had his imagination been as supple and ingenious as it now was when he daily concocted thousands of miscellaneous pretexts for serious apprehension about his freedom and honour. But with this went a considerable weakening of interest in the external world, especially in books, and his memory began to fail notably.

When the snow melted in spring two semi-decomposed corpses were found in a gulley near the cemetery: an old woman and a young boy bearing signs of death by violence. These corpses and the unknown murderers became the talk of the town. To show that he was not the killer Gromov would walk the streets smiling, and on meeting anyone he knew he would blench, blush and assert that there was no fouler crime than the murder of the weak and defenceless. But soon wearying of this lie, he decided on reflection that the best thing for someone in his position was to hide in the landlady's cellar. He sat in that cellar for a day, a night and another day, frozen to the marrow, then waited for darkness and crept stealthily up to his room like a burglar. He stood in the middle of that room until dawn, perfectly still, his ears cocked. In the early morning before sunrise some stove-makers called on his landlady. They had come to rebuild the kitchen stove, as Gromov was well aware, but his fears told him that they were policemen in stove-makers' clothing. Stealing out of the flat, he dashed panic-stricken down the street without hat or coat. Barking dogs chased him, a man shouted somewhere behind him, the wind whistled in his ears, and Gromov thought that all the violence on earth had coiled itself together behind his back and was pursuing him.

He was caught and taken home, his landlady was sent for a doctor. Dr. Andrew Ragin (of whom more later) prescribed cold compresses for his head and laurel-water drops, then shook his head sadly and went

away, telling the landlady that he did not propose to call again because one shouldn't do anything to stop a man taking leave of his senses. Unable to afford living and being treated at home, Gromov was soon sent to hospital and put in the ward for venereal diseases. He could not sleep at night, he behaved childishly, he disturbed other patients and soon Dr. Ragin arranged for his transfer to Ward Number Six.

A year later the town had quite forgotten Gromov, and his landlady dumped his books in a sledge in an out-building where they were pilfered by urchins.

IV

As I said before, Gromov's left-hand neighbour is the little Jew Moses, while his right-hand neighbour is a bloated, nearly globular peasant with an obtuse, utterly witless expression. This is an inert, gluttonous animal with dirty habits. Long bereft of all capacity to think and feel, it constantly exudes a sharp, acrid stench.

Cleaning up the mess, Nikita beats the creature cruelly, takes a real swing, doesn't pull his punches. The odd thing, though, is not the beating, because you can get used to that, but the failure of that stupefied animal to respond to blows with any sound, movement or expression of the eyes: it only rocks gently, like a heavy barrel.

The fifth and last denizen of Ward Number Six is a townsman of the lower sort, a former post-office sorter: a small, thin, fair man with a kindly but somewhat sly expression. To judge from his clever, quiet eyes with their serenely cheerful look, he has his wits about him and knows some momentous and delightful secret. He keeps under his pillow or mattress an object which he never shows to anyone: not from fear of its being removed or stolen, but from modesty. Sometimes he goes to the window, turns his back on his fellows, puts something on his chest and crooks his head to look at it. Should one approach him at these times he will grow flustered and snatch something off his chest. But his secret is not difficult to guess.

'You must congratulate me,' he often tells Gromov. 'I have been put in for the Order of St. Stanislaus, second class with star. The second class with star is only given to foreigners, but for some reason they want to make an exception in my case.'

He smiles, shrugging his shoulders in bewilderment. 'I must say I never expected this.'

'I know nothing about these things,' Gromov grimly avers.

'But do you know what I'm going to get sooner or later?' continues the ex-sorter, slyly screwing up his eyes. 'I mean to have the Swedish "Pole Star". That's a decoration worth angling for: a white cross with black ribbon. Most handsome.'

This hut is probably the most boring place on earth. Each morning the patients (the paralytic and the fat peasant excepted) wash from a big tub in the lobby and dry themselves on the tails of their smocks. Then they drink tea in tin mugs brought from the main building by Nikita. Each rates one mugful. At noon they eat sour cabbage stew and gruel, in the evenings they sup on gruel left over from lunch. In between times they lie, sleep, look out of the windows, pace the ward. And so it goes on every day. Even the ex-sorter always talks about the same old medals.

Fresh faces are rarely seen in Ward Number Six. The doctor stopped admitting new lunatics long ago and there are few people in this world with a taste for visiting asylums. Simon the barber attends the ward once every two months. How he shears the maniacs, how Nikita helps him, how the appearance of this drunken, grinning barber always strikes panic into the patients . . . over all that we shall draw a veil.

No one ever looks into the ward besides the barber, the patients are doomed to see no one but Nikita day in day out.

Recently, though, a rather odd rumour has swept the hospital.

The rumour is this: Ward Number Six has, allegedly, begun to receive visits from the doctor!

V

An odd rumour indeed!

Dr. Andrew Yefimovich Ragin was a remarkable man in his way. In early youth he was extremely pious, it is said, and he was preparing for a church career, proposing to enter theological college after leaving school in 1863, but his father, a Doctor of Medicine and surgeon, supposedly uttered a scathing laugh and announced categorically that he would disown the boy if he became a cleric. How true that is I have no idea, but Ragin himself has often confessed that he never had any vocation for medicine or for science in general.

Be that as it may, he did not take holy orders after graduating in medicine. He evinced no piety, bearing as little resemblance to a man of God at the beginning of his medical career as he does now.

He has a heavy, rough, uncouth look, his face, beard, flat hair and powerful, clumsy build reminding one of some paunchy, high-handed, cantankerous highway inn-keeper. His face is stern and covered with blue veins, the eyes are small, the nose is red, he is tall and broad-shouldered, he has enormous hands and feet, and he looks as if he could kill a man with a single blow. But he treads softly, walking cautiously and stealthily. Meeting someone in a narrow corridor, he is always first to stop and give way, apologizing in a gentle, reedy little voice: not in the bass tones which one might have expected. He has a small growth on his neck which prevents his wearing hard, starched collars, so he always goes about in a soft linen or cotton shirt. Altogether he doesn't dress like a medical man. He wears the same suit for ten years on end, while his new clothes, which he usually buys in a Jewish shop, look just as worn and dishevelled on him as the old. He sees his patients, eats his meals and goes visiting, all in the same old frock-coat: and this not out of meanness but because he just doesn't care about his appearance.

When Ragin came to town to take up his post in the hospital, that so-called charitable institution was in a parlous plight. In wards, corridors and hospital courtyard you could barely draw breath for the stink. The ambulance men, the nurses and their children slept in the wards with the patients, complaining that the cockroaches, bed-bugs and mice made their lives a misery. There was endemic erysipelas in the surgical department, the entire hospital boasted only two scalpels and not a single thermometer, and potatoes were kept in the baths. The manager, the matron and the assistant doctor robbed the patients, and the old doctor (Ragin's predecessor) was reputed to have sold surgical spirit on the sly, having also set up a regular harem among his nurses and women patients. These irregularities were common knowledge in town and were even exaggerated, but people took them calmly. Some defended them by saying that only lower-class townsfolk and peasants went to hospital, and such people couldn't complain because they were far worse off at home. They could hardly expect to be fed on the fat of the land! Others pleaded that the town lacked the resources to maintain a good hospital on its own, unaided by the Rural District. People should be grateful to have any hospital at all. But the newly established Rural District Council opened no clinic either in the town or its environs on the grounds that the town already had its hospital.

Having looked the hospital over, Ragin concluded that it was an immoral institution, detrimental to its inmates' health in the ultimate

degree. The wisest course would be to discharge the patients and close the place down, he felt; but he decided that he lacked the will-power to accomplish this on his own, and that it would be useless anyway. Expel physical and moral filth from one place and it will only crop up elsewhere, so one should wait for it to evaporate spontaneously. Besides, if people have opened a hospital and tolerate it they must have a need for it. Now, these superstitions and all these sickeningly foul living conditions *are* needed since they become transformed into something useful in due course, as dung produces fertile soil. There is nothing on earth so fine that some element of pollution was not present at its birth.

Having taken on the job, Ragin adopted an attitude of apparent indifference to the irregularities. He only asked the orderlies and nurses not to sleep in the wards, and installed two cupboards of instruments. The manager, the matron, the chief medical assistant and the surgical erysipelas all stayed put.

Andrew Ragin much admires intellect and integrity, but lacks the character and confidence to create a decent, intelligent environment. As for issuing orders and prohibitions or insisting on anything, he is positively impotent, as if he had taken a vow never to raise his voice or use the imperative mood. He finds it hard to say 'give me this' or 'bring me that'. When he feels hungry he will cough indecisively.

'I wouldn't mind a bit of tea,' he will tell his cook. Or: 'How about a spot of lunch?'

But to tell his manager to stop pilfering, to sack him, to do away with his parasitical sinecure entirely . . . such things are absolutely beyond him. When people try to hoodwink Dr. Ragin, when they flatter him or bring him some blatantly falsified account to sign, he turns red as a beetroot and feels guilty—but signs it all the same. He squirms when his patients complain of hunger or rude nurses.

'All right, all right,' he mutters guiltily. 'I'll go into it later, it's probably a misunderstanding.'

At first Dr. Ragin worked very hard, seeing his patients daily from early morning until lunch, performing operations—attending confinements, even. The ladies used to say how considerate he was, and what a first-class diagnostician, especially of children's and women's ailments. But in due course he has become obviously bored with the monotony and palpable futility of his job. He will see thirty patients today, and tomorrow, like as not, thirty-five will roll up, then forty on the next day—and so on, day in day out, year in year out. But the town's

mortality rate does not decline, the patients don't stop coming. To give serious help to forty out-patients between breakfast and lunch is a physical impossibility, and the upshot can only be total fraudulence. In the current year twelve thousand out-patients have been seen, and so twelve thousand people have been cheated, not to put too fine a point on it. But it was also out of the question to install seriously ill patients in the wards and treat them on scientific principles since such principles as they possessed had nothing scientific about them. Moreover, if one left theory out of it and stuck blindly to the rules like other doctors, then the crying need was for hygiene and ventilation instead of dirt, for healthy food instead of stinking sour cabbage stew, and for decent subordinates instead of crooks.

And then, why stop people dying if death is every man's normal, regular end? Who cares if some huckster or bureaucrat survives an extra five or ten years? And then again, if one sees medicine's function as relieving pain with drugs the question naturally arises why pain *should* be relieved. Firstly, suffering is said to bring man nearer to perfection. And, secondly, if mankind should really learn to relieve its sufferings with pills and drops it would completely turn its back on religion and philosophy which have hitherto furnished a bulwark against all manner of ills, and have even brought happiness too. Pushkin suffered terribly before he died, and poor Heine lay paralysed for several years. So why should an Andrew Yefimovich or Matryona Savishna be spared pain when they lead such blank lives: lives that would be utterly void and amoeba-like but for these sufferings?

Depressed by such considerations, Dr. Ragin let things slide and ceased to attend hospital every day.

VI

His routine is as follows. He usually rises at about eight a.m., dresses and has breakfast. Then he sits in his study reading or attends hospital. Here in the narrow, dark, little hospital corridor sit out-patients waiting to see him. Orderlies and nurses dash past them clattering their boots on the brick floor, scrawny in-patients go through in smocks, corpses and slop-pails are hauled past, children cry, there is a piercing draught. Dr. Ragin knows what sufferings such an ambience causes to those stricken with fever and tuberculosis, as also to impressionable patients in general, but it can't be helped. He is met in the surgery by his assistant Sergey Sergeyevich. This little fat man with his clean-shaven,

freshly washed, plump face and soft, fluid manners resembles a senator more than a doctor's *aide* in his ample new suit. He has a vast practice in town, wears a white tie and thinks himself better qualified than the doctor, who has no practice at all. In a corner of the surgery stands a large icon in a case with a heavy icon-lamp and near that a big candle-holder with a white cover. On the walls are archbishops' portraits, a view of Svyatogorsk Monastery and wreaths of dry cornflowers. Sergey Sergeyevich is religious, he likes pomp and ceremony. That icon was put here at his expense. On Sundays a patient reads the hymns of praise aloud in the surgery on his orders and after the reading Sergey Sergeyevich tours the wards in person, wafting incense from a censer.

The patients are many and time is short, so transactions are confined to brief questions and the issue of some nostrum such as ammoniated liniment or castor oil. Dr. Ragin sits plunged in thought, his cheek propped on his fist, and asks his questions like an automaton. Sergey Sergeyevich also sits there, rubbing his hands and occasionally intervening.

'The reason why we fall ill and suffer privation,' says he, 'is that we pray badly to All-Merciful God. Yes, indeed.'

Dr. Ragin does not perform operations during surgery hours. He has been out of practice for so long and the sight of blood upsets him. When he has to open a child's mouth to look in its throat, his head spins from the din in his ears and tears appear in his eyes if the child shouts and tries to ward him off with its little hands. Hurriedly prescribing something, he gestures for the mother to remove her child quickly.

At surgery he soon wearies of his patients' timidity, of their muddled talk, of the proximity of the grandiose Sergey Sergeyevich, of the portraits on the wall and of his own questions which he has been asking for over twenty years without variation. So he leaves after seeing half a dozen people and his assistant receives the rest after he has gone.

With the pleasant thought that he has not practised privately for ages, thank God, and that he won't be interrupted, Dr. Ragin sits down at the desk in his study and starts reading the moment he arrives home. He reads a lot and always much enjoys it. He spends half his salary on books, and three of the six rooms in his apartment are crammed with books and old magazines. His preference is for historical and philosophical works, and in the medical field he subscribes only to *The*

Physician, which he invariably starts reading from the back. He always reads non-stop for several hours on end, without tiring. He does not read rapidly and jerkily, as Ivan Gromov once did, but slowly, penetratingly, often pausing at passages which he likes or cannot understand. Near his book he always keeps a carafe of vodka, while a salted gherkin or pickled apple lies directly on the tablecloth, not on a plate. Every half hour he pours himself a glass of vodka and drinks it without taking his eyes off his book, then gropes for the gherkin and takes a small bite.

At three o'clock he cautiously approaches the kitchen door and coughs. 'Daryushka, how about a spot to eat?'

After a rather poor and messy meal Dr. Ragin paces his quarters, his arms folded on his chest. He is thinking. Four o'clock strikes, then five, and still he paces about, deep in thought. From time to time the kitchen door creaks and Daryushka's red, sleepy face appears.

'Isn't it time for your beer, Doctor?' she asks anxiously.

'No, not yet,' he answers. 'I'll just, er, wait a little——'

Towards evening Michael Averyanovich, the postmaster, usually arrives: the one person in town whose company does not depress Dr. Ragin. Once a very wealthy landowner and cavalry officer, he lost all his possessions and was driven to take a job with the post office in late middle age. He has a sound, healthy look, prolific grey side-whiskers, cultivated manners and a loud, agreeable voice. He is kind and sensitive, but irascible. When a post-office customer protests, expresses disagreement or simply starts an argument, Michael Averyanovich turns crimson and trembles from head to foot.

'Silence!' he thunders.

His post office has, accordingly, long rated as an institution terrifying to its visitors. Michael Averyanovich respects and likes Dr. Ragin for his erudition and high-mindedness, but he looks down on the other townsfolk, regarding them as subordinates.

'Well, here I am,' says he, entering Ragin's quarters. 'Hello there, my good fellow. You must be tired of me by now, what?'

'Far from it, I'm delighted to see you,' answers the doctor. 'You're always welcome.'

The friends sit on the study sofa, smoking in silence for a while.

'How about a spot of beer, Daryushka?' says Dr. Ragin.

They drink their first bottle in silence, the doctor rapt in thought, Michael Averyanovich with the jolly, vivacious air of one with something fascinating on his mind. It is always the doctor who opens their discussion.

'What a pity . . .' says he slowly and quietly, shaking his head, avoiding his companion's eyes (he never looks people in the eye). 'What a great pity, my dear Michael, that our town so totally lacks people who either can or will conduct an intelligent, interesting conversation. We're under such an enormous handicap. Even our professional men don't rise above vulgarity—they're no better than the lower classes in their level of maturity, you take it from me.'

'Perfectly true. Agreed.'

'As you well know, sir,' the doctor continues with quiet emphasis, 'everything in this world is trivial and boring, higher spiritual manifestations of the human intellect excepted. The intellect marks a clear boundary line between animal and man, it intimates man's divine nature and even compensates him to some extent for not being immortal. It follows that our intellect is our only possible source of pleasure. Neither seeing nor hearing anything intellectual around us, we are, accordingly, deprived of pleasure. We do have books, granted, but that's nothing like living conversation and interchange. If you will permit a rather dubious comparison, books are sheet music, while conversation is song itself.'

'Perfectly true.'

Silence ensues. Daryushka comes out of the kitchen and pauses in the doorway to listen with an expression of dazed grief, propping her face on her fist.

'Ah me,' sighs Michael Averyanovich. 'You get no sense out of people these days.'

How healthy, happy and interesting life was in the old days, he says, and what a brilliant intelligentsia Russia once had: how highly they had prized the concepts of honour and friendship. They lent money with no security, and withholding help from a friend in need was thought disgraceful. And what crusades, adventures and skirmishes there were, what comrades, what women! And the Caucasus . . . there was a wonderful land. A certain battalion commander's wife, an eccentric, would don officer's uniform and ride up into the mountains of an evening, alone and unescorted. She was said to be having an affair with a local princeling in some tribal village.

'Holy Mother, help us,' sighs Daryushka.

'How we drank and ate, what frantic liberals we were!'

Dr. Ragin listens without hearing as he muses and sips his beer.

'I often dream of talking to clever people,' he says unexpectedly, interrupting Michael Averyanovich. 'My father gave me an excellent

education, but then forced me to be a doctor, swayed by the ideas of the sixties. If I had disobeyed him then I think I should be at the very heart of the intellectual movement now, I'd probably belong to some faculty. Not that intellect lasts for ever, either—it is transitory, of course—but you already know why I have such a weakness for it. Life is a deplorable trap. When a thinking man attains adulthood and mature awareness he can't help feeling hopelessly ensnared. And it *is* against his will, actually, that he has been called into being from nothingness by certain chance factors.

'What for? What's the meaning and purpose of his existence? He wants to learn, but he isn't told—or he is fobbed off with absurdities. He knocks, but no one opens. Death approaches, and he hasn't asked for that either. You know how prisoners linked by common misfortune feel better when they're all together? In the same way the life-trap can be ignored when men with a flair for analysis and deduction forgather and pass the time exchanging proud, free ideas. In that sense intellectual activity is a unique pleasure.'

'Perfectly true.'

Avoiding his companion's eye, quietly, between pauses, Dr. Ragin continues to talk about conversing with intelligent people while Michael Averyanovich listens attentively and agrees.

'Perfectly true.'

'But don't you believe in immortality?' the postmaster asks suddenly.

'No, my dear Michael, I do not, nor have I any grounds for so believing.'

'I admit I have my doubts too. Actually, though, I do sort of feel I shall never die. Dear me, thinks I to myself, it's time you were dead, you silly old buffer, but there's a little voice inside me saying don't you believe it, you aren't going to die.'

Michael Averyanovich leaves just after nine o'clock.

'Dear me, fate *has* landed us in a dump!' he sighs as he dons his fur coat in the hall. 'The most maddening thing is, we have even got to die here. Ah, me.'

VII

After showing his friend out Dr. Ragin sits at his desk and resumes his reading. The quiet of evening, and of the night which follows, is unbroken by any sound. Time appears to be standing still, sharing the doctor's immobility as he pores over his book, and nothing seems to

exist beside that book and the green-globed lamp. The doctor's coarse, rough face gradually lights up with a smile of joyful delight at the stirrings of human intellect.

'Oh, why can't man be immortal?' he wonders. 'Why does the brain have its centres and crannies? Wherefore vision, speech, self-awareness, genius, if all these things are doomed to go into the soil and finally to cool along with the earth's crust—and then to rotate with the earth round the sun for millions of years, all for no reason? Cooling, rotating . . . these were no reasons for calling forth man, with his lofty, almost divine intellect, out of nothingness and then turning him into clay as if to mock him.

'The transmutation of matter? But what cowardice to console oneself with such makeshift immortality! The blind workings of the natural process are even more primitive than human folly since folly does at least imply awareness and deliberate intent, of which natural processes are entirely devoid. Only a coward, one whose fear of death exceeds his self-respect, can find comfort in the thought of his body being reborn in due course as grass, as a stone, as a toad. To see one's immortality in the transmutation of matter is as strange as to forecast a brilliant future for the violin-case after a valuable fiddle has been smashed and rendered useless.'

When the clock strikes Dr. Ragin lolls back in his arm-chair, closing his eyes for a spot of meditation. Then suddenly, swayed by the fine ideas culled from his book, he casts a glance at his past and present. His past is odious and better forgotten, and the same is true of his present. He knows that, at the very time when he is mentally rotating round the sun along with the cooled earth, people are suffering from illness and unhygienic conditions in the large hospital block adjoining his own quarters. There may be someone who can't sleep and is fighting off insects while someone else is contracting erysipelas or groaning because his bandage is too tight. Patients may be playing cards with the nurses and drinking vodka. Twelve thousand persons will have been swindled in the current year and the hospital's whole activities are still based on pilfering, squabbles, tittle-tattle, jobbery and rank charlatanism, just as they were twenty years ago. The place is still an immoral institution, detrimental to its inmates' health in the ultimate degree. Ragin knows that Nikita thrashes the patients behind the bars of Ward Number Six and that little Moses runs round town begging every day.

On the other hand, Ragin is also well aware of the fantastic changes which have taken place in medicine in the last quarter of a century.

In his college days he used to feel that medicine would go the way of alchemy and metaphysics, but now, when he reads at nights, medicine moves him, arousing his admiration—his enthusiasm, even. And, in very truth, what a dazzling break-through! What a revolution! Thanks to antiseptics, operations are performed such as the great Pirogov never even dreamt of. Ordinary general practitioners venture on resections of the knee-joint, abdominal surgery produces only one fatality per hundred operations and stone matters so little that no one even bothers to write about it. There is a radical treatment for syphilis. And then there is the theory of heredity, isn't there, and hypnotism? There are Pasteur's and Koch's discoveries, there are hygiene statistics, there's our Russian rural medical welfare service. Psychiatry with its modern methods of classifying disorders, its techniques of diagnosis and treatment . . . a gigantic stride forward, all that! The insane no longer have cold water poured over their heads, they are not put in strait-jackets, they are treated decently, they even have theatrical performances and dances arranged for them—or so the newspapers say. Modern views and tastes being what they are, Dr. Ragin knows that an abomination like Ward Number Six can only exist a hundred and twenty miles from the railway in a small town where the Mayor and Council are all semi-literate yahoos who regard a doctor as a sort of high-priest to be trusted blindly even when he's pouring molten lead down your throat. Anywhere else the public and the newspapers would have made mincemeat of this puny Bastille ages ago.

'But what does it matter?' Ragin wonders, opening his eyes. 'What does it all matter? There are antiseptics, there is Koch, there's Pasteur—yet the essence of things has not changed a bit, sickness and mortality still remain. People arrange dances and shows for the lunatics, but they still don't let them loose. So it's all a snare and delusion, and between the best Viennese clinic and my hospital there is no real difference at all.'

Yet grief and a feeling akin to envy prevent him from feeling detached: through fatigue, presumably. His heavy head slumps towards his book and he cushions his face in his hand.

'I am serving a bad cause,' thinks he, 'and I get a salary from those whom I swindle, so I'm dishonest. But I am nothing in myself, am I? I'm only part of an inevitable social evil. All the provincial officials are up to no good, they all get paid for doing nothing. So it's not my fault I'm dishonest, it's the fault of the age. If I had been born two hundred years later I'd have been different.'

When three o'clock strikes he puts out his lamp and goes to his bedroom. He doesn't feel sleepy.

VIII

In a fit of generosity Rural District had decided two years previously to make a yearly grant of three hundred roubles towards reinforcing the town hospital's medical staff until a country hospital should be opened. The town invited a local doctor, a Eugene Khobotov, to help Dr. Ragin. This Khobotov is very young, still in his twenties. He is tall and dark with broad cheek-bones and small eyes: his ancestors must have been Asiatics. He arrived in town penniless with a small suitcase and an ugly young woman whom he calls his cook, and who has a young baby. Dr. Khobotov wears a peaked cap, jack-boots, and a short fur coat in winter. He is very friendly with Dr. Ragin's assistant Sergey Sergeyevich and with the local treasurer, but calls the other officials aristocrats for some reason and shuns them. In his whole flat there is only one book: *The Latest Prescriptions of the Vienna Clinic for 1881*. He always takes this book with him when visiting a patient. He plays billiards in the club of an evening, but dislikes cards. He is very much given to such expressions as 'rigmarole', 'mumbo-jumbo with trimmings', 'don't cloud the issue' and so on.

He attends hospital twice a week, does his ward rounds, sees his patients. Though dismayed by the cupping-glasses and total lack of antiseptics, he does not introduce improvements lest he offend Dr. Ragin. He considers his colleague Dr. Ragin an old rogue, suspects him of being pretty well off and secretly envies him. He would like Ragin's job.

IX

One spring evening at the end of March, when the snow had all melted and starlings sang in the hospital garden, the doctor came out to see his friend the postmaster to the gate. At that very moment the little Jew Moses was entering the yard on his way back from a foraging expedition. He wore no hat, he had thin galoshes on bare feet and he carried a small bag which contained his takings.

'Give us a copeck,' he asked the doctor, shivering with cold and smiling.

Dr. Ragin, who could never say no, gave him a ten-copeck piece.

'This is quite wrong,' he thought, looking at the bare feet and thin red ankles. 'And in this damp weather too!'

Moved by mingled pity and distaste, he followed the Jew into the hut, glancing now at the bald pate, now at the ankles. As the doctor entered Nikita sprang from his pile of junk and stood to attention.

'Good day, Nikita,' said Dr. Ragin softly. 'You might perhaps give this Jew some boots or something, or else he'll catch cold.'

'Very good, sir. I'll notify the manager, sir.'

'Please do. Ask him in my name, will you? Tell him I said so.'

The door leading from lobby to ward was open. Ivan Gromov was lying on his bed, leaning on one elbow and listening anxiously to the strange voice, when he suddenly recognized the doctor. Vibrating with fury, he leapt up and ran into the centre of the ward, his face crimson with rage, his eyes bulging.

'The doctor's here!' he shouted with a bellow of laughter. 'And about time too! Congratulations, gentlemen! The doctor honours us with his presence!

'You bloody rat!' he shrieked, stamping his foot in a frenzy never witnessed in the ward before. 'Kill the vermin! No, killing's too good for him—drown him in the latrine!'

Hearing this, Dr. Ragin peeped into the ward from the lobby.

'What for?' he asked softly.

'What *for*?' shouted Gromov, approaching with a minatory air and frantically wrapping his smock around him. 'Well may you ask!

'Thief!' he brought out with abhorrence, his lips working as if he wanted to spit. 'Charlatan! Butcher!'

'Calm yourself,' said Dr. Ragin with a guilty smile. 'I have never stolen anything, I do assure you. As for the other things, you are probably much exaggerating. I see you are angry with me. Calm yourself, please, if you can, and tell me quietly what you're so angry about.'

'Well, why do you hold me here?'

'Because you are ill.'

'Yes, I am. But aren't there dozens—hundreds—of other madmen at large because you're too ignorant to distinguish them from the sane? So why should I—why should these other wretches—be cooped up here as scapegoats for everyone else? You, your assistant, the manager and all the other hospital riff-raff are immeasurably lower on the moral scale than any one of us. So why are we shut up? Why not you? Where's the logic of it?'

'Morality and logic are neither here nor there. It's all due to chance. Whoever has been put in here stays put, and whoever hasn't runs about outside, that's all. There is no morality or logic about my being a doctor and your being a mental patient, it's sheer blind chance.'

'That gibberish means nothing to me,' said Gromov in a hollow voice, and sat on his bed.

Little Moses, whom Nikita hesitated to search in the doctor's presence, had deployed some hunks of bread, pieces of paper and little bones on his bed. Still shivering with cold, he intoned something quickly in Yiddish. He probably imagined that he had opened a shop.

'Let me out of here,' said Gromov in quavering tones.

'I can't.'

'Why not? Why ever not?'

'It's not in my power, that's why. And just think: what would you gain if I did release you? If you went off the townspeople or police would only pick you up and bring you back.'

'Yes, yes, quite true,' said Gromov, and wiped his forehead. 'It's awful. But what am I to do? You tell me that.'

Dr. Ragin liked Gromov's voice and intelligent, grimacing young face. Wanting to comfort the young man and soothe him, he sat down on the bed beside him.

'You ask me what to do,' Ragin said after a little thought. 'The best thing in your position would be to run away, but that's no use unfortunately as you'd only be picked up. Society's all-powerful when it protects itself from criminals, mental patients and other awkward customers. There's only one thing you *can* do: accept the idea that you're a fixture here.'

'But what use is it to anyone?'

'Since there are such things as prisons and lunatic asylums someone must be shut up in them, mustn't they? If not you, then I, if not I, then someone else. Just wait until prisons and asylums cease to exist in the distant future, then there won't be any bars on the windows or hospital smocks. Sooner or later, of course, that time will come.'

Gromov smiled derisively.

'You're joking,' he said, screwing up his eyes. 'You and your minion Nikita . . . you have no concern with the future, your sort of gentry haven't. But better times *are* on the way, my dear sir, you can take that from me. I may sound banal, you may laugh at me, but a new life *will* dawn. Justice shall triumph, our day will come. I shan't see it, I shall be dead, but someone's great-grandchildren will live to see it. I

greet them with all my heart and I'm glad for their sake: glad, I tell you! March forward, my friends, and may God be with you.'

Eyes shining, Gromov arose and stretched his arms towards the window.

'From behind these bars I bless you,' he continued in throbbing tones. 'Long live justice! I rejoice!'

'I see no special cause for rejoicing,' said Dr. Ragin, who found Gromov's gesture theatrical, yet most pleasing. 'There will be no prisons or asylums, and justice shall indeed prevail: as you say, sir. But the real essence of things won't change, will it? The laws of nature will stay as they are. People are going to fall ill, grow old and die, just as they do now. And gloriously as your dawn may irradiate your life, you'll still end up nailed in your coffin and thrown in a pit.'

'But what about immortality?'

'Oh, really!'

'You may not believe in it, but I do. Someone in Dostoyevsky or Voltaire says that if God hadn't existed man would have invented him. And I profoundly believe that if there's no such thing as immortality human genius will sooner or later invent it.'

'Well said,' remarked Ragin, smiling delightedly. 'I'm glad you're a believer. With such faith a man can live a merry life, even immured inside a wall. Did you receive any education, sir?'

'Yes, I went to university, but didn't take my degree.'

'You're a thinking man and a thoughtful one. You can find consolation inside yourself in any surroundings. Free, profound speculation on the meaning of life, utter contempt for the world's foolish vanities... those are two blessings higher than any other known to man. And you can possess them though you live behind triple rows of bars. Diogenes lived in a barrel, but was happier than all the emperors of this world.'

'Your Diogenes was an ass,' Gromov pronounced morosely. 'But why all this stuff about Diogenes and the meaning of something or other?'

He jumped up in sudden rage.

'I love life, love it passionately! I have a persecution complex, I suffer constant, agonizing fears, but there are moments when such a lust for life comes over me that I fear my brain will burst. I have such a tremendous appetite for life, tremendous!'

He paced the ward excitedly.

'In my day-dreams I see visions,' he said in hushed tones. 'People sort of haunt me, I hear voices and music, I seem to be walking

through a forest or along a beach, and I do so long for the hum and bustle of life.

'Tell me now, what's the news?' Gromov asked. 'What's going on?'

'In town, you mean, or in general?'

'Oh, tell me about the town first and then about things generally.'

'All right. The town is an abysmal bore, what with no one to talk to, no one to listen to and no new faces. Actually, though, a young doctor did turn up recently: Khobotov.'

'He came while I was still in circulation. What's he like then, pretty crude?'

'Well, he's not exactly cultured. It's odd, you know, there's no mental stagnation in St. Petersburg and Moscow, so far as one can see. Things are humming there, so they must have some pretty impressive people around. But why do they always send us people of whom the less said the better? Unfortunate town!'

'Yes, unfortunate indeed,' sighed Gromov, and laughed. 'But how are things in general? What do the newspapers and magazines say?'

The ward was already in darkness. The doctor stood up to describe what was being written, abroad and in Russia, and spoke of current intellectual trends. Gromov listened carefully and asked questions, but then suddenly clutched his head as if gripped by some hideous memory and lay on the bed, his back to the doctor.

'What's the matter?' the doctor asked.

'Not one more word will you hear from me,' said Gromov roughly. 'Leave me alone.'

'Why, what's the matter?'

'Leave me alone, I tell you. To blazes——'

Dr. Ragin shrugged his shoulders, sighed and went out.

'You might clean up a bit, Nikita,' he said as he passed through the lobby. 'The smell's absolutely frightful.'

'Oh, yes sir. Oh certainly, sir.'

'Now, what a nice young man,' thought Ragin as he went to his quarters. 'I think he's the first person I've been able to talk to since I've been here. He can use his brain and he is interested in just the right things.'

While reading, and then as he went to bed, he kept thinking of Gromov, and on waking up next morning he remembered meeting so intelligent and entertaining a person on the previous day, and decided to call on him again at the first opportunity.

X

Gromov lay in the same posture as yesterday, his head clutched in his hands, his legs tucked beneath him. His face was hidden.

'Hello there, my dear friend,' said Ragin. 'Not asleep, are you?'

'Firstly, I'm not your dear friend,' said Gromov into his pillow. 'And secondly, you are wasting your time. Not one word will you get out of me.'

'Odd,' muttered Ragin, flustered. 'We were having such a friendly chat yesterday, but you suddenly took offence and broke off abruptly. I put something clumsily, very likely, or I may have expressed an idea contrary to your convictions.'

'Catch me trusting you? Not likely!' said Gromov, raising himself slightly, and looking at the doctor with contempt and misgiving. His eyes were bloodshot. 'Do your spying and snooping somewhere else, there's nothing for you here. I spotted your little game yesterday.'

'What a strange delusion,' the doctor laughed. 'So you take me for a spy?'

'I do. A spy or a doctor I'm to be examined by . . . what's the difference?'

'Oh, really, I must say! I'm sorry, but you *are* a funny chap.'

The doctor sat on a stool near the bed and shook his head reproachfully.

'But let's suppose you are right,' he said. 'Let's suppose I am a deceiver trying to catch you out and give you away to the police. You'll be arrested and tried, but will you be any worse off in court and prison than you are here? And if you're sent to Siberia as an exile—or as a convict, even—would that really be worse than sitting cooped up in this hut? I don't think so. So what have you to fear?'

These words obviously had their effect on Gromov. He quietly sat up.

It was about half past four in the afternoon: the time when Ragin usually paced his rooms and Daryushka asked if it was time for his beer. The weather was calm and clear.

'I came out for an afternoon stroll,' the doctor said, 'and I'm calling on you, as you see. Spring is here.'

'What month is it now, March?' asked Gromov.

'Yes, it's the end of March.'

'Is it muddy outside?'

'No, not very. The garden paths are walkable.'

'I'd like to go for a carriage drive now, somewhere out of town,' said Gromov, rubbing bloodshot eyes as if half asleep. 'Then I'd like to come home to a warm, comfortable study where some proper doctor would cure my headache. It's ages since I lived like a human being. This place is so foul, it's unbearably disgusting.'

He was tired after the previous day's excitement: inert and reluctant to speak. His fingers shook and he looked as if he had an acute headache.

'There's no difference whatsoever between a warm, comfortable study and this ward,' Ragin said. 'Man finds peace and contentment within him, not in the world outside.'

'Meaning what?'

'The man in the street seeks good or evil in externals—in carriages and studies, that is—but a thinking individual looks to the world within him.'

'Go and preach that philosophy in Greece where it's warm and smells of oranges. It doesn't fit our climate. Now, who was I discussing Diogenes with—not you, was it?'

'Yes it was—yesterday.'

'Diogenes needed no study or warm building. It was warm there anyway, and he could just lie around in his barrel munching oranges and olives. Now, if he had to live in Russia he'd be begging to be allowed indoors in May, let alone December. He'd be doubled up with cold, you mark my words.'

'No. One can ignore cold, just like any other pain. "Pain is the vivid impression of feeling pain," Marcus Aurelius said. "Will yourself to change that impression, jettison it, stop complaining—and the pain will vanish." That's quite right. Your sage, or your ordinary thinking, thoughtful individual . . . it's this very contempt for suffering which distinguishes them. They are always content and nothing ever surprises them.'

'I must be an idiot then, since I suffer, since I'm discontented and since I am surprised at human depravity.'

'Don't say that. If you meditate more you will appreciate the insignificance of all those externals that so excite us. One must seek the meaning of life, for therein lies true happiness.'

'Meaning of life. . . .' Gromov frowned. 'Externals, internals. . . . This makes no sense to me, sorry.

'I know only one thing,' he said, standing up and looking angrily at the doctor. 'I know God made me of warm blood and nerves, that I do know, sir. Now, organic tissue with any spark of vitality must react to

every stimulus. So react I do! To pain I respond with shouts and tears, meanness makes me indignant, revolting behaviour sickens me. This is what life means, actually, or so I think. The lower the organism the less sensitive it is and the weaker its response to stimuli, whereas the higher it is the more receptively and forcefully does it react to reality. Why, it's so obvious! The man's a doctor and doesn't even know a little thing like that! Contempt for suffering, permanent contentment, never being surprised . . . it just means sinking to *that* condition.'

Gromov pointed to the obese, bloated peasant.

'Or else it means so hardening oneself through suffering that one loses all sensitivity—gives up living, in other words.

'I'm no sage or philosopher, sorry,' Gromov went on irritably. 'These things are beyond me and I'm in no state to argue.'

'Far from it, you argue very well.'

'The Stoics whom you caricature . . . they were remarkable men, but their doctrine ground to a halt two thousand years ago, it hasn't budged an inch since. Nor will it, impractical and moribund as it is. It has only succeeded with the minority which spends its time studying and sampling various creeds. The masses haven't grasped it. A doctrine of indifference to wealth and comfort, of contempt for suffering and death . . . it's quite beyond the great majority of people since both wealth and comfort have passed them by. If such people despised suffering they would be despising life itself. Hunger, cold, injury, loss, fear of death *à la* Hamlet . . . why, these feelings are the very essence of being a man! They're the whole of life, these sensations are. Life may irk you, you may loathe it, but despise it you mustn't. And so, I repeat, Stoicism can never have a future, whereas sensitivity to pain, the capacity for response to stimuli . . . these things have been moving forward from the beginning of time to our own day, as you can see for yourself.'

Gromov suddenly lost track of his thoughts, paused and rubbed his forehead with annoyance.

'I had something vital to say, but I've lost the thread,' he remarked. 'Now, where was I? Oh, yes. Now, this is my point. A Stoic once sold himself into slavery to ransom a neighbour. So even a Stoic reacted to a stimulus, you see, since so generous a deed as self-denial for one's neighbour's sake presupposes feelings of outraged sympathy. In this prison I have forgotten everything I ever studied, or else I should remember a few other things too. Well, take Christ. He reacted to the external world with tears, smiles, grief, wrath—with anguish, even.

He didn't greet suffering with a smile or despise death, but prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that this cup should pass Him by.'

Gromov laughed and sat down.

'Let's admit that man's peace and contentment are within him, not outside him,' said he. 'And let's admit that one should despise suffering and never feel surprise. But you, now—what grounds have *you* for preaching this doctrine? Are you a sage? A philosopher?'

'No, I'm no philosopher, but everyone should preach this doctrine, because it's rational.'

'Now, why do you think yourself competent in the search for meanings, contempt for suffering and the rest of it? That's what I'd like to know. Have you ever suffered? Have you any idea what suffering is? Tell me, were you beaten as a child?'

'No, my parents abhorred corporal punishment.'

'Well, my father beat me cruelly. My father was a cantankerous government official with a long nose, a yellow neck and piles. But let's go on about you. No one ever laid a finger on you in your life, no one ever frightened you, no one hit you. You're as strong as an ox. You grew up under your father's wing, you studied at his expense, you picked up a soft job straight away. For twenty years and more you've had rent-free accommodation with heating, lighting and service, besides which you have been entitled to work how you liked, as much as you liked: even to do nothing at all. Being lazy and spineless by nature, you tried to arrange things so that nothing bothered you or budged you from the spot. You delegated your job to your assistant and those other swine while you sat in the warmth and quiet, saving money, reading a book or two, indulging yourself with speculations in the sphere of higher nonsense, and also'—Gromov looked at the doctor's red nose—'by hitting the bottle. You've never seen life, in other words, you know nothing about it. You're conversant with reality only in theory. And why *is* it you despise suffering, *why* don't you ever feel surprise? There's a very simple reason. The vanity of vanities, externals, internals, despising life, suffering and death, the meaning of existence, true happiness . . . it's the philosophy best suited to a typical lackadaisical Russian. Say you see a peasant beating his wife. Why meddle? Let him beat away, they're both going to die anyway sooner or later. Besides, that peasant is degrading himself with his blows, not the person he's hitting. Getting drunk is stupid, it's not respectable, but you die if you drink and you die if you don't. A peasant woman comes along with toothache. So what? Pain is just the impression of feeling

pain, besides which no one can get through life without sickness and we are all going to die. So let that woman clear out and leave me to my meditations and vodka. A young man wants advice on what to do, how to live. Anyone else might reflect before answering, but you have your ready-made reply: seek the meaning of life or true bliss. But just what *is* this fantastic "true bliss"? That, of course, we're never told. We are kept behind these bars, we're left to rot, we're given hell, but that is all splendidly rational because there's no difference between this ward and a warm, comfortable study. Oh, it's a convenient philosophy, this is! You don't have to do anything, your conscience is clear and you think yourself a sage.

'No, sir, there is no philosophy, no thought, no breadth of vision in that, there's only laziness, mumbo-jumbo and a sort of drugged trance.

'Yes, indeed,' said Gromov, angry again. 'You may despise suffering, but you catch your finger in the door and I bet you'll scream your head off!'

'Or perhaps not,' Ragin said with a gentle smile.

'You damn well would! And suppose you suddenly became paralysed. Or say some crass upstart used his rank and position to insult you in public, and you knew he was bound to get away with it—that would teach you to refer people to the meaning of existence and true bliss.'

'This is highly original,' said Dr. Ragin, smiling with pleasure and rubbing his hands. 'Your bent for generalizations impresses me most agreeably, while your character-sketch of me . . . quite brilliant, sir! I enjoy talking to you hugely, I do confess. Well, sir, I've heard you out. Now will you be so good as to listen to me?'

XI

The conversation lasted another hour or so and obviously made a great impression on Ragin. He took to visiting the ward daily. He went there in the mornings and afternoons, and the evening darkness often overtook him deep in discussion with Gromov. Gromov was wary of him at first, suspecting him of evil intent and expressing open hostility, but then grew used to him, changing his harsh attitude for ironical condescension.

Soon rumours of Dr. Ragin's visits to Ward Number Six spread through the hospital. Why did he go there? Why did he stay for hours on end, what did he talk about, why didn't he write any prescriptions? His assistant, Nikita, the nurses . . . none of them could make sense of it.

His conduct seemed peculiar. He was often out when Michael Averyanovich called, which had never happened before, and Daryushka was extremely put out because the doctor no longer had his beer at a definite hour and was even late for his meals sometimes.

Once, at the end of June, Dr. Khobotov called to see Ragin about something. Not finding him at home, he sought him in the yard, where he learnt that the old doctor was visiting the mental patients. Khobotov went into the hut and paused in the lobby, where he heard the following conversation.

'We shall never see eye to eye and you'll never convert me,' said Gromov irritably. 'You are totally ignorant of life, you have never suffered, you've only battened, leech-like, on others' woes, whereas I've never stopped suffering from my day of birth until now. So I frankly tell you I think myself your superior, more competent in every way. I have nothing to learn from you.'

'I have absolutely no idea of converting you,' Ragin brought out quietly, regretting the other's unwillingness to understand him. 'Anyway, that's not the point, my friend. The point is not that you have suffered and I haven't. Suffering and joy are transitory, so let's ignore the wretched things. The point is that you and I are thinking beings. We see each other as people capable of meditation and discussion, and that makes for our solidarity, different as our views may be. My friend, if you did but know how bored I am with general idiocy, mediocrity, obtuseness—and how glad I always am to talk to you. You are an intelligent man and I revel in your company.'

Khobotov opened the door an inch or two and peeped into the ward. The nightcapped Gromov and Dr. Ragin sat side by side on the bed. The madman grimaced and shuddered, frenziedly wrapping his smock about him, while the doctor sat perfectly still, his head lowered, his face red, helpless and sad-looking. Khobotov shrugged his shoulders, grinned and exchanged glances with Nikita. Nikita too shrugged.

Next day Khobotov came into the hut with Dr. Ragin's assistant. Both stood and eavesdropped in the lobby.

'The old man seems to have a screw loose,' said Khobotov, coming out of the hut.

'Lord, have mercy on our souls,' sighed the grandiose Sergey Sergeyevich, carefully avoiding the puddles so as not to dirty his brightly polished boots. 'Quite frankly, I've been expecting this for some time, my dear Eugene.'

XII

From now onwards Dr. Ragin began to notice an aura of mystery around him. Orderlies, nurses and patients would shoot him quizzical glances when they met him and then whisper to each other. Little Masha, the manager's daughter, whom he used to enjoy meeting in the hospital garden . . . when he smiled and went to stroke her head she now ran away for some reason. The postmaster Michael Averyanovich no longer said 'Perfectly true!' when listening to Ragin, but became mysteriously embarrassed, looked thoughtful and sad, and muttered 'Yes, quite so.' For some reason he was advising his friend to give up vodka and beer, but he didn't come straight out with this, he hinted at it, as a man of tact, and spoke of some battalion commanding officer ('grand chap') or else of a regimental chaplain ('first-rate bloke') who had taken to drink and fallen ill, but completely recovered after going on the wagon. Dr. Ragin's colleague Khobotov visited him a couple of times, also advising him to give up spirits, and recommending him to take potassium bromide for no obvious reason.

In August Dr. Ragin received a letter from the Mayor asking him to call on most urgent business. Reaching the town hall at the appointed time, Ragin found the district military commander, the county school superintendent, a town councillor, Khobotov, and also a stout, fair individual who was introduced as a doctor. This doctor had an unpronounceable Polish surname, lived on a stud farm about twenty miles away and happened to be passing through town.

'There's a memorandum here that's up your street, like,' the councillor told Ragin after they had exchanged greetings and sat down at the table. 'Dr. Khobotov here says there ain't enough space for the dispensary in the main block. It ought to be moved to one of the huts, he reckons. Now, moving it ain't no problem, of course—but the thing is, that hut's in need of repair, like.'

'Yes, there will have to be repairs,' said Ragin after some thought. 'Say we take the corner hut as our dispensary, then I suppose it will require five hundred roubles at least. It's an unproductive expense.'

There was a short pause.

'Ten years ago,' Ragin continued quietly, 'I had the honour to report that this hospital as it stood was a luxury which the town couldn't afford. It was built in the forties, but things were different then, weren't they? The town spends too much on unneeded buildings

and unnecessary posts. If we changed the system we could maintain two model hospitals on the same money, I reckon.'

'Oh, so it's the system we want to change now, is it?' the councillor asked forcefully.

'I have already had the honour of reporting that our health department should be transferred to the Rural District.'

'You give the R.D.C. money and they'll only steal it,' the fair-haired doctor laughed.

'That's the way of it,' agreed the councillor, also with a laugh.

Dr. Ragin gazed with dull, lack-lustre eyes at the fair-haired doctor.

'One should be fair,' he said.

Another pause followed. Tea was served. Very embarrassed for some reason, the military commander reached across the table to touch Ragin on the arm.

'You've quite forgotten us, Doctor,' he said. 'But then you are a bit of a monk—don't play cards, don't like women. You're bored with the likes of us.'

Living in this town . . . oh, what a bore for any self-respecting man, they all started saying. There was no theatre, no music. At the last club dance there had been about twenty ladies and only two gentlemen. Young people didn't dance, but they were always swarming round the bar or playing cards. Without looking at anyone, Dr. Ragin spoke slowly and quietly about what a great, great pity it was that the townsfolk squandered their vital energies, their hearts and their minds on cards and gossip, that they neither could nor would find time for interesting conversation and reading, that they had no use for intellectual pleasures. Intellect was the one fascinating and remarkable thing, all the rest was vulgar triviality.

Khobotov listened carefully to his colleague. Then he suddenly asked a question.

'What is today's date, Dr. Ragin.'

After receiving an answer, Khobotov and the fair-haired doctor began questioning Ragin in the manner of examiners aware of their own incompetence. What day of the week was it? How many days were there in the year? And was it true that Ward Number Six housed a remarkable prophet?

Ragin blushed at this last question.

'Yes, it's a patient, but an interesting young fellow,' he said.

They asked no more questions.

As Ragin was putting his coat on in the hall the military commander laid a hand on his shoulder.

'It's time we old fellows were put out to grass,' he sighed.

As he left the town hall, Ragin realized that this had been a commission appointed to assess his sanity. He blushed as he remembered their questions and for the first time in his life he somehow found himself terribly upset about the state of medicine.

'My God,' thought he, remembering the doctors who had just investigated him. 'Why, these people took a course in psychiatry only recently, they sat an examination. So why such crass ignorance? They have no conception of psychiatry.'

And for the first time in his life he felt insulted and enraged.

Michael Averyanovich called that evening. He came up to Ragin without greeting him and took him by both hands.

'My dear, good friend,' said the postmaster in a voice vibrant with emotion, 'prove that you believe in my sincere good will and consider me your friend. My friend . . .

'I like you because you're so well-educated and generous-hearted,' he went on excitedly, not letting Ragin speak. 'Now, listen to me, my dear fellow. Medical etiquette obliges those doctors to keep the truth from you, but I'm going to give it you straight from the shoulder, soldier-fashion. You're not well. I'm sorry, my dear fellow, but it is so—everyone round here noticed it some time ago. As Dr. Eugene Khobotov was saying just now, you need rest and a change for your health's sake. Perfectly true, that—a capital idea! Now I'm taking my leave in a day or two and I'm going away for a whiff of fresh air. So prove you're my friend—come with me. It will be quite like old times.'

'I feel completely well,' said Ragin after a little thought, 'and I can't go with you. Permit me to prove my friendship in some other way.'

Going off on some trip without rhyme or reason, without books, without Daryushka, without beer, while so brusquely shattering a routine of twenty years' standing . . . at first the idea struck him as wildly grotesque. But remembering the interview at the town hall and his depressed state on the way home, he suddenly warmed to the prospect of a short break from this abode of morons who thought him insane.

'Now, where are you thinking of going?' he asked.

'Moscow, St. Petersburg, Warsaw. I spent the five happiest years of my life in Warsaw. A staggering city, that! Let's go, my dear fellow!'

XIII

A week later Dr. Ragin was invited to 'take a holiday': to resign, in other words. He didn't mind and a week later he and Michael Averyanovich were bowling along in a post-chaise on their way to the nearest railway station. The days were cool and bright, the sky was blue, the distant view was clear. They did the hundred and twenty miles to the station in forty-eight hours, with two overnight stops. Whenever they were served tea in dirty glasses at the coaching inns, whenever harnessing their horses took too much time, Michael Averyanovich turned crimson and shook all over.

'Shut up!' he would shout. 'Don't you bandy words with me!'

In the carriage he kept up a non-stop account of his trips in the Caucasus and Poland—so many adventures he had had, such meetings! He spoke so loudly and he looked so amazed about it all that he might have been supposed to be lying, besides which he breathed into Ragin's face while describing all this and guffawed into his ear. This irked the doctor—prevented him from thinking and concentrating.

On the train they went by third-class non-smoker to save money. Half the passengers were of the respectable sort. Michael Averyanovich quickly got to know them all, moving from one seat to another and loudly averring that one shouldn't use these disgusting railways: the whole thing was such a racket! Now, horseback riding was a different matter! You could knock up your sixty miles a day, and you felt healthy and hearty afterwards. Now, the reason why we had bad harvests was the draining of the Pripet Marshes. By and large things were in a pretty pickle! He grew heated, spoke loudly and no one else could get a word in edgeways. This endless natter interspersed with loud guffaws and eloquent gestures . . . it wearied Ragin.

'Which of us two is the lunatic?' he wondered indignantly. 'Is it I, who try not to annoy the other passengers? Or this megalomaniac who thinks he is cleverer and more interesting than everyone else, and so won't leave anyone alone?'

In Moscow Michael Averyanovich donned a military tunic without epaulettes and trousers with red piping. He wore an officer's peaked cap and cloak in the streets, and the soldiers saluted him. The man had squandered all the good patrician qualities which he had once possessed, Ragin now felt, and had kept only the bad ones. He liked being waited on, even when it was completely pointless. There might be matches on the table in front of his eyes, but that wouldn't stop him shouting

for a waiter to bring him a light. When the chambermaid was in his room he walked around in his underwear and made no bones about it. He was very off-hand with all the servants, even the old ones, and called them oafs and blockheads when he lost his temper. These were the manners of the squirearchy, Ragin thought, but they were odious.

Michael Averyanovich first took his friend to see the Iverian Madonna. He prayed fervently, bowing to the ground and weeping, and sighed deeply when he had finished.

'Even if you aren't a believer you'll feel easier somehow after a spot of prayer. Kiss the icon, old man.'

Embarrassed, Ragin did so. Michael Averyanovich mouthed a whispered prayer, while his head swayed and his eyes once more brimmed with tears. Then they went to the Kremlin, where they saw the 'Tsar Cannon' and the 'Tsar Bell', even touching them with their fingers. They enjoyed the view across the river, they visited St. Saviour's Temple and the Rumyantsev Museum.

They dined at Testov's. Michael Averyanovich scrutinized the menu for some time, stroking his side-whiskers and adopting the tone of a lusty trencherman completely at home in restaurants.

'Now, my good man,' he would say. 'What treat have you in store today?'

XIV

The doctor went about, saw the sights, ate and drank, but his sole sensation was of annoyance with Michael Averyanovich. He wanted a holiday from his friend, he wanted to go away and hide, but his friend felt in duty bound not to let Ragin out of his sight and to furnish him with as much entertainment as possible. When there were no sights to see he entertained Ragin with talk. Ragin stood it for two days, but on the third he told his friend that he was ill and wanted to stay in all day. In that case, said his friend, *he* would stay in too. They did need a rest, actually, if their feet were going to stay the course. Ragin lay facing the back of the sofa and listened, teeth clenched, to the friend who fervently assured him that France would certainly smash Germany sooner or later, that Moscow was teeming with crooks and that one should never judge a horse's qualities by its looks. The doctor's ears buzzed and his heart pounded, but he was too tactful to ask the friend to go away or be quiet. Luckily Michael Averyanovich tired of being cooped up in a hotel room and went for a stroll in the afternoon.

Left on his own, Ragin relaxed completely. How pleasant to lie perfectly still on a sofa and know you are alone in the room! True happiness is impossible without privacy. The fallen angel probably betrayed God because he wanted the privacy denied to an angel. Ragin wanted to think about what he had seen and heard during the last few days, but he was obsessed with thoughts of Michael Averyanovich.

'He took his holiday and made this trip with me out of friendship and generosity, didn't he?' the doctor brooded in dismay. 'There's nothing worse than such paternalism. Oh, he seems kind and generous all right, he is cheerful enough, but he's such a bore, such a shattering bore! He is like those people who can't speak without uttering witticisms and *bons mots*, yet leave you feeling how very dull they are.'

On the following days Ragin said he was ill and did not leave his hotel room. He lay facing the back of the sofa, suffering while his friend entertained him with conversation or resting during his friend's absence. He was angry with himself for making the trip, and angry with his friend who became more garrulous and hail-fellow-well-met every day. Ragin simply could not pitch his thoughts in a serious and elevated key.

'I am suffering from the very environment that Ivan Gromov spoke of,' he thought, incensed at his own pettiness. 'Anyway, that's all nonsense. When I'm back home everything will be the same as ever.'

St. Petersburg was no different. He stayed in his hotel room for days on end, lying on the sofa, and only got up for a glass of beer.

Michael Averyanovich kept urging him on to Warsaw.

'What do I want there, old man?' pleaded Ragin. 'You go by yourself and let me go home, I beg you.'

'Most certainly not!' Michael Averyanovich protested. 'It's a staggering city. It was there that I spent the five happiest years of my life.'

Lacking the strength of character to get his own way, Ragin went to Warsaw much against his will. There he stayed in his hotel room and lay on the sofa, furious with himself, with his friend and with the servants who stubbornly refused to understand Russian, while Michael Averyanovich—hale, hearty and jolly as ever—scoured the city from morning till evening looking up his old pals. Sometimes he didn't come home at all. After one such night, spent heaven knows where, he returned in the early morning, greatly agitated, red-faced, with hair awry. He spent some time pacing the room muttering to himself, then stood still and said:

'Honour above everything!'

After a little more pacing he clutched his head.

'Yes, honour above everything!' he pronounced tragically. 'I curse the moment when I first thought of coming to this hell-hole.

'Despise me, dear friend,' he told the doctor. 'I have lost all my money gambling. You must lend me five hundred roubles!'

Counting out five hundred roubles, Ragin silently handed them to his friend, who, still crimson with shame and rage, mumbled some superfluous oath, put his cap on and went out. Returning two hours later, he flopped in an arm-chair and gave a loud sigh.

'Honour is saved,' said he. 'So let us be on our way, my friend. I won't stay one minute longer in this bloody city. Swindlers! Austrian spies!'

It was November when the friends returned to their town and snow lay deep in the streets. Dr. Khobotov was doing Ragin's job, but was still living in his old lodgings, waiting for Ragin to come back and move out of his hospital rooms. The ugly woman whom he called his cook was already established in one of the out-buildings.

In town new rumours were circulating about the hospital. The ugly woman was said to have quarrelled with the manager, and he was alleged to have gone down on his knees and asked her forgiveness.

Ragin had to find himself new lodgings on the day after his arrival.

'Excuse an indiscreet question, my friend,' said the postmaster timidly, 'but what are your means?'

Ragin silently counted his money.

'Eighty-six roubles,' he replied.

'I didn't mean that.' Michael Averyanovich was embarrassed, not grasping the doctor's purport. I meant how much money do you have altogether.'

'I've just told you, eighty-six roubles. I have no more.'

Michael Averyanovich had thought the doctor a man of honour and integrity, but he still suspected him of having tucked away at least twenty thousand. Now that he knew Ragin for a pauper with nothing to live on, he suddenly burst into tears for some reason and embraced his friend.

XV

Dr. Ragin was now living in a three-windowed cottage belonging to a Mrs. Belov, a townswoman of the lower sort. This cottage had only three rooms apart from the kitchen. Two of them, with windows on the street, were occupied by the doctor while Daryushka,

Mrs. Belov and her three children lived in the third and the kitchen. The landlady's lover, a rowdy, drunken yokel who terrified the children and Daryushka, sometimes stayed the night. When he turned up and installed himself in the kitchen, clamouring for vodka, everyone felt uncomfortable. Taking pity on the crying children, the doctor took them into his room and laid them to rest on the floor, which gave him great pleasure.

He still rose at eight in the morning, had tea and then sat down to read his old books and magazines—he couldn't afford new ones. Whether because the books were old, or perhaps because of his changed circumstances, reading no longer held his attention, but tired him. For the sake of something to do, he was making a detailed catalogue of his books, gluing labels to the spines and finding this meticulous, mechanical work more interesting than reading. In some mysterious way the monotonous fiddling relieved his brain, his mind would go blank and time passed quickly. Peeling potatoes in the kitchen with Daryushka or picking dirt out of the buckwheat . . . even that he found interesting. On Saturdays and Sundays he went to church. Standing by the wall and screwing up his eyes, he listened to the choir and thought about his father, his mother, his university and about different religions. He felt relaxed and sad. Leaving the church later, he would find himself regretting that the service had ended so soon.

He twice went to the hospital to talk to Gromov, but on each occasion Gromov was unusually agitated and angry. He asked to be left in peace, saying that he was utterly sick of trivial tittle-tattle and required of these damn blackguards only one recompense for his sufferings: solitary confinement. Would they deny him even that? As Ragin was taking farewell and wishing him good night each time, Gromov snarled and told him to go to hell.

Now Ragin didn't know whether to go and see Gromov a third time. He wanted to, though.

Ragin had been accustomed to patrolling his rooms in the afternoons and thinking, but now he would lie facing the back of his sofa between lunch and afternoon tea, indulging in niggling reflections which he was quite unable to repress. He was hurt at receiving neither a pension nor a lump sum in return for more than twenty years' service. He hadn't done an honest job, admittedly, but all functionaries receive pensions without distinction, don't they, honest or dishonest? It's just the way things are done nowadays, to be fair to every one—it isn't your moral qualities or competence, it's just doing your job, however you

do it, that earns you your rank, medals and pension. So why should Ragin be the one exception? He had absolutely no money. He was ashamed to pass the local shop and see the woman who kept it. There were thirty-two roubles owing for beer already and Mrs. Belov was owed money too. Daryushka was selling old clothes and books on the side, and she lied to the landlady: said the doctor was expecting a large sum of money shortly.

He was angry with himself for spending a thousand roubles' savings on his holiday. How useful that sum would be now! He was also annoyed at not being left in peace. Khobotov thought himself in duty bound to visit his sick colleague from time to time. Everything about the man disgusted Ragin: his smug face, his bad manners, his patronizing air, his use of the word 'colleague', his jack-boots. Most odious of all, Khobotov felt obliged to give Ragin medical treatment and believed that he was actually doing so. He brought a phial of potassium bromide on each visit, and some rhubarb pills.

Michael Averyanovich also felt obliged to visit his friend and amuse him. He always entered Ragin's room with an air of bogus nonchalance, uttering an affected guffaw, and assuring his friend that he looked splendid today and that matters were on the mend, thank God—from which it might be deduced that he thought his friend's situation desperate. He still hadn't paid back the money borrowed in Warsaw and was weighed down by a burden of guilt. Being on edge, he tried to guffaw the more uproariously and to tell funnier stories. Now apparently never-ending, his anecdotes and tales were excruciating both to Ragin and himself.

Ragin usually lay on the sofa during these visits, listening with his face to the wall and his teeth clenched. Layers of scum seemed to be forming inside him, and after each of his friend's visits he felt as if these deposits were mounting higher and higher until they seemed to be clutching at his throat.

Trying to suppress trivial worries, he quickly thought about himself, Khobotov and Michael Averyanovich all being bound to die and vanish without trace sooner or later. If one imagined a ghost flashing through space past the earth in a million years' time, it would see nothing but clay and naked crags. Culture, moral laws . . . it will all disappear, it won't even have burdocks growing on it. So what if you *are* ashamed to face a shopkeeper? What *of* the wretched Khobotov? Or Michael Averyanovich's irksome friendship? These things were mere insubstantial trifles.

Such arguments no longer helped, though. Barely had he pictured the earth's globe in a million years' time before jack-booted Khobotov popped up behind a naked crag—or Michael Averyanovich, forced guffaw and all. One could even hear his mortified whisper about that Warsaw loan.

'I'll pay you back in a day or two, old man. You rely on me.'

XVI

One afternoon Michael Averyanovich arrived when Ragin was lying on the sofa and Khobotov chanced to turn up with his potassium bromide at the same time. Ragin rose ponderously to a sitting position and braced both hands on the sofa.

'Well, old man, you're a far better colour than you were yesterday,' began Michael Averyanovich. 'You look no end of a lad—by golly, so you do!'

'It's high time you were on the mend, dear colleague,' yawned Khobotov. 'You must be sick of all this rigmarole.'

'Oh, we're on the mend all right,' said jolly Michael Averyanovich. 'We shall live another hundred years, shan't we now?'

'I won't say a hundred, but we'll hold out for another twenty,' Khobotov consoled him. 'Don't worry, dear colleague, don't despair. And don't cloud the issue, now.'

'We'll show what stuff we're made of,' guffawed Michael Averyanovich, slapping his friend on the knee. 'We'll show them a thing or two. We'll be off to the Caucasus next summer with a bit of luck, and we'll ride all over it on horseback—clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop! And when we get back from the Caucasus it'll be wedding bells for us, I shouldn't wonder.'

Michael Averyanovich gave a crafty wink.

'We'll marry you, my dear old pal, we'll marry you off.'

Ragin suddenly felt the deposit of scum reach the level of his throat. His heart pounded violently.

'That's pretty cheap,' he said, quickly rising to his feet and going over to the window. 'Can't you see you're talking vulgar nonsense?'

He wanted to continue gently and politely, but suddenly clenched his fists in spite of himself, lifting them above his head.

'Leave me alone!' he shouted in a strange voice, turning crimson and trembling all over. 'Clear out of here! Both of you, clear out!'

Michael Averyanovich and Khobotov stood up and stared at him: first with amazement, then in fear.

'Get out, both of you!' Ragin kept shouting. 'Imbeciles! Half-wits! I don't need your friendship, you oaf, or your medicines. Oh, what a rotten, dirty business!'

Exchanging frantic glances, Khobotov and Michael Averyanovich backed towards the door and debouched into the lobby. Ragin seized the bottle of potassium bromide. He hurled it after them and it crashed, ringing, on the threshold.

'You go to hell!' Ragin bellowed tearfully, rushing into the lobby. 'To blazes with you!'

After his visitors had left Ragin lay on the sofa, trembling as if with a fever.

'Imbeciles! Half-wits!' he kept repeating for some time.

His first thought on calming down was how terribly embarrassed and depressed poor Michael Averyanovich must feel, and how horrible all this was. Nothing like it had ever happened before. Where were his intellect and tact? What of his search for the meaning of things, his philosophical detachment?

Ashamed and annoyed with himself, the doctor lay awake all night and went to the post office at ten o'clock next morning to apologize to Michael Averyanovich.

The postmaster was deeply moved.

'We'll forget the whole thing,' sighed he, firmly shaking Ragin's hand. 'Let bygones be bygones.

'Bring a chair, Lyubavkin!' he suddenly yelled, so loudly that the postal staff and customers all started.

'And *you* can wait!' he yelled at a peasant woman who was thrusting a registered letter towards him through the grille. 'Can't you see I'm busy?

'We'll forget all about it,' he continued, addressing Ragin affectionately. 'Now, sit down, my dear chap, I do implore you.'

He stroked his knees in silence for a minute.

'I never even dreamt of taking offence,' he said. 'One must make allowances for illness, I know that. Yesterday's attack alarmed the doctor and myself, and we had a long talk about you afterwards. Why won'tyou take your health seriously, old man? You can't go on like this.

'Excuse an old friend's bluntness,' Michael Averyanovich whispered, 'but you do live under most unsuitable conditions: cramped and dirty, with no one to nurse you and no money for treatment. My dear friend, the doctor and I do beg you most earnestly to heed our advice and go into hospital. You will be properly fed there, you'll be nursed and you'll

receive treatment. Eugene Khobotov may be a bit uncouth, between ourselves. Still, he does know his stuff and he is completely reliable. He has promised to attend to you.'

Ragin was moved by the postmaster's sincere sympathy and by the tears which suddenly glistened on his cheeks.

'Don't believe a word of it, my good sir,' he whispered, laying his hand on his heart. 'Don't believe them, it's all a trick. There's only one thing wrong with me: it has taken me twenty years to find a single intelligent man in the whole town, and he is insane. I'm not ill at all, I'm just trapped in a vicious circle from which there is no way out. But I don't mind, I'm ready for anything.'

'Then go into hospital, my dear fellow.'

'It can be a hole in the ground for all I care.'

'Promise me you'll do everything Dr. Khobotov says, old man.'

'All right, I promise. But I repeat, sir, I am caught up in a vicious circle. Everything, even my friends' sincere sympathy, tends the same way now: to my ruin. I'm finished and I'm man enough to recognize it.'

'You'll get better, old chap.'

'Why talk like that?' asked Ragin irritably. 'What I am now experiencing . . . most people go through it at the end of their lives. When you are told you have something like bad kidneys or an enlarged heart and you take treatment, when you're called a lunatic or a criminal—when people suddenly take notice of you, in other words—then you can be sure you are trapped in a vicious circle from which you will never escape. The more you try to get away the more you are enmeshed in the toils. You may as well give in because no human effort will save you now, or that's what I think.'

Meanwhile a crowd was gathering by the grille. Not wanting to be a nuisance, Ragin stood up and began saying good-bye. Michael Averyanovich made him repeat his promise and saw him to the outside door.

Late that afternoon Khobotov unexpectedly presented himself to Dr. Ragin in his short fur coat and jack-boots.

'I have some business with you, dear colleague,' he said in a tone which seemed to dismiss the previous day's happenings. 'Now, how about coming along to a little consultation, eh?'

Believing that Khobotov wanted to take him for a stroll or really would help him to earn some money, Ragin put his hat and coat on, and they went into the street together. Ragin was glad of the chance to redress the wrong which he had done on the previous day and to make

peace, so he felt grateful to Khobotov for not breathing a hint about the matter: evidently, to spare his feelings. Such delicacy was hardly to be expected from a being so uncivilized.

'And where is your patient?' asked Ragin.

'In the hospital. I've been wanting to show you this for some time: a most fascinating case.'

Entering the hospital yard, they skirted the main block on their way to the hut where the lunatics were housed: all this in silence for some reason. When they entered the hut Nikita jumped up as usual and stood to attention.

'One of these people has a lung complication,' said Khobotov in an undertone, entering the ward with Ragin.

'Now, you wait here, I'll be back in a moment. I'll just fetch my stethoscope.'

He left.

XVII

Darkness was already falling and Ivan Gromov lay on his bed with his face buried in his pillow. The paralysed patient sat immobile, quietly weeping and moving his lips. The fat peasant and the former post-office sorter were asleep. It was quiet.

Ragin sat on Gromov's bed and waited. But half an hour passed, and instead of Khobotov it was Nikita who came into the ward with a hospital smock, underclothes and slippers clasped in his arms.

'Kindly put these on, sir,' he said quietly.

'Now, here's your bed, you come this way,' he added, pointing to an empty bed which had obviously been brought in recently. 'It's all right, you'll get better, God willing.'

Now Ragin understood. He went wordlessly to the bed indicated by Nikita and sat down. Seeing Nikita standing there waiting, he took off all his clothes and felt embarrassed. Then he put on the hospital clothes. The pants were too short, the shirt was too long, the smock stank of smoked fish.

'You'll get better, God willing,' repeated Nikita.

He collected Ragin's clothing in his arms, went out and closed the door behind him.

'Oh, who cares?' thought Ragin, bashfully wrapping his smock around him and feeling like a convict in his new garb. 'Nothing matters. Tail-coat, uniform or smock . . . whatever you wear, it's all the same.'

What about his watch, though? And the notebook in his side pocket? What of his cigarettes? And where had Nikita taken his clothes? Now perhaps he would never have occasion to put on his trousers, waistcoat and boots for the rest of his life. All this was a bit weird at first—mysterious, even. Ragin was still convinced that there was no difference at all between Mrs. Belov's house and Ward Number Six, that everything on this earth is folly and vanity—yet his hands trembled, his legs grew cold, and he was afraid of Gromov suddenly standing up and seeing him in this smock. He got up, paced about, then sat down again.

He sat for a further half hour, then another hour, and was bored to tears. Could one really spend a day or a week here—years, even, like these people? Here he was having sat down, walked about, then sat down again. One could go and look out of the window and cross the room again. But what next? Was one to sit like this all the time like a stuffed dummy, just thinking? No, one could hardly do that.

Ragin lay down, but at once stood up again, wiped the cold sweat from his brow with his sleeve and smelt his whole face stinking of smoked fish. He paced about again.

'This is some misunderstanding,' he said, spreading his arms in perplexity. 'It must be cleared up, it's a misunderstanding——'

Then Ivan Gromov awoke, sat up, propped his cheeks on his fists. He spat. He gave the doctor a lazy glance, obviously not understanding for a minute, but then a malevolent leer suddenly came over his sleepy face.

'Oho, so they've shoved you in here too, have they, old man,' he said in a voice hoarse with sleep, closing one eye. 'Welcome, indeed. So far you've been the vampire, now it's your turn to be thrown to the bloodsuckers! An excellent idea!'

'This is some misunderstanding,' Ragin said, fearing Gromov's words. He shrugged his shoulders.

'It's a misunderstanding,' he repeated.

Gromov spat again and lay down.

'Oh, blast this life!' he grumbled. 'And the really galling, wounding thing is that it won't end with any recompense for sufferings or operatic apotheosis, will it? It will end in death. Some peasants will come and drag one's corpse into a cellar by its hands and feet. Ugh! Oh well, never mind, we'll have our fun in the next world. I shall come back from the other world and haunt these rats. I'll scare them, I'll turn their hair white.'

Little Moses came in, saw the doctor and held out his hand.

'Give us a copeck,' he said.

XVIII

Ragin went over to the window and looked out into open country. Darkness was already falling and a cold, crimson moon was rising above the horizon on the right. Not far from the hospital fence, no more than a couple of hundred yards away, stood a tall white building with a stone wall round it: the prison.

'So this is reality,' thought Ragin, terrified.

Moon, prison, the nails on the fence, a distant flame in the glue factory . . . it all terrified him. Hearing a sigh behind him, Ragin turned and saw a man with shining stars and medals on his chest who smiled and artfully winked an eye. That too struck Ragin as terrifying.

Ragin told himself that there was nothing peculiar about a moon and a prison, that even sane persons wear medals, and that everything would rot and turn to clay in time, but despair suddenly overwhelmed him and he clutched the window-bars with both hands, shaking them with all his strength. The iron grille did not yield.

Then, to lull his fears, he went to Gromov's bed and sat down.

'I don't feel too grand, old chap,' he muttered, trembling and wiping off the cold sweat. 'I'm feeling a little low.'

'Then how about a spot of philosophy?' jeered Gromov.

'Oh, God, my God! Yes, er, quite so. You, sir, once remarked that there's no Russian philosophy, but that all Russians, nonentities included, are philosophers.

'But the philosophic theorizings of nonentities don't do any harm, do they?' Ragin asked, his tone suggesting that he wanted to weep and arouse sympathy. 'So why laugh at my misfortunes, dear friend? And why shouldn't nonentities talk philosophy if they're dissatisfied? An intelligent, well-educated, proud, freedom-loving man made in God's image . . . and his only outlet is to be a doctor in a dirty, stupid little town surrounded by cupping-glasses, leeches and mustard plasters all his life! How bogus, how parochial, ye Gods, how cheap!'

'Stuff and nonsense. If you hated doctoring you should have been a Minister of the Crown.'

'There's nothing one *can* be, I tell you. And we're so feeble, my friend. I used to be detached, I used to argue confidently and sensibly, but it only took a bit of rough handling to make me lose heart and cave

in. We're a rotten, feeble lot. You are the same, my dear chap. You're intelligent, you have integrity, you imbibed high principles at your mother's breast, but barely were you launched on life before you tired and sickened. You're feeble, I tell you.'

Besides fear and resentment, some other depressing sensation had been nagging at Ragin ever since nightfall. In the end he realized that he wanted his beer and a smoke.

'I'm just going out, my dear chap,' he said. 'I'll tell them to bring us a light. I can't manage like this, can't cope——'

Ragin went and opened the door, but Nikita jumped up in a flash and blocked his path.

'And just where do you think you're off to?' he asked. 'None of that, now! It's bed-time.'

Ragin was flabbergasted. 'But I only want a turn in the yard for a minute.'

'None of that, now. It ain't allowed, you know that.'

Slamming the door behind him, Nikita leant his back against it.

Ragin shrugged his shoulders. 'But what does it matter if I go out for a bit?' he asked.

'I don't understand, Nikita, I *must* go out,' he said in quavering tones. 'I've got to.'

'Don't you give me no trouble, we can't have that,' Nikita cautioned him.

'Oh, what the blazes *is* going on?' Gromov suddenly shouted and jumped up. 'What right has he to stop you? How dare they keep us here? The law, I think, states clearly enough that no one may be deprived of his liberty without a court order. It's an outrage, it's sheer tyranny!'

'Of course it is,' said Ragin, encouraged by Gromov's shout. 'I *must* go out, I've got to! He has no right to do this. Let me out of here, I tell you!'

'Do you hear me, you stupid bastard?' shouted Gromov, banging his fist on the door. 'Open up or I'll break down the door, you bloody savage!'

'Open up!' shouted Ragin, shaking all over. 'I insist!'

'You just say one word more!' Nikita answered from behind the door. 'Just you try it, that's all!'

'At least go and fetch Dr. Khobotov. Tell him I asked him to come over, er, for a minute.'

'The doctor will be along tomorrow anyway.'

'They'll never let us out,' Gromov was saying. 'They'll let us rot here. Oh Lord, can there really be no hell in the next world, will these blackguards really get away with it? It's so unfair!

'Open up, scum, I'm choking!' he shouted hoarsely, charging the door. 'I'll beat my brains out! Murdering bastards!'

Nikita swiftly opened the door, roughly shoved Ragin back with both hands and a knee, then swung and punched him in the face. Ragin felt as if a vast wave of salt water had broken over his head and swept him to his bed. And his mouth did indeed taste salty—because blood was coming from his teeth, probably. As if trying to swim away, he struck out and gripped someone's bed. As he did so he felt Nikita hit him twice in the back.

Gromov gave a loud shriek. He must have been hit too.

Then all was quiet. Moonlight filtered through the bars, a network of shadows lay on the floor. It was horrible. Ragin lay down and held his breath—terrified, awaiting another blow. He felt as if someone had stuck a sickle in him and twisted it a few times inside his chest and guts. He bit the pillow in his pain and clenched his teeth. Then suddenly a fearful thought past all bearing flashed through the chaos of his mind: that just such a pain must be the daily lot, year in year out, of these men who loomed before him like black shadows in the moonlight. How could it be that for twenty years and more he had ignored that—and ignored it wilfully? He had not known pain, he had had no conception of it, so this wasn't his fault. And yet his conscience proved as tough and obdurate as Nikita, flooding him from head to heels with an icy chill. He leapt up, wanting to shout at the top of his voice, wanting to rush off and kill Nikita, then Khobotov, then the manager, then Khobotov's assistant and finally himself. But no noise came from his chest, his legs would not obey him. Panting, he ripped the smock and shirt on his chest, and flopped unconscious on his bed.

XIX

On the next morning he had a headache, his ears buzzed, his whole body felt exhausted. He was not ashamed to recall his feebleness of the previous day. He had been cowardly yesterday, he had even been scared of the moon, he had frankly expressed feelings and thoughts which he had never suspected himself of harbouring: those ideas on the discontents of theorizing nonentities, for instance. But now he cared nothing for all that.

He neither ate nor drank, but lay still and silent.

'I don't care,' he thought as they asked him their questions. 'I'm not answering, I just don't care.'

Michael Averyanovich arrived that afternoon with a quarter of a pound of tea and a pound of jam. Daryushka came too and stood near the bed for a whole hour, her face expressing dazed grief. Dr. Khobotov also visited. He brought a bottle of potassium bromide and told Nikita to fumigate the ward.

Late that afternoon Ragin died of a stroke. His first sensation was of a devastating feverish chill and nausea. Something quite sickening seemed to permeate his whole body, even his fingers, sweeping from his stomach to his head, swamping his eyes and ears. A green light flashed in his eyes. Knowing that his end was near, Ragin remembered that Gromov, Michael Averyanovich and millions of others believed in immortality. Now, what if there really were such a thing? But he didn't want any immortality, he only thought about it for a moment. A herd of deer, extraordinarily handsome and graceful, of which he had been reading on the previous day, darted past him. A peasant woman held out a registered letter, Michael Averyanovich said something.

Then it all vanished. Dr. Andrew Yefimovich Ragin plunged into eternal oblivion.

The peasant orderlies came, seized his hands and feet, and hauled him off to the chapel. There he lay on the table, open-eyed and bathed in moonlight at night. On the next morning Sergey Sergeyevich came, prayed devoutly before the crucifix and closed his ex-boss's eyes.

A day later Ragin was buried. Only Michael Averyanovich and Daryushka went to the funeral.

ARIADNE

On the deck of the Odessa–Sevastopol steamer a rather good-looking man with a full beard came up and asked me for a light.

'Notice those Germans sitting by the deck-house?' he asked. 'When Germans or Englishmen meet, they talk about crops, the price of wool or personal affairs, yet somehow when we Russians meet, we always talk about women and abstract ideas. Mainly women, though.'

I knew him by sight because we had both come in on the train from abroad the day before and I had seen him at the customs at Volochisk, standing with his lady companion before a mountain of suitcases and hampers full of feminine attire. He was annoyed and much disheartened at having to pay duty on some odd bit of silk, and his companion protested and threatened to complain. Then on the way to Odessa I saw him taking cakes and oranges along to the ladies' compartment.

It was rather damp and the sea was a little rough, so the women had gone to their cabins. The bearded man sat down beside me.

'Yes,' he went on. 'When Russians meet they only discuss abstract subjects and women. We're pompous intellectuals forever laying down the law and we can't tackle a problem at all unless it's on a very lofty plane. A Russian actor can't act the fool—even in a farce he feels he has to be profound—and the rest of us are just the same. Even our small talk must be on the most exalted level. We're not bold, sincere or natural enough, that's why. And why do we keep on about women so? Because we aren't satisfied, I think. We idealize women too much and make demands out of all proportion to what we're actually likely to get. We don't get what we want or anything like it. Hence our dissatisfaction, shattered hopes and wounded spirits, and you can't have a sore point without wanting to talk about it. Would it bore you if I went on?'

'Not at all.'

'Then may I introduce myself?' he asked, rising slightly from his seat. 'I'm Ivan Shamokhin, a landowner from the Moscow district, you might say. As for you—I know you well.

He sat down again and went on, looking into my eyes in a frank, friendly sort of way.

'This endless talk about women—a second-rate philosopher like Max Nordau would put it down to sex mania, the serf-owning

mentality or something, but that's not my view. We're dissatisfied because we're idealists, I tell you. We want the creatures who bear us and our children to be superior to us and everything else on God's earth. As young men we feel romantic adoration for our beloved. To us love and happiness are one and the same. We Russians look down on anyone who doesn't marry for love, we find lust ridiculous and disgusting, and our most successful novels and stories are those in which the women are beautiful, romantic and exalted. Russians have raved over Raphael's Madonna and worried about women's rights for years, but that isn't a pose, believe me. The trouble is this, though. No sooner do we marry or have a love affair than in a couple of years we feel disappointed and let down. Then we have more affairs and more dreadful disappointments. In the end we decide that women are mean, restless, lying, unfair, primitive, cruel creatures. Indeed, far from thinking them man's superiors, we completely look down on them. Dissatisfied and deceived as we are, we can only grouse and talk in and out of season about being let down so badly.'

While Shamokhin spoke I noticed how much he relished his native language and environment. He must have been terribly homesick abroad. He praised Russians and called them great idealists, but without disparaging foreigners, and that was rather in his favour. Clearly, too, he was feeling a little upset and it was himself rather than women that he wanted to talk about. I was in for a long story, a confession of some kind.

Sure enough, after we had ordered a bottle of wine and drunk a glass each, he began.

'I remember someone in a tale of Weltmann's remarking, "I say, what a story!" But someone else answers, "That's no story, it's only the beginning of one." Well, what I've told you so far is only the beginning. What I'd really like is to tell you my latest romantic adventure. Excuse my asking again, but would it bore you to hear it?'

I said no and he went on as follows.

The action takes place in the north of Moscow Province. The country round there is just wonderful, indeed it is. Our estate is on the high bank of a swift-flowing stream by some rapids, with water thundering past day and night. Picture a large, old garden, pleasant flower-beds, beehives, a vegetable-plot and the river down below with feathery willows that seem to lose their gloss and turn grey in heavy dew. Across the river there is a meadow and beyond it on a hill is a

grim, dark pinewood with masses and masses of orange mushrooms. Elks live in the heart of it.

Those early mornings, you know, with the sun actually hurting your eyes—when I am dead and in my grave I think I shall still dream of them. Then there are the wonderful spring evenings with nightingales and corncrakes calling in the garden and beyond, the strains of an accordion floating over from the village, someone playing the piano in the house and the river roaring past—such music, indeed, that you want to cry and sing out loud. We haven't much ploughland, but the pasture helps us out, bringing in about two thousand a year with what we get from the woods. I'm the only son. My father and I live modestly and with Father's pension this was quite enough for us to live on.

For three years after taking my degree I stayed in the country, running the farm and expecting all the time that some job would turn up. But the point is, I was very much in love with an extremely beautiful and charming girl. She was the sister of our neighbour Kotlovich, a bankrupt squire whose estate sported pineapples, superb peaches, lightning-conductors and a fountain in the courtyard, though he had not a copeck to his name. He was idle, incompetent and somehow mushy like a boiled turnip. He treated the peasants by homœopathy and went in for spiritualism. He was a mild, tactful sort of person, actually, and no fool, but I have no use for anyone who talks to spirits and treats village women by magnetism. To start with, this kind of limited outlook always goes with muddled thinking, and such people are very hard to talk to. And then they aren't fond of anyone usually and they don't live with women, which gives them an air of mystery that puts sensitive people off. I didn't like his looks either. He was tall, fat and white, and had a tiny head, tiny glittering eyes and plump white fingers. He didn't shake your hand, he massaged it. He was always saying how sorry he was—if he asked for something it was 'so sorry', and if he gave you something, it was 'so sorry' again.

But his sister was quite a different story. By the way, I hadn't known the Kotloviches when I was younger, for my father was a professor at N. and we lived in the provinces for years. The girl was twenty-two by the time I met them, had left school long ago, and had lived in Moscow for a year or two with a rich aunt who brought her out. The first time I met her I was greatly struck by her unusual and beautiful christian name—Ariadne. It suited her so well. She was a brunette, very slim, very dainty, svelte, elegant and amazingly graceful,

with exquisite and really handsome features. Her eyes were bright, like her brother's, but whereas his had a cold, sickly glint like boiled sweets, it was youthful beauty and self-confidence that shone in hers. I fell in love with her at first sight, and no wonder. First impressions were so strong that I have still not lost my illusions and would like to think that nature created this girl as part of some splendid grand design.

Ariadne's voice, her footsteps, her hat—even her footprints on the sandy bank where she fished for gudgeon—thrilled me, delighted me and put new life into me. To me her lovely face and figure were pledges of her inner self. Ariadne's every word and smile bewitched me, charmed me, made me feel that hers was indeed a noble nature. She was affectionate, talkative, gay and natural. Her belief in God seemed infused with poetry, as did her reflections on death. So rich and subtle was her inner nature that it lent even her faults delightful qualities all her own.

Perhaps she wanted a new horse, but couldn't afford one. Well, why worry? There was always something to sell or pawn. And if the estate-manager swore that there was not, then why not strip the metal roofs off the lodges and dispose of them to the local factory? Or take the cart-horses to market and let them go dirt cheap just when the farm work was at its height? These wild urges sometimes drove everyone on the estate quite frantic, but she expressed them with such style that she was always forgiven in the end and allowed to do as she pleased, like a goddess or Caesar's wife.

There was something rather moving about my love and soon everyone—Father, neighbours, village people—noticed it. They were all on my side and if I happened to stand the men a round of vodka, they would bow and say, 'Here's hoping you may wed Miss Kotlovich, sir.'

Ariadne herself knew that I loved her. She often rode over to see us, or drove over by cabriolet, and sometimes spent whole days with me and Father. She made friends with the old man and he even taught her to ride a bicycle—his great hobby. I remember helping her onto her bicycle one evening when they were just going for a ride. She was so beautiful. I felt that touching her was like scorching my hands. I was trembling, I was in ecstasy. And when she and the old man, both so handsome and graceful, bowled off down the road together, a black horse—coming the other way and ridden by our manager—lurched to one side because it too was dazzled by her beauty, or so I thought. My love and adoration greatly moved Ariadne and she

longed to feel the same magic and love me in return. That would be so romantic, you see.

But unlike me she couldn't love truly, for she was cold and already rather corrupted. Day and night a devil inside her whispered that she was so charming, so divine. What was she doing in this world? What had she been born for? She had no clear idea and saw her own future purely in terms of fame and fortune. She dreamt of dances, race-meetings, liveries, a sumptuous drawing-room, her own *salon* with a swarm of counts, princes, ambassadors, famous painters and entertainers—the whole lot at her feet, raving about her beauty and fine clothes.

This lust for power, this ambition and unswerving concentration on a single goal—it makes people insensitive. And insensitive Ariadne was, about me, about nature and about music.

Meanwhile time was passing and so far there were no ambassadors in evidence. Ariadne continued to live with her spiritualist brother and things went from bad to worse until she could not afford to buy dresses and hats and was put to all sorts of shifts and dodges to hide how badly off she was.

Typically enough, a Prince Maktuyev—rich, but an utter worm—had paid his addresses to her when she was living at her aunt's in Moscow. She had refused him out of hand, but now there was sometimes that little nagging doubt. Had she been right to turn him down? Just as your peasant blows disgustedly on a glass of kvass with beetles in it, but still drinks it, so she frowned and turned up her nose when she remembered the prince—yet remarked to me, 'Say what you like, but there's something mysterious and delightful about a title.'

She dreamt of titles and gracious living, yet she did not want to let me go either. Dream of ambassadors as you will, you are not made of stone after all, and it's hard to forget that you are only young once. Ariadne tried to fall in love, pretended to be in love, and even swore that she loved me.

Now I am a highly strung, sensitive person. I can tell when someone loves me, even at a distance, and I need no assurances or vows. But this was like a breath of cold air. When she spoke of love I seemed to hear the singing of a mechanical nightingale. Ariadne herself felt that there was something missing. That distressed her and I often saw her in tears. Then once, believe it or not, she suddenly flung her arms round me impetuously and kissed me—it happened on the river bank one evening. I could tell by her eyes that she did not love me, but had

embraced me purely out of curiosity, as a sort of exercise. She wanted to see what would happen. But it horrified me. I took her hands.

'It makes me so unhappy when you kiss me without loving me,' I brought out in desperation.

'Oh, you are a—funny boy!' she said irritably and went away.

I should probably have married her after a year or two, which would have been the end of my story, but fate decided to give our romance a different twist. A new personality happened to swim into our ken when Michael Lubkov, a university friend of Ariadne's brother, came to stay with him. He was a charming fellow and even the coachmen and servants called him 'the amusing gentleman'. He was of medium height, a bit scraggy and bald. His face was that of a good bourgeois—unattractive, but presentable, pale, with a bristly, carefully tended moustache. He had goose-flesh and pimples on his neck and a large Adam's apple. He wore pince-nez on a broad black ribbon and couldn't pronounce *r* or *l* properly. He was always in high spirits and found everything great fun. He had made a peculiarly stupid marriage at the age of twenty, and receiving two houses in Moscow near Devichy as part of his wife's dowry, had had them repaired, built a bath-house and then lost every penny. Now his wife and four children were living in terrible poverty at the Oriental Apartments and he had to support them. All this was great fun. He was thirty-six and his wife was forty-two and that was fun too. His mother, a stuck-up, pompous person—a frightful snob—looked down on his wife and lived alone with a horde of dogs and cats and he had to pay her seventy-five roubles a month, quite apart from what his wife got.

Lubkov himself was a man of taste and liked lunching at the Slav Fair Hotel or dining at the Hermitage Restaurant. He needed a lot of money, but his uncle only let him have two thousand a year, which was not enough, and for days on end he ran round Moscow with his tongue practically hanging out, trying to cadge a loan. That was funny too. He said that he had come to stay with Kotlovich to recover from family life in the heart of the country. At lunch, at supper and on walks he talked about his wife and mother, about creditors and bailiffs, and laughed at them. He laughed at himself too and claimed to have met a lot of very nice people through his knack of borrowing.

He laughed all the time and we joined in. And during his stay we passed the time differently. I was given to quiet and 'idyllic' pleasures, being fond of fishing, evening walks and mushroom-picking. But

Lubkov preferred picnics, fireworks and hunting. Two or three times a week he arranged a picnic and Ariadne, looking solemn and dedicated, would list oysters, champagne and chocolates, and dispatch me to Moscow—not asking, naturally, if I had any money. Toasts were drunk at the picnics, there were lots of laughs, and more gleeful stories about how old his wife was, how fat his mother's dogs were, and what nice people creditors were.

Lubkov was fond of nature, but took it very much for granted, thinking it thoroughly beneath his notice and created only for his amusement.

'Not a bad place to have tea,' he would say, pausing in front of some magnificent view.

Once, seeing Ariadne walking some way off with a parasol, he nodded towards her.

'What I like about her is, she's thin,' he said. 'I don't like fat women.'

I was shocked and asked him not to speak of women like that in my presence. He looked surprised.

'What's wrong about me liking thin ones and not fat ones?' he asked.

I made no answer. Then there was another occasion, when he was in a good mood and had had a drop to drink.

'I've noticed that Ariadne likes you,' he said. 'But I can't make out why you're so slow off the mark.'

This embarrassed me and I rather shyly gave him my views on love and women.

'I don't know,' he sighed. 'Women are women, the way I see it, and men are men. Ariadne may be the poetical, exalted creature you make her out, but that doesn't put her outside the laws of nature. She's at an age when she needs a husband or lover, you can see that for yourself. I respect women every bit as much as you do, but I don't think certain relationships are incompatible with poetry. Poetry is one thing. A lover's another. It's just like agriculture—natural beauty's one thing and the income from forests and fields is something else again.'

When Ariadne and I fished for gudgeon, Lubkov lay near us on the sand and poked fun at me or instructed me in the art of living.

'How do you manage without a mistress?' he asked. 'It baffles me, man. You're young, handsome, attractive—in fact, you're one hell of a fellow. But you live like a monk. I've no use for these old men of twenty-eight! I'm nearly ten years older than you, but which of us is the younger? You tell us, Ariadne.'

'You of course,' Ariadne answered.

When he tired of us saying nothing and keeping our eyes on the floats, he would go indoors.

'It's a fact,' she would say, looking furiously at me. 'You're not a man. You're such a ninny, God forgive us! A man should be swept off his feet, do crazy things, make mistakes and suffer! A woman will forgive you if you're rude and impudent, but she'll never forgive you for being so stuffy.'

She was genuinely angry.

'You must be bold and dashing if you want to get anywhere,' she went on. 'Lubkov isn't as good-looking as you, but he's more attractive and he'll always be a success with women because he's not like you, he's a real man.'

She sounded really vexed. One evening at supper she started off without looking at me about how she wouldn't vegetate in the country if she was a man. She would travel and spend the winter abroad somewhere—in Italy, say. Oh, Italy! Now my father inadvertently added fuel to the flames by making a long speech about Italy—how splendid it was with its wonderful weather and museums. Ariadne suddenly yearned to go there. She actually banged the table with her fist and her eyes flashed as if to say, 'Let's be off!'

This started a lot of talk about how nice it would be in Italy. 'Oh, Italy, lovely Italy!' We had this every day. When Ariadne looked at me over her shoulder, her cold, stubborn look told me that in her day-dreams she already had Italy at her feet—salons, famous foreigners, tourists and all. There was no holding her back now. I advised her to wait—put the trip off for a year or two—but she frowned disdainfully.

'You're so stuffy!' she said. 'You're like an old woman.'

But Lubkov was in favour of the trip. He said that it would be very cheap and he would be glad to go along himself and recover from family life in Italy. I'm afraid I behaved as innocently as a schoolboy. I tried to leave them alone together as little as possible, not from jealousy, but because I thought that something outrageous might happen. They pulled my leg—pretended to have been kissing, say, when I came in the room and that kind of thing.

Then one fine morning her plump, white, spiritualist brother arrived and evinced a desire to speak to me in private.

He was a man with no will-power. If he saw other people's letters on a table, he simply couldn't stop himself reading them, for all his education and tact. Now, as we spoke, he admitted that he had happened to read a letter from Lubkov to Ariadne.

'This letter shows she's going abroad soon. I'm terribly upset, old boy. For goodness' sake tell me what it's all about. It makes no sense to me.'

He panted straight into my face as he spoke and his breath smelt of boiled beef.

'Excuse my revealing the secrets of this letter,' he went on. 'But you're a friend of Ariadne's and she thinks highly of you. You might know something. She wants to go away, but do you know who with? Mr. Lubkov proposes to go with her. I must say, Lubkov's behaviour is decidedly odd. He's a married man with children, but he tells Ariadne he loves her and calls her "darling". All most peculiar, I must say!'

A chill came over me. My arms and legs grew numb and I felt a sharp pain in my chest. Kotlovich flopped helplessly in an easy chair with his arms hanging limply down.

'But what can I do?' I asked.

'Influence her. Make her see sense. She and Lubkov—well, judge for yourself. They're not in the same street. Oh God, it's so awful!' he went on, clutching his head. 'Awful! She has such wonderful prospects—Prince Maktuyev and . . . and the rest of them. The prince adores her and only last Wednesday his deceased grandfather Ilarion definitely confirmed in so many words that Ariadne would be his wife—no doubt about it! Grandfather Ilarion may be dead, but he's amazingly clever. We call up his spirit every day.'

I lay awake all night after this conversation and felt like shooting myself. Next morning I wrote five letters and tore them all in little pieces. Then I wept in the barn. Then I borrowed money from Father and left for the Caucasus without saying good-bye.

Women are women, of course, and men are men, but is all that really as straightforward these days as it was before the flood? Must I, an educated man with a complex spiritual nature, really put down my yearning for a woman to the fact that her body is a different shape from my own? What a ghastly thought! I should like to think that man's genius has taken up the cudgels against carnal love as part of his battle with nature, and that if he hasn't beaten it, he has at least managed to enmesh it in illusions of comradeship and affection. For me at any rate these things were not just a function of my biological organism as if I were a dog or frog, but true love—every embrace inspired by a pure impulse of the heart, by respect for womankind.

Actually a revulsion against animal instincts has been built up over the centuries in hundreds of generations. I've inherited it—it is part of my blood, part of the very fibre of my being. And if I now romanticize love, isn't that just as natural and inevitable these days as the fact that I can't waggle my ears and am not covered with fur? I think this is what most educated people feel, since love without anything moral and poetical about it is treated as an atavistic phenomenon these days, and is said to be a symptom of degeneracy and many forms of derangement. Granted, when we romanticize love we do endow the loved one with virtues that are often just non-existent, and that's why we're always doing the wrong thing and suffering for it. But it's better that way in my opinion. I mean it's better to suffer than to console oneself with women being women and men men.

In Tiflis I had a letter from my father. He wrote that Ariadne had gone abroad on such-and-such a date and intended to be away all winter.

A month later I went home. It was autumn. Every week Ariadne sent my father letters on scented paper, most interesting letters too, written in an excellent literary style—I think any woman could be an author. Ariadne described in great detail how hard she had found it to placate her aunt and obtain a thousand roubles from her for the trip, and how long she had spent in Moscow hunting up an old lady, a distant relative, to persuade her to go with them. There was a highly contrived air about this excess of detail and I realized of course that she was travelling without a chaperon.

Soon afterwards I too had a letter from her—also scented and well-written. She wrote how much she missed me and my beautiful, clever, love-lorn eyes, reproached me in a friendly way for wasting my youth and stagnating in the country when, like her, I might live in paradise under palm-trees and breathe the fragrance of orange groves. She signed herself, 'Ariadne, whom you have deserted'. A day or two later there was a second letter in the same style signed 'whom you have forgotten'. I was in a complete daze. I loved her passionately and dreamt of her every night, and here was all this 'deserted' and 'forgotten' stuff. Why? What was I to make of it? Besides, there was the tedium of country life to put up with, and the long evenings and nagging thoughts about Lubkov.

I was tortured by uncertainty that poisoned my days and nights until I could stand it no more. I gave in and left.

Ariadne wanted me to go to Abbazia. I arrived on a fine, warm day

after a shower had left drops hanging on the trees, and took a room in the huge, barrack-like hotel annexe where Ariadne and Lubkov were staying. They were out. I went into the local park, strolled along the paths for a while and then sat down. An Austrian general passed by with his hands behind his back. He had red stripes down his trousers just like one of our own generals. A baby was pushed past in a pram, with a squeaking of wheels on the wet sand. A doddery old man with jaundice passed by, followed by a group of Englishwomen and a Polish priest, then the Austrian general came round again. Military bandsmen, just in from Fiume, plodded off to the bandstand, carrying their glittering trumpets, and struck up a tune.

Were you ever in Abbazia? It is a filthy little Slav town. Its only street stinks, and when it has been raining you can't get along it without galoshes. I had been so carried away by all the things I had read about this earthly paradise that I was annoyed and embarrassed to find myself hitching up my trousers as I gingerly crossed the narrow street and bought some hard pears from an old countrywoman out of sheer boredom. Seeing that I was a Russian, she made a pathetic attempt to talk our language. I was puzzled where on earth to go and what to do in the place, and was forever running across other Russians who felt as cheated as I did.

There is a quiet bay crossed by steamers and boats with coloured sails. You can see Fiume and distant islands shrouded in mauvish mist. It would be all very picturesque if the view of the bay wasn't blocked by hotels and their annexes in the inane suburban architectural style favoured by greedy speculators who have built up the whole of that green coast, so that you hardly see anything of paradise but windows, terraces and odd spaces with little white tables and waiters' black tail-coats. There is the sort of park that you find in any foreign resort nowadays. The dark, still, silent foliage of palms, the bright yellow sand on the paths, the bright green benches, the flash of soldiers' blaring trumpets and the red stripes on generals' trousers—it takes just ten minutes for all that stuff to bore you stiff. Meanwhile you are somehow forced to spend ten days or ten weeks in the place!

Drifting from one resort to another, I have noticed more and more what mean, uncomfortable lives the rich and overfed lead. Their imaginations are so feeble and stunted, their tastes and desires so unadventurous. How much happier are travellers, young or old, who cannot afford hotels, but live where they can, admire the sea while lying on green grass high in the hills, go about on foot, see forests

and villages at close quarters, study a country's customs, listen to its songs and love its women.

It was growing dark as I sat in the park. Spruce and elegant as any princess, Ariadne appeared in the twilight, followed by Lubkov in a new, loosely fitting suit that he must have bought in Vienna.

'Why do you look so cross?' he asked. 'What have I done wrong?'

She saw me and gave a joyful shout, and would certainly have thrown her arms round my neck if we had not been in a park. She squeezed my hands, laughing, and I joined in, moved almost to tears. Then the questions began. How were things in the village? How was Father? Had I seen her brother? And so on. She insisted on me looking her in the eyes and asked if I remembered the gudgeon, our little quarrels and the picnics.

'It was so marvellous, wasn't it?' she sighed. 'Not that it's dull here either. Darling, we've lots of friends! Tomorrow I'll introduce you to a Russian family here. Only for goodness' sake buy another hat.' She looked me up and down and frowned. 'Abbazia isn't a village,' she said. 'It's the thing here to be *comme il faut*.'

We went to a restaurant. Ariadne kept laughing, behaving skittishly and calling me a 'dear', a 'darling' and 'such a clever boy', as if she could scarcely believe I was with her. We sat around till about eleven and departed very pleased with our supper and each other. Next day Ariadne presented me to the Russian family as 'the son of a distinguished professor whose estate is next to ours'. She talked of nothing but estates and harvests to these people, continually referring to me. She wanted to pass as a member of a rich 'county' family, and I must say she succeeded, having the superb manner of a true aristocrat—which indeed she was.

'Isn't Aunt funny!' she suddenly said, smiling at me. 'We had a bit of a tiff and she's gone off to Merano. What do you think of that?'

'Who's this aunt you were talking about?'. I asked her later when we were walking in the park. 'What's all this about an aunt?'

'Oh, just a little white lie,' laughed Ariadne. 'They mustn't know I'm unchaperoned.' After a moment's silence she snuggled up to me. 'Please, darling, do be nice to Lubkov,' she said. 'He's so miserable. His mother and wife are simply dreadful.'

With Lubkov she seemed to keep her distance, and when she went to bed she wished him good night with a 'till tomorrow', just as she did me. And they lived on different floors, which made me hope there

was nothing in the idea that they were lovers. So I felt at ease with him and when he asked for a loan of three hundred roubles, I was glad to let him have it.

We spent the whole of each day amusing ourselves, strolling about the park, eating and drinking. And every day we had these conversations with the Russian family. One thing I gradually got used to was that if I went in the park I was sure to meet the old man with jaundice, the Polish priest and the Austrian general, who always had a small pack of cards with him and whenever possible sat down and played patience, nervously twitching his shoulders. And the band kept playing the same tune.

At home in the country I was always ashamed to face our peasants when I went fishing on a working day or drove out for a picnic. And I had the same feeling of shame with the servants, coachmen and workers that I met here. I felt they were looking at me and wondering why I never did anything. I felt this sense of shame every day from morning to night.

It was a strange, unpleasant, monotonous time, varied only by Lubkov borrowing money from me—now a hundred florins, now fifty. Money was to him what morphine is to an addict. It soon cheered him up and he would roar with laughter at his wife, at himself or at his creditors.

Then the rains and cold weather set in. We left for Italy and I telegraphed Father, asking him for God's sake to send me an eight hundred rouble money-order in Rome. We stopped in Venice, Bologna and Florence, and in each city invariably found ourselves at expensive hotels where we were charged extra for lighting, service, heating, bread with our lunch, and the right to dine in a private room. We ate an enormous amount. We had a large breakfast and lunched at one o'clock on meat, fish, some kind of omelette, cheese, fruit and wine. At six o'clock we had an eight-course dinner with long intervals when we drank beer and wine. About half-past eight tea was served. Towards midnight Ariadne would declare herself hungry and demand ham and boiled eggs and we would have some too to keep her company.

Between meals we dashed round museums and exhibitions, haunted by the fear of being late for lunch or dinner. I was bored with pictures and longed to go home and lie down.

'Marvellous! What a feeling of space,' I would repeat hypocritically after the others, looking exhaustedly for a chair.

Like gorged boa-constrictors, we only noticed things that glittered. Shop windows mesmerized us, we were fascinated by cheap brooches and bought a lot of useless junk.

It was the same story in Rome where there was rain and a cold wind and we went to inspect St. Peter's after a greasy lunch. Because we had been stuffing ourselves, or perhaps because the weather was so bad, it did not impress us, and having caught each other out not caring about art we almost quarrelled.

The money arrived from Father. It was morning, I remember, when I went to fetch it and Lubkov went with me.

'So long as one has a past,' he said, 'one can't lead a full, happy life here and now. My past is a great handicap to me. True, if I had money it wouldn't be too bad, but I'm broke. Do you know I've only eight francs left?' he went on, lowering his voice. 'Yet I must send my wife a hundred and my mother another hundred. Then there's living here. Ariadne's such a child. She just won't understand, and she squanders money like a duchess. Why did she have to buy that watch yesterday? And why should we still pretend to be as innocent as new-born babes? You tell me that! Why, it costs us an extra ten to fifteen francs a day to conceal our relationship from servants and friends by taking a separate room for me. What's the point?'

I felt a sharp stab of pain in my chest. Now I knew what was going on—no more uncertainty. I felt cold all over and at once found myself deciding to see no more of these two, but to escape and go home at once.

'Starting an affair with a woman's easy enough,' Lubkov went on. 'It's just a matter of undressing her. It's what comes later that's such a bore—oh, what a lot of nonsense!'

I counted my remittance.

'Lend me a thousand francs or I'm done for,' he said. 'Your money's my last hope.'

I gave him it and he cheered up at once and started laughing at his uncle—the silly fool hadn't managed to keep Lubkov's address from his wife. I went back to the hotel, packed and paid the bill. It remained to say good-bye to Ariadne.

I knocked on her door.

'*Entrez!*'

Her room was in a typical morning mess—tea things on the table, a half-eaten roll and eggshells. There was a strong, stifling reek of scent. The bed had not been made and it was obvious that two people

had slept in it. Ariadne herself had only just got up and was wearing a flannel bed-jacket. She had not done her hair.

I said good morning and sat for a moment in silence while she tried to tidy her hair.

'Why, oh why did you send for me?' I asked her, trembling in every limb. 'Why drag me abroad?'

She evidently guessed what was in my mind and took me by the hand.

'I want you here,' she said. 'You're such a decent person.'

I was ashamed of being so shaken and distressed—I should be bursting into tears next thing! I went out without another word, and an hour later I was in the train. All the way home I somehow pictured Ariadne as pregnant and she seemed repulsive. And somehow all the women I saw in trains and stations appeared pregnant and, like her, repulsive and pathetic. I felt like a fanatical miser who suddenly finds that his gold coins are all counterfeit. Those pure, graceful visions which my imagination, inspired by love, had so long cherished, my plans, my hopes, my memories, my views of love and woman—all that seemed to be mocking me and jeering at me.

'Could this be Ariadne,' I asked in horror, '—this young, strikingly beautiful, educated girl, the daughter of a senator—conducting an intrigue with that vulgar, humdrum mediocrity?'

'But why shouldn't she love Lubkov?' I answered. 'Is he any worse than me? Oh, let her love who she likes. But why lie? And then again, why on earth should she be honest with me?' And so on and so forth until I felt I was going out of my mind.

The train was cold. I was travelling first class, but there were three people to a side and no double windows. There was no corridor either and I felt like a man in the stocks—cramped, abandoned, pitiable. My feet were dreadfully cold. Meanwhile I kept thinking how seductive she had looked that morning in her jacket with her hair down. I felt such pangs of jealousy and I jumped to my feet in such agony of mind that my neighbours looked surprised and even scared.

At home I found snow-drifts and nearly forty degrees of frost. I like winter because my home has always been so warm and snug even in the hardest frosts. I like putting on my fur jacket and felt boots on a fine, frosty day and doing a job in the garden or yard, reading in my well-heated room, sitting in Father's study by the fire, or taking a country-style steam-bath. But when one has no mother, sister or children about the place, winter evenings are somehow eerie and

fearfully long and silent. The warmer and cosier the home, the more you feel that something is missing. After my return from abroad that winter the evenings seemed interminable. I was so dreadfully depressed that I could not even read. It wasn't so bad in the daytime when you could clear snow in the garden or feed the hens and calves, but the evenings were more than flesh and blood could stand.

I used to hate visitors, but I was glad to see them now, knowing that they were bound to talk about Ariadne. Kotlovich, our spiritualist, often drove over for a chat about his sister, and sometimes brought along his friend Prince Maktuyev who loved her as much as I did. To sit in Ariadne's room, strumming on her piano and looking at her music—this was a necessity for the prince. He could not live without it. And the spirit of Grandpa Ilarion was still predicting that she would be his wife one day. The prince usually stayed for a long time, from lunch to midnight perhaps, and hardly spoke. He would drink two or three bottles of beer without a word and now and then he would give a staccato, sad, silly laugh just to show that he was still with us. Before going home he always took me on one side.

'When did you last see Miss Kotlovich?' he would ask in a low voice. 'Is she well? She's not bored there, is she?'

Spring came round with the woodcock-shooting and the corn and clover to be sown. There was a sad feeling, but this was springtime melancholy and one felt like making the best of things. Listening to the larks as I worked in the fields, I wondered if I should not settle this business of personal happiness once and for all by simply marrying an ordinary village girl. Then suddenly, when the work was in full swing, I had a letter with an Italian stamp.

Clover, beehives, calves and village girls . . . all that vanished in a flash. Ariadne now wrote that she was profoundly, unutterably miserable. She blamed me for not coming to her rescue, for looking down on her from the pedestal of my own virtue, and deserting her in her hour of danger—all this in large, shaky writing with smears and blots, evidently dashed off in great distress. At the end she begged me to come and save her.

Once more I slipped my moorings and was swept away. Ariadne was living in Rome. I reached her late one evening and she burst into tears when she saw me and flung her arms round my neck. She had not changed at all during the winter and looked as young and lovely as ever. We had supper and drove round Rome till dawn while she told me about her doings. I asked where Lubkov was.

'Don't mention that man to me!' she shouted. 'Disgusting, loathsome creature!'

'But you did love him, I think.'

'Never! He seemed a bit unusual to start with and made me feel sorry for him, but nothing more. He's shameless and takes a woman by storm, which is attractive. But don't let's talk about him—that's a dreary chapter of my life. He's gone to Russia to fetch some money and jolly good riddance to him! I told him not to dare come back.'

She was not staying in a hotel now, but in a two-room private apartment which she had decorated to her own taste, with chilly luxury. She had borrowed about five thousand francs from friends since Lubkov's departure, and my arrival really was her last hope. I was counting on taking her back to the country, but I did not succeed—though she was homesick for Russia, memories of past hardships and shortcomings, and of the rusty roof on her brother's house, made her shudder with disgust. When I suggested going home she clutched my hands convulsively.

'No, no!' she said. 'I'd be bored to death.'

It was now that my love entered its last, waning phase.

'Be a darling again and love me a little,' said Ariadne, leaning towards me. 'You're so solemn and stuffy. You're afraid to let yourself go and you keep worrying about what might happen, which is a bore. Please, please be nice, I beg you! My good, kind, precious darling, I love you so.'

I became her lover. For at least a month I was crazy with sheer undiluted happiness. To hold her beautiful young body in my arms, to enjoy it, and feel her warmth every time one woke up and remember that she, she, my Ariadne, was here—well, it took a bit of getting used to! Still, I did get used to it and gradually found my bearings in my new position. The main thing was, I could see that Ariadne loved me no more now than she had before. Yet she longed for true love, fearing loneliness. And the point is, I was young, healthy and strong, while she, like all unemotional people, was sensual, so we both acted as if our affair was a grand passion. That, and a few other things, became clearer as time went on.

We stayed in Rome, Naples and Florence. We went to Paris for a while, but found it cold there and returned to Italy. We passed everywhere as man and wife, rich landowners. People were glad to meet us and Ariadne was a great success. She took painting lessons, so they called her an artist, and do you know, that really suited her, though

she had not a scrap of talent. She always slept till two or three in the afternoon and had coffee and lunch in bed. For dinner she took soup, scampi, fish, meat, asparagus and game, and then when she went to bed I used to bring her something else—roast beef, say—which she ate with a sad, preoccupied look. And if she woke up in the night she ate apples and oranges.

The woman's main and more or less basic characteristic was her fabulous cunning. She was up to some trick every minute of the day. There was no obvious motive for it, it was just instinctive—the sort of urge that makes a sparrow chirp or a beetle waggle its antennae. She played these tricks on me, on servants, porters, shop-assistants and friends. She could not talk to anyone or meet anyone without all sorts of posturing and antics. Just let a man come into our room—waiter or baron, it made no difference—and the look in her eyes, her expression, her voice changed. Even the contours of her figure altered. If you had seen her then, you would have called us the smartest and richest people in all Italy. Not one artist or musician did she meet without telling him a string of fatuous lies about his remarkable genius.

'You're so brilliant!' she would say in a sickly drawl. 'You frighten me, really. I'm sure you see right through people.'

The point of all this was to be attractive, successful and charming. Every morning she woke with but a single thought—to attract! That was the aim and object of her life. If I had told her that in such-and-such a house in such-and-such a street there lived someone who did not find her attractive, it would really have spoilt her day. Every day she must bewitch, captivate, drive people out of their minds. To have me in her power, converted into an utter worm by her charms, gave her the pleasure that victors once felt at tournaments.

My humiliation was not enough, though, and at nights she lounged about like a tigress—with no clothes on, for she always felt too hot—reading letters from Lubkov. He begged her to come back to Russia, or else he swore he would rob or murder somebody to get money and come and see her. She hated him, but his ardent, abject letters excited her.

Having an extremely high opinion of her charms, she thought that if a great assembly of people could see what her figure and complexion were like, she would vanquish all Italy and indeed the entire globe. This talk about her 'figure' and 'complexion' shocked me. She noticed this, and when angry she tried to annoy me with all sorts of vulgar taunts. It reached the point where, losing her temper once at some

woman's villa, she told me, 'If you don't stop boring me with your sermons, I'll take off all my clothes this instant and lie down naked on those flowers!'

When I watched her sleeping, eating or trying to look innocent, I often wondered why God had given her such outstanding beauty, grace and intelligence. Could it really be just for lolling in bed, eating and telling lies, lies, lies? Indeed, was she really intelligent? She thought the number thirteen unlucky—three candles too. She was terrified of the evil eye and nightmares. She spoke of free love—and freedom in general—like some pious old granny, and maintained that Boleslav Markevich was a better writer than Turgenev! But she was diabolically sharp and cunning, and in company she had the knack of passing as educated and progressive.

Even when she was in a good mood she thought nothing of insulting a servant or killing an insect. She liked bullfights and reading about murders, and was angry when accused people were acquitted in court.

For the kind of life that we were leading, Ariadne and I needed plenty of money. Poor Father sent me his pension and all his odds and ends of income, and borrowed for me where he could. Once when he answered that he had no money left, I sent a frantic telegram begging him to mortgage the estate. A little later I asked him to raise funds on a second mortgage. He did both without a murmur and sent me the money down to the last copeck. Ariadne despised the practical side of life and took no interest in any of this. While I squandered thousands of francs to gratify her mad whims and groaned like an old tree in the wind, she just gaily hummed, '*Addio, bella Napoli*'.

I gradually cooled towards her and grew ashamed of our liaison. I dislike pregnancy and childbirth, but now I sometimes longed for a child, if only as some formal justification of our way of life. To retain some shreds of self-respect, I began visiting museums and galleries and reading books, ate little, and gave up drinking. If you keep yourself on the go like that from morning to night it does seem to help a little.

Ariadne tired of me too. It was only mediocrities, by the way, who were so taken with her, and her ambassadors and *salon* were still as far away as ever. Money was short and that upset her and made her cry. In the end she announced that perhaps after all she wouldn't mind going back to Russia. So here we are on our way back. In the last few months before our departure she has been very busy corresponding with her brother. She is obviously up to something, but what, God

only knows. I'm tired of puzzling over her tricks. But we aren't going to the country—it's to be Yalta and then the Caucasus.

She can only live in holiday resorts these days. If you did but know how I loathe all such places—they make me feel I'm choking, they embarrass me so. I want to go to the country! I want to work and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow and make good my mistakes. I'm so full of energy just now. And I feel that if I really put my back into it I could clear the estate of debt in five years. But there's a snag, you see. We're not abroad now, this is dear old mother Russia and there's the question of holy wedlock. Of course my infatuation's over, my love has gone beyond recall, but be that as it may, I'm in honour bound to marry her.

Shamokhin was excited by telling his story and we went below, still talking about women. It was late. We were sharing a cabin as it turned out.

'Nowadays it's only in the villages that women keep up with men,' said Shamokhin. 'There women think and feel like men. They grapple with nature, they fight for civilization just as hard as men. But the urban, bourgeois, educated woman long ago dropped out. She's reverting to her primeval condition, she's already half animal and, thanks to her, many triumphs of the human spirit have just been thrown away. Woman is gradually disappearing and her place is being taken by an archetypal female. This backwardness of the educated woman is a real menace to civilization. Retreating, she tries to drag man back with her and arrest his progress, no doubt about it.'

'Why generalize?' I asked. 'Why judge all women by Ariadne? Women's urge towards education and the equality of the sexes, which I take to be an urge for justice, simply can't be reconciled with any idea of retreat.'

But Shamokhin was hardly listening. He smiled suspiciously. By now he was a fanatical misogynist and was not going to change.

'Oh, get away with you!' he interrupted. 'Once a woman sees me, not as a man and her equal, but as a male animal, and is bent solely on attracting me—possessing me, that is—her whole life through, the question of equal rights doesn't arise. Don't you believe them, they're very, very cunning! We men make a great fuss about their freedom, but they don't want to be free at all, they're only pretending. They're up to all sorts of dirty tricks.'

Tired of arguing and wanting to sleep, I turned my face to the wall.

'Yes indeed,' I heard as sleep came over me. 'Indeed yes. It's all the fault of our upbringing, man. What does the upbringing and training of an urban woman boil down to? To turning her into a human animal so she can attract a male and conquer him. Yes indeed.'

Shamokhin sighed. 'Our girls and boys should be brought up together and never be separated. A woman should be trained to know when she's wrong, like a man. As it is she always thinks she knows best. Impress on a little girl from the cradle that a man is not first and foremost her escort and suitor, but her comrade and equal. Teach her to think logically and to generalize, and don't keep telling her that her brain weighs less than a man's and so she needn't bother with learning, the arts or cultural matters. A boy—a cobbler's or house-painter's apprentice—also has a smaller brain than a grown man's, but he takes part in the general struggle for existence, he works and suffers. We must also give up this trick of putting it all down to physiology, pregnancy and childbirth. And why? Firstly, a woman doesn't give birth every month. Secondly, not all women have children anyway. And thirdly, a normal village woman works in the fields the day before she has her baby and is none the worse for that. Then there should be complete equality in everyday life. If a man gives up his seat to a lady or picks up her handkerchief, let her do as much for him. I don't mind a girl of good family helping me on with my coat or giving me a glass of water——'

I fell asleep, so that was the last I heard.

As we approached Sevastopol next morning the weather was wet and unpleasant and the sea was a little rough. Shamokhin sat with me in the deck-house, thoughtful and silent. When the bell rang for tea, men with turned-up coat collars and pale, sleepy-looking ladies began going below. A young, very pretty woman—the one who had been angry with the customs officers at Volochisk—stopped in front of Shamokhin and spoke to him, looking like a naughty, spoilt child.

'Ivan dear, poor little Ariadne's been sick!'

Later on, while staying in Yalta, I saw this lovely creature dashing about on horseback followed by two officers who could hardly keep up with her. Then I saw her one morning wearing a Phrygian cap and a small apron, sitting on the sea-front and sketching while a large crowd stood a little way off admiring her. I was introduced to her. She shook me heartily by the hand, gave me an enraptured look and thanked me in a sickly drawl for the enjoyment that my writings gave her.

'Don't you believe it,' Shamokhin whispered. 'She hasn't read a word of yours.'

Strolling on the front late one afternoon, I met Shamokhin who was carrying some large parcels of delicatessen and fruit.

'Prince Maktuyev's here!' he said delightedly. 'He arrived yesterday with her spiritualist brother. Now I see what she was writing to him about. My God!' he went on, looking at the sky and pressing the parcels to his chest. 'If she and the prince hit it off, I'm free, don't you see! I can go back to the country, to Father.'

He ran off.

'I'm beginning to believe in spirits,' he shouted, looking back. 'Grandfather Ilarion's prophecy seems to have come true. God, I hope so!'

The day after this meeting I left Yalta and how Shamokhin's story ended I do not know.

A DREARY STORY

FROM AN OLD MAN'S MEMOIRS

I

THERE is in Russia an eminent professor, a Nicholas Stepanovich Such-and-such—a man of great seniority and distinction. So many medals, Russian and foreign, does he possess that when he wears them his students refer to him as an icon-stand. He knows all the best people, having been on terms of intimacy with every celebrated Russian scholar of the last twenty-five or thirty years at least. His present life offers no scope for friendship. But if we speak of the past the long list of his famous friends ends with names like Pirogov, Kavelin and the poet Nekrasov, who all bestowed on him an affection sincere and warm in the extreme. He is a member of all Russian and three foreign universities, and so on and so forth. All this, and a lot more that might be said, makes up my so-called name.

It is a popular name. It is known to every Russian who can read and write, and is invoked in foreign lecture-rooms with 'famous and distinguished' appended. It's one of those few lucky names—to abuse it, to take it in vain in public or in print, would be a sign of bad taste. And this is as it should be. My name is, after all, closely linked to the image of an illustrious, brilliant and unquestionably useful man. I work hard. I have the stamina of an ox, which is important, and I have flair, which is a great deal more important. I'm also a well-behaved, modest, decent sort of chap, incidentally. Never have I poked my nose into literature and politics, or curried favour by bandying words with nitwits—nor have I ever made after-dinner speeches or orated at my colleagues' funerals.

My name as a scholar is free from blemish, by and large. It has nothing to grumble about. It is a fortunate name.

What of the bearer of this name—of myself, in other words? I present the spectacle of a sixty-two-year-old man with bald head, false teeth and an incurable nervous *tic*. I'm every bit as dim and ugly as my name is brilliant and imposing. My head and hands tremble with weakness. Like one of Turgenev's heroines, I have a throat resembling the stringy neck of a double bass, my chest is hollow, my shoulders are narrow. When I speak or lecture, my mouth twists to one side. When

I smile, senile wrinkles cover my whole face, and I look like death. There is nothing impressive about my wretched figure, except perhaps that, when I suffer from my nervous *tic*, a special look comes over me—one bound to provoke in those who observe me the grim, arresting thought that 'the man will soon be dead, obviously'.

I still lecture quite well, I can still hold my audience for two hours. My enthusiasm, the skill with which I deploy my theme, and my humour almost hide the defects of my voice, which is dry, harsh and sing-song, like that of some snivelling preacher. But I write badly. The bit of my brain which controls the writing faculty has ceased to function. My memory is going, my ideas lack consistency, and when I put them down on paper I always feel I've lost all feel for their organic links. My construction is monotonous, my language is poverty-stricken and feeble. I often write things I don't mean, and by the time I reach the end of what I'm writing, I've forgotten the beginning. I often forget ordinary words, and I always have to waste a lot of energy avoiding unnecessary sentences and superfluous parentheses in my writing. These things are clear evidence of declining intellectual activity. The simpler the subject the more agonizing the effort, oddly enough. I feel more at ease and more intelligent writing a learned article than when composing a congratulatory letter or memorandum. Another thing—I find it easier to write German or English than Russian.

As to my present mode of life, I must first mention the sleeplessness from which I've been suffering lately. If anyone should ask me what constitutes the essential core of my life at the moment, I should answer insomnia. From force of habit I still undress and go to bed at midnight exactly. I fall asleep quickly, but I wake up between one and two o'clock feeling as if I hadn't slept at all. I have to get up and light the lamp. I walk up and down the room for an hour or two, and look at long-familiar pictures and photographs. When I tire of walking I sit at my table—sit motionless, thinking no thoughts, experiencing no desires. If there's a book in front of me I pull it towards me mechanically and read listlessly. Not long ago I read an entire novel in one night in this mechanical way—it had an odd title: *The Song the Swallow Sang*. Or I make myself count a thousand to occupy my mind. Or else I imagine a colleague's face and start recalling when and how he took up academic work. I like to listen for sounds. My daughter Liza sometimes mutters rapidly in her sleep two rooms away. Or my wife walks through the drawing-room with a candle—and never fails to drop the

match-box. A warping cupboard squeaks, or the lamp burner gives a sudden buzz. All these sounds excite me, somehow.

To miss one's sleep of a night is to feel abnormal every minute, which is why I yearn for dawn and the daytime when I have the right not to sleep. Much exhausting time passes before the cock crows outside—my first herald of good news. At cock-crow I know that the house-porter downstairs will awake within an hour and come up on some errand, angrily coughing. Then the air beyond the windows will gradually grow pale and voices will be borne in from the street.

The day begins for me when my wife comes in. She arrives in her petticoat with her hair in disarray—but washed, smelling of flower-scented eau-de-Cologne, and looking as if she has dropped in by accident. She always says the same thing.

'Sorry, I'll only be a minute. Had another bad night?'

Then she turns out the lamp, sits by the table and starts talking. I'm no prophet, but I can predict her theme, which is the same every morning. After anxious inquiries about my health, she'll suddenly mention our son—an officer stationed in Warsaw. We always send him fifty roubles after the twentieth of the month, and this is our chief topic of conversation.

'We can't afford it, of course,' my wife sighs. 'But we're bound to help the boy till he finds his feet. He's abroad, and his pay's not much. Anyway, we'll send him forty roubles next month instead of fifty if you like. How about that?'

Daily experience might have taught my wife that constant talk about our expenses does nothing to reduce them, but having no faith in experience, she regularly discusses our officer son every morning, and tells me that the price of bread is down, thank God, but sugar has gone up two copecks—all this with the air of one communicating matters of moment.

I listen and grunt encouragement mechanically, while strange, unsuitable thoughts obsess me, probably because I had such a bad night. I look at my wife and feel a childlike wonder. This elderly woman, very stout and clumsy, with her stupid look of petty anxiety, her fear of falling on evil days, her eyes clouded by brooding on debts and poverty, her capacity for harping on the price of things, and for smiling only when it comes down—can this woman, I wonder in amazement, really be the slim Varya with whom I once fell so deeply in love because of her good, clear brain, her pure heart, her beauty, and because she felt the same 'sympathy' for my profession which

Desdemona felt for Othello's? Can this really be my wife Varya who once bore me a son?

I stare intensely at this fat, clumsy old woman's face, seeking my Varya, but of her old self nothing remains except her anxiety over my health, together with her habit of calling my salary 'our salary', and my cap 'our cap'. She's a painful sight to me, so I let her say what she likes to give her what comfort I can, and I don't even answer when she criticizes others unfairly, or nags me for not taking up private practice and publishing textbooks.

Our conversation always ends in the same way—my wife suddenly remembers that I haven't had my tea, and panics.

'But what am I doing here?' she asks, standing up. 'The samovar's been on the table ever so long, and here I am chattering. Dear me, how forgetful I'm becoming.'

She moves off quickly, but stops by the door.

'You know we owe Yegor five months' wages?' she asks. 'We shouldn't let the servants' wages run up, I've told you that again and again. It's far easier to pay them ten roubles a month than fifty every five months.'

She goes through the doorway and stops again.

'Poor Liza's the one I'm sorry for,' she says. 'The child studies at the Conservatory and moves in good society, but her clothes aren't fit to be seen. Her fur coat is—well, she's ashamed to go out in it. If she was just anyone's daughter it wouldn't matter, but of course everyone knows her father's a distinguished professor, one of the heads of his profession.'

Having reproached me with my rank and reputation, she goes out at last. This is the start of my day. Nor does it improve as it proceeds.

While I'm drinking tea, my daughter Liza enters in her fur coat and little cap—carrying some music, and all ready to go off to the Conservatory. She's twenty-two years old, but seems younger. She's pretty, and looks a bit like my wife when young. She kisses me affectionately on temple and hand.

'Good morning, Father,' she says. 'Are you well?'

She was very fond of ice-cream as a child, and I often used to take her to a café. Ice-cream was her yard-stick of excellence. 'You're ice-creamy, Daddy,' she would say if she wanted to praise me. We used to call one of her fingers 'pistachio', another 'cream', a third 'raspberry', and so on. When she came in to say good morning I would usually put her on my knee and kiss her fingers.

'Cream, pistachio, lemon,' I would say.

I still kiss Liza's fingers for old time's sake. 'Pistachio, cream, lemon,' I mutter—but it doesn't come off at all, somehow. I feel as cold as ice myself, I'm embarrassed. When my daughter comes in and touches my temple with her lips, I start as if stung by a bee, give a forced smile and turn my face away. Ever since I first contracted insomnia, a single question has been nagging at me. My daughter often sees me, a distinguished elderly man, blushing painfully because I owe my servant money, she sees how often worry over petty debts stops me working and has me walking up and down the room for hours on end brooding. Then why has she never come to me without telling her mother and whispered: 'Here are my watch, bracelet, ear-rings and dresses, Father. Pawn them all, you need the money'? When she sees her mother and me trying to keep up appearances by concealing our poverty—why doesn't she give up the expensive pleasure of music study? I wouldn't accept her watch, her bracelet or any other sacrifices. God forbid, that's not what I need.

I also happen to remember my son, the officer stationed in Warsaw. He's an intelligent, honest, sober fellow, but that's not good enough for me. If I had an old father, and if I knew that he had moments when he felt ashamed of his poverty, I think I'd give someone else my officer's commission, and take a job as an ordinary labourer. Such thoughts about my children poison me. What good are they? To harbour ill-will against ordinary mortals for not being heroes—only a narrow-minded or embittered man can do that. But enough!

At a quarter to ten I have to go and lecture to my dear boys. I dress and walk along the road which I've known for thirty years, and which has a history of its own for me. There is the large grey house containing the chemist's shop. Here was once a small house with an ale bar where I thought out my thesis and wrote Varya my first love letter—in pencil, on a page headed *Historia Morbi*. Next comes the grocery once kept by a little Jew who sold me cigarettes on credit, and then by a fat countrywoman who loved students because 'each of them has a mother'. Its present occupant is a red-headed shopkeeper, a very stolid man who drinks his tea out of a copper teapot. Now come the gloomy university gates so long in need of repair, the bored janitor in his sheepskin coat, the broom, the piles of snow.

On a bright boy fresh from the provinces with the idea that a temple of learning really is a temple, such gates cannot produce a salutary impression. By and large the university's dilapidated buildings, its gloomy

corridors and grimy walls, the dearth of light, the melancholy vista of steps, coathooks and benches, have played an outstanding part as a conditioning factor in the history of Russian pessimism.

Here is our garden—it seems neither better nor worse than it was in my student days. I don't like it. Instead of these wizened limes, that yellow acacia and the skimpy pollarded lilac, it would be far more sensible to have some tall pines and fine oaks growing here. Most students' moods depend on their environment, and their place of learning should confront them exclusively with loftiness, strength and elegance at every hand.

God preserve them from scraggy trees, broken windows, grey walls and doors upholstered in tattered oilcloth.

When I reach my own entrance, the door is flung open and I'm greeted by my old colleague, contemporary and namesake—the porter Nicholas. He lets me in and clears his throat.

'Freezing weather, Professor,' says he.

Or, if my fur coat is wet he says: 'A bit on the rainy side, Professor.'

Then he runs ahead, opening all the doors on my way. In my study he solicitously removes my fur coat whilst contriving to purvey some item of university news. Such is the close fellowship between all university porters and caretakers that he knows all about what goes on in the four faculties, the registry, the vice-chancellor's study and the library. He knows pretty well everything. For instance, when the vice-chancellor's retirement is in the air, or a dean's, I hear him talking to the young door-keepers—listing the candidates for the vacancy, and immediately explaining that So-and-so won't be accepted by the Minister, and Such-and-such will turn it down. Then he goes into fantastic details about certain mysterious papers which have turned up in the registry and concern an alleged secret discussion of the Minister's with the County Education Officer, and so forth. These details apart, he's practically always right. His sketches of each candidate's character have their peculiarities, but they're dependable too. Should you need to know the year when So-and-so was vivaed for his thesis, took up academic work, retired or died—then enlist this old soldier's portentous memory, and he'll not only tell you year, month and date, he'll also furnish the details attending this or that circumstance. No one can have a memory like this unless he loves his subject.

He's a custodian of academic tradition. From his predecessors as porter he has inherited many university legends, to which treasures he has added stocks of his own amassed in the course of his career. Many

are the tales, long and short, which he'll tell you should you wish. He can speak of fantastic pundits who knew *everything*, about tremendous workers who went without sleep for weeks on end, about scholarship's many victims and martyrs. In his stories good triumphs over evil, while the weak, the wise, the modest and the young always vanquish the strong, the stupid, the proud and the old.

There's no need to take all these legends and fantasies at face value, but sift them carefully and you'll be left with something vital—our fine traditions and the names of real paragons who are generally recognized.

Society at large knows nothing of the academic world beyond anecdotes about the grotesque absentmindedness of elderly professors, and two or three witticisms variously ascribed to Gruber, me or Babukhin. For an educated community this is rather poor. If society loved learning, scholars and students as Nicholas loves them, its literature would long ago have included whole epics, legends and chronicles such as it now unhappily lacks.

After telling me the news, Nicholas adopts a stern expression, and we proceed to discuss practical matters. If an outsider could observe the freedom with which Nicholas handles technical terminology at such times, he might take him for a scholar masquerading as an old soldier. Those stories of college porters' erudition are grossly exaggerated, by the way. True, Nicholas knows over a hundred Latin terms. True, he can put a skeleton together, he can prepare the occasional specimen, and he can amuse the students with some long, learned quotation. But a theory as straightforward as that of the circulation of the blood, say—it's as deep a mystery to him today as it was twenty years ago.

Hunched over a book or preparation, my demonstrator Peter Ignatyevich sits at a desk in my study. This industrious, modest, not very bright person is about thirty-five years of age, but already bald and pot-bellied. He slogs away morning noon and night, reads a great deal, and has a good memory for what he has read, in which respect he's a real treasure. But in all other respects he's an old hack—a dull pedant, in other words. The old hack's characteristic features—those which distinguish him from a really able man—are as follows. His horizon's restricted and narrowly confined to his subject—outside his own special field he's like a baby, he's so naïve. I remember going into the study one morning.

'What terrible news!' say I. 'I'm told Skobelev's died!'

Nicholas crosses himself, but Peter Ignatyevich turns to me and asks who this Skobelev is!

Another time—this was somewhat earlier—I announce that Professor Perov has died, and dear old Peter Ignatyevich asks what he used to lecture on!

If Patti sang in his very ear, if Chinese hordes invaded Russia, or if an earthquake struck, I don't think he'd move a muscle—he'd just go on squinting down his microscope, imperturbable as ever. 'What was Hecuba to him?' in other words. I'd have given a lot to see this fossilized specimen in bed with his wife.

Another feature is his fanatical faith in the infallibility of science, and above all in anything written by a German. He has confidence in himself and his preparations, he knows the purpose of life, and is a total stranger to the doubts and disillusionments which turn more able heads grey. Then there's his grovelling deference to authority, his lack of any urge to original thought. It's hard to change his views on any subject, and there's no arguing with him. How can you argue with a man so deeply convinced that medicine is the queen of the sciences, that doctors are an élite, that medical traditions are the finest of all? Only one tradition has survived from medicine's bad old days—the white tie still worn by doctors. For a scholar—for any educated man, indeed—the only possible traditions are those of the academic world as a whole, without any distinction between medicine, law and so on. But it's hard for Peter Ignatyevich to accept this, and he's prepared to argue about it till doomsday.

I can picture his future clearly. In the course of his life he'll have made several hundred preparations of exceptional purity, he'll write a number of dull but highly respectable articles, and he'll do a dozen conscientious translations. But he'll never make a real splash. For that you need imagination, inventiveness, flair—and Peter Ignatyevich has nothing of the kind. He's no master of science, in brief, he's its lackey.

Peter Ignatyevich, Nicholas and I speak in low voices. We feel a certain unease. It's a peculiar sensation, this, to hear your audience booming away like the sea on the other side of a door. Thirty years haven't hardened me to this sensation, I still feel it each morning. I nervously button up my frock-coat, ask Nicholas unnecessary questions, betray irritation.

Panic-stricken though I may look, this is no panic, but something else that I can neither name nor describe.

I look at my watch quite unnecessarily.

'How about it?' I say. 'Time to go.'

We parade in sequence. Nicholas walks in front with the preparations or charts, and I follow—while after me, his head modestly lowered, trudges the old hack. Or, if necessary, a corpse is carried in first on a stretcher, followed by Nicholas, and so on. At my appearance the students stand up, then they sit down and the sea's boom is suddenly hushed. We are becalmed.

I know what I shall lecture about, but just how I shall lecture, what I shall start with, where I shall end—that I don't know. I haven't a single sentence on the tip of my tongue. But I only have to glance round my lecture hall, built in the form of an amphitheatre, and utter the timeworn phrase 'last week we were discussing—', for sentences to surge out of my inner self in a long parade—and the fat is in the fire! I speak with overwhelming speed and enthusiasm, feeling as if no power on earth could check the flow of words. To lecture well—interestingly, that is, and with some profit to the audience—you need other qualities besides ability of a high order: experience, a special knack, and the clearest possible conception of your own powers, of your audience, and of the subject of your lecture. Furthermore, you need to have your head screwed on, keep your wits about you, and never for one moment lose sight of your object.

When a good conductor interprets his composer, he does twenty things at once—reads the score, waves his baton, watches the singer, motions sideways towards drum or French horn, and so on. My lecturing is the same. I have before me a hundred and fifty faces, all different from each other, and three hundred eyes boring into my own. My aim is to vanquish this many-headed hydra. If I can keep its level of attention and comprehension clearly in view throughout every minute of my lecture, then I have it in my power. My other adversary is within myself. This is an infinite variety of forms, phenomena and laws, and the welter of ideas—my own and other people's—thereby conditioned. I must maintain a constant facility for seizing out of this vast material the most significant and vital element, keeping time with the general flow of my lecture as I clothe my idea in a form suited to the hydra's understanding and calculated to stimulate its attention, remaining on the alert to convey my thoughts—not as they accumulate, but in a certain order essential to the proper grouping of the picture which I wish to paint. Furthermore, I try to make my language as elegant, my definitions as brief and precise, and my wording as simple and graceful as I can. Every moment I must check myself and remember

that I have a mere hour and forty minutes at my disposal. I have my work cut out, in other words. I have to play the scholar, the pedagogue and the orator at one and the same time, and it's a poor lookout if the orator in one preponderates over the pedagogue and scholar, or vice versa.

After a quarter or half an hour of lecturing, you notice the students looking up at the ceiling or at Peter Ignatyevich. One feels for his handkerchief, another shifts in his seat, a third smiles at his thoughts.

Their attention is flagging, in other words, and something must be done about it—so I seize the first chance to make some joke. The one hundred and fifty faces grin broadly, the eyes glitter merrily and the sea briefly booms.

I laugh too. Their attention has been revived, and I can go on.

No argument, no entertainment, no sport has ever given me such enjoyment as lecturing. Only when lecturing have I really been able to let myself go, appreciating that inspiration isn't an invention of the poets, but really does exist. And I don't think that even the most exotic of Hercules' labours ever left him so voluptuously exhausted as I've always felt after lecturing.

So it was once, but now lecturing is sheer agony. Not half an hour has passed before I feel intolerable weakness in legs and shoulders. I sit in an arm-chair—but I'm not accustomed to lecture sitting down. I stand up a minute later, and carry on standing—but then sit down again. My mouth feels dry, my voice grows husky, my head reels.

To conceal my condition from the audience, I keep drinking water, I cough, I frequently blow my nose as if I had a cold, I make random jokes, and I end up announcing the break before time. But my main feeling is one of shame.

Conscience and reason tell me that my best course would now be to deliver the boys a farewell lecture, say my last words to them, give them my blessing, and yield my post to a younger and stronger man. But, as God is my judge, I lack the courage to obey my conscience.

Unluckily I'm neither philosopher nor theologian. I'm perfectly well aware that I have less than six months to live. My main concern should now be with the shades beyond the grave, one might suppose—with the ghosts which will haunt my entombed slumbers. But somehow my heart rejects these issues, though my mind recognizes their full import. On the brink of death my interests are just the same now as they were twenty or thirty years ago—purely scientific and scholarly.

Even at my last gasp I shall still believe that learning is the most

important, splendid and vital thing in man's life, that it always has been and always will be the highest manifestation of love, and that it alone can enable man to conquer nature and himself. Though the belief may be naïve and based on incorrect premisses, it's not my fault if I hold this faith and no other. Nor can I shake this conviction within me.

But this is beside the point. I only want people to indulge my weakness, and realize that if a man's more interested in the fate of the bone medulla than in the ultimate goal of creation, then to deprive him of his professorial chair and pupils would be like taking him and nailing him in his coffin without waiting for his death.

My insomnia, and the strain of fighting my increasing weakness, have caused a strange thing to happen to me. In the middle of a lecture tears suddenly choke me, my eyes begin smarting, and I feel a furious, hysterical urge to stretch forth my arms and complain aloud. I want to cry aloud that fate has sentenced me, a famous man, to capital punishment, that within six months someone else will be officiating in this lecture theatre. I want to shout that I've been poisoned. New thoughts, hitherto unfamiliar, have been blighting the last days of my life, and they continue to sting my brain like mosquitoes. Meanwhile my situation seems so appalling that I want all members of my audience to leap from their seats in terror and rush panic-stricken to the exit with screams of despair.

Such moments are not easily endured.

II

After the lecture I stay at home working. I read journals and academic theses, or prepare my next lecture. Sometimes I write. I work in fits and starts because I have to receive visitors.

My bell rings. A colleague has come to discuss some professional matter. Entering my room with his hat and stick, he thrusts both at me.

'I'll only be a minute, only a minute,' says he. 'Don't get up, dear colleague, I only want a couple of words.'

Our first concern is to demonstrate how extremely courteous we both are, and how delighted to see each other. I sit him in an arm-chair, he asks me to sit too. Meanwhile we're cautiously stroking each others' waists, touching each others' buttons, and seem to be feeling each other over as if afraid of burning our fingers. We both laugh, though our remarks are devoid of humour. Once seated, we incline our heads towards each other, and speak in subdued tones. However affectionately

disposed we may be towards each other, we can't help embellishing our speech with all manner of mumbo-jumbo like 'as you so justly deigned to observe', or 'I have already had the honour to inform you'. And we can't help laughing aloud if one of us makes a joke, however poor. His business completed, my colleague stands up jerkily, and begins saying good-bye with a wave of his hat in the direction of my work. Again we finger each other, again we laugh. I see him out into the hall. Here I help him on with his coat, while he makes every effort to evade so high an honour. Then, when Yegor opens the door, my colleague assures me that I shall catch cold, while I pretend that I'm ready to escort him into the street, even. And when I get back to my study at last, my face still smiles—through inertia, no doubt.

A little later the bell rings again. Someone comes into the hall and spends some time removing his coat and coughing. Yegor announces a student.

'Ask him in,' say I.

A little later a well-favoured young man comes in. Our relations have been strained for the last twelve months. He makes a frightful hash of his examinations, so I give him the lowest mark. Each year I always have half a dozen of these young hopefuls whom I fail—or 'plough', in student parlance. Most of those who fail an examination through incompetence or illness bear their cross patiently, they don't bargain with me. The only ones to bargain and visit my home are gay, uninhibited spirits who find that the examination grind spoils their appetite and prevents them visiting the opera regularly. The first sort I spare, the second I go on 'ploughing' throughout the year.

'Sit down,' I tell my visitor. 'Now, what can I do for you?'

'Sorry to disturb you, Professor,' he begins haltingly, not looking me in the eye. 'I wouldn't venture to bother you if I, er——. I've taken your examination five times now and, er, have ploughed. I beg you, please pass me because, er——'

All idlers defend themselves with the same argument. They have passed with distinction in all other subjects, they have only failed mine —which is all the more amazing because they've always studied my subject so industriously, and know it inside out. Their failure is due to some mysterious misunderstanding.

'I'm sorry, friend,' I tell my visitor, 'but I can't pass you. Go and read your lecture notes again, then come back—and we'll see about it.'

There is a pause. I feel the urge to torment the student a little for loving beer and opera more than learning.

'Your best course,' I sigh, 'is to give up medicine altogether, I think. If you, with your ability, can't get through your examination, you obviously don't want to be a doctor, and you've no vocation for it either.'

The young hopeful's face lengthens.

'I'm sorry, Professor,' he smiles. 'But that would be a bit odd, to put it mildly—study five years, and then suddenly throw it all up!'

'Oh, I don't know—better lose five years than spend the rest of your life doing a job you dislike.'

But then I immediately feel sorry for him.

'All right, suit yourself,' I hasten to add. 'Do a bit more reading, then, and come along again.'

'When?' asks the idler in a hollow voice.

'When you like—tomorrow would do.'

'Come I may,' his good-natured eyes seem to tell me, 'but you'll only plough me again, you swine!'

'If I examine you fifteen times over,' I tell him, 'it still won't make you any more learned, that's obvious. But it will train your character, and that's at least something.'

Silence ensues while I get up and wait for my visitor to leave, but he stands looking at the window, plucking at his beard and thinking. This grows tedious.

Our young hopeful's voice is pleasantly fruity, his eyes are alert and sardonic, his face is complacent and somewhat the worse for wear from too much beer-drinking and lolling on his sofa. He would obviously have a lot to say about the opera, his love affairs and his student friends. But it's not done to discuss such things, unfortunately, much as I'd like to hear about them.

'On my word of honour, Professor, if you pass me I'll, er——'

When we arrive at that 'word of honour', I make gestures of despair and sit down at my desk, while the student spends another minute in thought.

'In that case good-bye,' he says despondently. 'I'm sorry.'

'Good-bye, dear boy. Look after yourself.'

He walks hesitantly into the hall, slowly dons his coat and goes into the street, where he probably ponders the matter further, but without hitting on anything new beyond the term 'old devil' with reference to myself. He goes into a cheap restaurant for some beer and a meal, then returns home to bed. May your bones rest in peace, honest toiler!

The bell rings for the third time, and a young doctor comes in—

wearing a new black suit, gold-rimmed spectacles, the inevitable white tie. He introduces himself, I sit him down and ask what I can do for him. Somewhat nervous, this youthful devotee of scholarship tells me that he has this year passed the examination qualifying him to go on to a doctorate, and all he has to do now is to write his thesis. He would like me to be his supervisor, and I should oblige him greatly by giving him a research subject.

'Delighted to be of assistance, dear colleague,' say I. 'But can we first agree about what a research thesis is? The term normally implies a dissertation based on original work—or am I wrong?—while a composition written on someone else's subject, under someone else's supervision, is given a rather different name——'

The doctorate-seeker remains silent.

'Why do you all come to me? That's what I don't see!' I blaze out angrily, leaping from my chair. 'Think I'm running a shop? I'm not hawking research theses! Why won't you all leave me in peace, for the umpteenth time! I'm sorry to be so blunt, but I'm absolutely sick and tired of it!'

The doctorate-seeker makes no reply beyond a slight flush in the region of the cheek-bones. Though his face expresses deep respect for my distinguished reputation and erudition, I can read in his eyes how he despises my voice, miserable figure and nervous gestures. Angry, I seem a kind of freak to him.

'I'm not keeping a shop!' I say wrathfully. 'But why won't any of you be original, that's what baffles me? Why do you hate freedom so?'

I talk a great deal, he says nothing. In the end I gradually calm down —and give in, of course. He'll receive a subject from me not worth a brass farthing, write an utterly pointless thesis under my supervision, hold his own in a tedious disputation, and obtain an academic degree of no possible use to him.

Sometimes the bell never seems to stop ringing, but I shall confine myself here to four visits only. With the fourth ring I hear familiar footsteps, the rustle of a dress and a well-loved voice.

Eighteen years ago an oculist colleague of mine died, leaving his seven-year-old daughter Katya and about sixty thousand roubles. He appointed me guardian in his will, and Katya lived with us as one of the family till she was ten, after which she went to boarding-school and spent only the summer holidays in my home. Having no time to attend to her upbringing, I only observed her sporadically, which is why I can't say much about her childhood.

My first memory of her—and one that I'm very fond of—is the amazing trustfulness with which she entered my house, which showed in her manner towards the doctors who treated her, and which always glowed in her little face. She would sit somewhere out of the way with cheek bandaged, and she was always examining something attentively. I might be writing or leafing through some books while my wife busied herself about the house, the cook peeled potatoes in the kitchen, or the dog played—seeing which things, her eyes always retained the same unchanging expression.

'All things in this world are beautiful and rational,' they seemed to say.

She was inquisitive and much enjoyed talking to me, sitting on the other side of my desk, watching my movements and asking questions—curious to know what I was reading, what my job was at the university, whether I was afraid of corpses, and what I did with my salary.

'Do the students have fights at the university?' she asks.

'Yes, dear.'

'And do you make them go down on their knees?'

'I do.'

She was tickled by the idea of student fights—and of me making them kneel—and she laughed. She was an affectionate, patient, good child. I often chanced to see something taken off her—or saw her punished for something that she hadn't done, or with her curiosity left unsatisfied. Her unfailing expression of trustfulness took on a tinge of sadness at such times, but that was all.

I was incapable of standing up for her and only when I saw her sadness did I long to draw her to myself and console her in the voice of an old nanny, calling her my 'poor darling orphan'.

I remember too how fond she was of dressing up and using scent, in which she resembled me, for I too like fine clothes and good scent.

I regret that I lacked the time and inclination to observe the origin and development of the great passion which engulfed Katya when she was fourteen or fifteen. I mean her passion for the stage. When she came home from school for the summer holidays, she spoke of nothing with such delight and eagerness as plays and actors, wearying us with her incessant talk of the theatre. My wife and children wouldn't listen, and only I was too cowardly to deny her an audience. When she felt an urge to share her enthusiasm, she would come into my study.

'Nicholas Stepanovich, let me talk to you about the theatre,' she would plead.

I would point to the clock.

'You can have half an hour,' I'd say. 'Commence.'

Later she began bringing home dozens of portraits of actors and actresses whom she adored. Then she tried to take part in amateur theatricals several times, until finally, when her schooldays were over, she informed me that she was born to become an actress.

I never shared Katya's enthusiasm for the theatre. If a play's any good, one can gain a true impression without troubling actors, I think—one only needs to read it. And if the play's bad, no acting will make it good.

As a young man I often went to the theatre, and now my family takes a box twice a year and 'gives me an airing'. That's not enough to entitle me to judge the theatre, of course, but I shan't say much about it. I don't think the theatre's any better now than it was thirty or forty years ago. I still can't find a glass of clean water in corridors or foyer. Attendants still fine me twenty copecks for my coat, though there's nothing discreditable about wearing warm clothes in winter. The orchestra still plays in the intervals without the slightest need, adding to the impression already conveyed by the play a further new and quite uncalled for impression. The men still go to the bar in the intervals and drink spirits. Where there's no progress in small things it would be idle to seek it in matters of substance. When an actor, swathed from head to foot in theatrical traditions and preconceptions, tries to declaim a simple, straightforward soliloquy like 'To be or not to be' in a manner anything but simple, and somehow inevitably attended with hissings and convulsions of his entire frame, when he tries to convince me at all costs that Chatsky—who spends so much time talking to fools and falls in love with a foolish girl—is a highly intelligent man, and that *Woe from Wit* isn't a boring play, then the stage seems to exhale that same ritual tedium which used to bore me forty years ago when they regaled me with bellowings and breast-beatings in the classical manner. And I always come out of the theatre more conservative than I went in.

You may convince the sentimental, gullible rabble that the theatre as at present constituted is a school, but that lure won't work on anyone who knows what a school really is. What may happen in fifty or a hundred years, I can't say, but the theatre can only be a form of entertainment under present conditions. Yet this entertainment costs too much for us to continue enjoying it. It deprives the country of thousands of healthy, able young men and women who might have become good doctors, husbandmen, schoolmistresses and officers, had they not

devoted themselves to the stage. It deprives the public of the evening hours, which are best for intellectual work and friendly converse—not to mention the waste of money, and the moral damage to the theatre-goer who sees murder, adultery or slander improperly handled on the stage.

Katya held quite different views, however, assuring me that the theatre—even in its present form—was superior to lecture-rooms, books, and anything else on earth. The stage was a power uniting all the arts, the actors were missionaries. No art, no science on its own could make an impact on the human psyche as powerful and sincere as the stage—no wonder, then, if a second-rate actor enjoyed more popularity in the state than the greatest scholar or artist. Nor could any form of public service give such enjoyment and satisfaction as the stage.

So one fine day Katya joined a theatrical troupe and went away—to Ufa, I think—taking with her a lot of cash, a host of rainbow-coloured hopes and the most lordly views of the matter.

Her first letters written on the road were wonderful. I read them, simply astounded that these small sheets of paper could contain so much youth, spiritual integrity and heavenly innocence—yet also subtle, practical judgements such as would have done credit to a good male mind. The Volga, the scenery, the towns which she visited, her colleagues, her successes and failures—she did not describe them so much as rhapsodize them. Every line breathed that trusting quality which I was used to seeing in her face—and with all this went masses of grammatical mistakes and an almost total lack of punctuation marks.

Within six months I received an extremely romantic, ecstatic letter. 'I'm in love,' it began, and with it was enclosed the photograph of a clean-shaven young man in a broad-brimmed hat with a rug thrown over his shoulder. The ensuing letters were still as magnificent as ever, but punctuation marks had now appeared, grammatical mistakes had vanished, and there was a strong masculine flavour about them. It would be a good idea to build a large theatre somewhere on the Volga, Katya wrote. It must be a joint-stock company, and rich businessmen and steamship owners must be brought into the project. There would be lots of money in it, terrific takings, and the actors would play on a partnership basis.

Perhaps it really was a good idea, but such schemes can originate only in a man's brain, I feel.

Be this as it may, all seemed to go well for eighteen months or

two years. Katya was in love, she had faith in her work, she was happy. But later I began to notice in her letters the obvious signs of a decline. It started with complaints about her associates—the first symptom, and a most sinister one. If a young scholar or literary man begins his career by complaining bitterly about other scholars and literary men, it's a sure sign of premature fatigue and unfitness for his work. Katya wrote that her colleagues missed rehearsals, and never knew their lines. By the fatuous plays which they put on, by their bearing on stage, they each revealed utter disrespect for the public. For the sake of box-office receipts, their sole topic of conversation, serious actresses sank to singing popular songs, while tragic actors performed musical skits on deceived husbands, the pregnancy of unfaithful wives and so forth. The wonder was, what with one thing and another, that the provincial stage hadn't yet collapsed entirely—that it could still hang on by a thread so flimsy and rotten.

I wrote Katya a long answer—a very boring one, admittedly.

'I've had many occasions,' I wrote, amongst other things, 'to talk to elderly actors, extremely decent folk sympathetically disposed towards myself. From our conversations I could see that their activities were governed less by their own intelligence and free choice than by fashion and society's moods. The best of them had had to play tragedy, operetta, Parisian farce and pantomime in their time, and whichever it was, they always felt they were on the right lines, and were doing good. So, you see, one mustn't seek the root of this evil in actors, but more deeply—in the art itself, in society's attitude to it as a whole.'

This letter only irritated Katya.

'We're completely at cross purposes,' she replied. 'I was not referring to these extremely decent folk sympathetically disposed towards yourself, but to a gang of crooks without the faintest shred of decency—a pack of yahoos who only went on the stage because no one would take them anywhere else, and who only call themselves artists out of sheer impudence. There's not one talent among them, but there are plenty of mediocrities, drunkards, schemers and scandal-mongers. My adored art has fallen into the clutches of people odious to me, and I can't tell you how bitterly I feel about it. And I'm bitter because even the best of men will only look on evil from a distance, won't go any nearer, and won't stick up for me—but only write me pompous, platitudinous, futile sermons instead.'

And so on. It was all in that vein.

A little later I received the following letter.

'I've been cruelly deceived, I can't go on living. Do what you think fit with my money. I've loved you as my father, my only friend. Farewell.'

Her young man, it turned out, also belonged to that pack of yahoos. I later gathered from certain hints that there had been an attempt at suicide. I think she tried to poison herself. That she fell seriously ill afterwards seems likely because her next letter reached me from Yalta, where her doctors had presumably sent her. Her last letter contained a request to send her a thousand roubles in Yalta quickly.

'I'm sorry my letter's so gloomy,' she ended. 'Yesterday I buried my baby.'

She spent about a year in the Crimea, and then came home.

She had been on the road about four years, during the whole of which time I had played a pretty invidious and curious role in our relations, I can't deny it. When she originally told me that she was going on the stage, and then wrote about her love, when she was periodically seized by fits of extravagance and I had to keep sending her a thousand or two roubles at her demand, when she wrote of her intention to die and then of her baby's death—I always felt disconcerted, and could express my sympathy for her lot only by much meditation, and by composing long, boring letters which might just as well never have been written. And all this time I was supposed to be a father to her, don't you see? I loved her as a daughter!

Katya lives a few hundred yards from me now, having taken a five-room flat and fixed herself up rather comfortably, and in her own peculiar taste. Were one to portray her surroundings, the picture's dominant mood would be laziness—with soft couches and soft stools for lazy bodies, rugs for lazy feet and faded, dim or pastel colours for lazy eyes. A profusion of cheap fans on the walls caters for the lazy psyche, as also do the wretched little pictures wherein eccentricity of technique predominates over content, the welter of little tables and shelves stocked with utterly superfluous and worthless objects, and the shapeless rags in place of curtains.

Add to all this a dread of bright colours, symmetry and space, and you have evidence of perverted natural taste in addition to temperamental indolence. Katya lies on the couch reading books day in day out—chiefly novels and stories. She only goes out of doors once a day, to visit me in the afternoon.

While I work, Katya sits near me on the sofa in silence, wrapped in a shawl as if she felt cold. Either because she's so congenial, or because

I was so used to her visits as a little girl, her presence doesn't affect my concentration. I automatically ask her a question from time to time, and she replies very briefly. Or, for the sake of a minute's relaxation, I turn towards her and watch as she pensively scans some medical journal or newspaper. At such times her face no longer carries its former trustful look, I observe, her present expression being cold, listless and abstracted—as with passengers who have a long wait for a train. She still dresses beautifully and simply, but carelessly. Her dress and *coiffure* have clearly taken no little punishment from the sofas and rocking-chairs on which she sprawls for days on end. Nor is she inquisitive as of old, having given up asking me questions, as if she'd already seen what there is to see in life and didn't expect to learn anything new.

Towards four o'clock movement begins in hall and drawing-room—Liza is back from the Conservatory, and has brought some girl friends with her. They are heard playing the piano, exercising their voices and laughing. In the dining-room Yegor lays the table with a clatter of crockery.

'Good-bye,' Katya says. 'I shan't call on your family today. I hope they'll excuse me, I haven't time. Do come and see me again.'

As I escort her to the hall she looks me up and down severely.

'You keep getting thinner,' she says regretfully. 'Why don't you see a doctor? I'll call on Sergey Fyodorovich and ask him to look you over.'

'Don't do that, Katya.'

'What's your family playing at? That's what I don't see! A fine lot they are, I must say.'

She puts her coat on abruptly, and inevitably a couple of pins fall from her carelessly dressed hair to the floor. She's too lazy to do her hair, hasn't the time. She awkwardly hides the straying locks under her hat and leaves.

I enter the dining-room.

'Wasn't that Katya with you just now?' my wife asks. 'Why didn't she come and see us? It's rather peculiar——'

'Mother,' says Liza reproachfully, 'if she doesn't want to, never mind. We can't very well go down on bended knee.'

'Say what you like, but it is rather off-hand. To spend three hours in the study without one thought for us. Oh, anyway, let her suit herself.'

Varya and Liza both hate Katya. This hatred is quite beyond me, one must probably be a woman to appreciate it. Among the hundred and

fifty young men whom I see almost daily in my lecture-theatre, and among the hundred or so older men whom I run across every week, there's barely one, I'd stake my life, capable of understanding this hatred and disgust for Katya's past—her pregnancy and the illegitimate child, in other words. And yet I can't recall one woman or girl of my acquaintance who wouldn't harbour such sentiments, consciously or unconsciously. Nor is this because woman is purer and more virtuous than man, for virtue and purity differ precious little from vice unless they're free from malice. I attribute it simply to women's backwardness. The despondency, the sympathy, the conscience-pangs which the spectacle of misery evokes in your modern male—they say a lot more for his cultural and moral level than would hatred and disgust. Now, your female is as tearful and insensitive today as she was in the Middle Ages, and those who advocate educating her like a man are being perfectly sensible, or so I believe.

My wife also dislikes Katya for having been an actress, for being ungrateful, proud and eccentric, and for all those many other vices which one woman can always find in another.

Besides myself and my family, two or three of my daughter's girl friends lunch with us, as also does Alexander Adolfovich Gnekker—Liza's admirer and a suitor for her hand. He is a fair-haired young man under thirty, of medium height, very stout and broad-shouldered, with ginger dundreary whiskers near his ears and a tinted little moustache which makes his plump, smooth face look like a toy. He wears a very short jacket, a gaudy waistcoat, trousers very broad on top, very narrow down below and patterned in large checks, and yellow heelless boots. He has bulging eyes like a crayfish, his tie resembles a crayfish's neck. The young man's whole person gives off a smell of crayfish soup, or so it seems to me. He visits us daily, but no one in the family knows where he comes from, where he went to school, or what his means are. He doesn't play or sing, but he's somehow implicated in singing and music as a salesman for someone or other's pianos who's always in and out of the Conservatory, knowing all the celebrities and officiating at concerts. He criticizes music with a great air of authority, and I've noticed that people are quick to agree with him.

As rich men are always surrounded by toadies, so are science and the arts. There seems to be no art, no branch of learning free from 'foreign bodies' of friend Gnekker's ilk. Not being a musician, I may be wrong about Gnekker—not that I know him very well, anyway. But his

authority seems to me rather suspect, as does his air of profundity when he stands by a piano listening to someone sing or play.

You may be a gentleman and a leading member of your profession a hundred times over, but once you have a daughter there's nothing to protect you from the lower-class vulgarity so frequently obtruded upon your home and mood by courtship, marriage negotiations and wedding. For instance, I simply can't abide the triumphant look on my wife's face when Gnekker's in the house, and I can't put up with bottles of Château Lafite, port and sherry served solely to provide him with ocular evidence of our generous and lavish way of life. Neither can I stomach Liza's laugh which she has picked up at the Conservatory, or her trick of screwing up her eyes when we have men in the house. Least of all can I comprehend why I should be visited daily by —and lunch daily with—a creature so totally alien to my habits, my studies and the whole tenor of my life, who is also so utterly different from anyone dear to me. My wife and the servants mysteriously whisper about him being 'Liza's young man', but I still can't see what he's doing here, and I feel as nonplussed as if they'd sat a Zulu down beside me at table. What also seems odd is that my daughter, whom I'm used to regarding as a child, should love this tie, these eyes, these soft cheeks.

In the old days I used to enjoy my lunch, or was indifferent to it. But now it only bores and irritates me. Since I became a professor, since I've been a Dean of Faculty, my family has found it necessary to make a complete change in our menu and lunching procedures for some reason.

Instead of the simple dishes familiar to me as student and ordinary doctor, I'm now given 'purée'—or soup with things like white icicles floating in it—and kidneys in Madeira. Professorial rank and fame have for ever cut me off from cabbage stew, tasty pies, goose and apple, bream and *kasha*. They have also robbed me of our maid Agasha, a chatty old woman who liked a bit of a laugh, and in whose stead a dim, haughty creature called Yegor, with a white glove on his right hand, now serves meals. The intervals between courses are short, but seem excessively long because there's nothing to occupy them. Our former gaiety, the carefree talk, the jokes, the laughs, the expressions of fondness for each other, the delight which used to stir the children, my wife and myself whenever we met in our dining-room—these are all things of the past. To a busy man like myself lunch was a time for relaxation and sociability, while for my wife and children it was a holiday—brief

indeed, but bright and gay—when, for one half hour, they knew that I belonged not to science, not to my students . . . but to them, and them alone. Now I've lost the knack of growing merry on one glass of wine, and there's no more Agasha, no more bream and *kasha*, no more uproar such as once greeted minor meal-time scandals like the cat and dog fighting under the table, or Katya's bandage falling off her cheek into a bowl of soup.

To describe my present style of lunch is as unappetizing as the eating of it. Solemn in its pompous affectation, my wife's face wears its usual careworn expression.

'I see you don't like the joint,' says she with an anxious glance at our plates. 'Now, you don't like it, do you? Tell me.'

'Don't worry, dear,' I have to answer, 'the joint's very nice.'

'You always agree with me, Nicholas,' says she. 'You never tell the truth. But why is Mr. Gnekker eating so little?'

So it goes on right through the meal, with Liza laughing her staccato laugh and screwing up her eyes. I watch them both, and only now at lunch does it dawn on me that their inner life has long since vanished from my field of vision. Once I lived at home with a real family, I feel, but now I'm just the lunch-guest of a spurious wife, looking at a spurious Liza. A great change has taken place in them both, but I have missed the long process by which it occurred, so no wonder I can't make sense of anything. What caused that change I don't know. The trouble is, perhaps, that God gave my wife and daughter less strength than he granted me. I've been used to holding out against external pressures since boyhood, I've steeled myself pretty well. Such disasters in life as fame, reaching the top of one's profession, abandoning modest comfort for living above one's means, acquaintance with celebrities and all that—these things have barely touched me, I've kept a whole skin. But on my weak, untempered wife and Liza the whole business has collapsed like an avalanche of snow, crushing them.

Gnekker and the young ladies talk fugues, counterpoint, singers, pianists, Bach and Brahms, while my wife smiles sympathetically, fearing to be suspected of musical ignorance.

'How splendid,' she mutters. 'Really? You don't say!'

Gnekker eats solidly away, making his solid jokes and lending a patronizing ear to the young ladies' observations. Evincing an occasional desire to speak bad French, he finds it necessary for some reason to dub me *Votre Excellence* at such times.

But I'm morose. They're as uneasy with me, obviously, as I am

with them. I had never come up against class hatred before, but that's what plagues me now, or something like it. I seek only the bad in Gnekker, I find it soon enough, and suffer agonies at the thought of someone outside my own circle as suitor for my daughter's hand. His presence affects me badly in another way too. When I'm on my own or with people I like, I don't brood on my own virtues as a rule—or, if I do, I find them as trifling as if I'd only spent one day in academic life. But when I'm with someone like Gnekker, my merits loom before me like some great mountain with its summit lost in cloud, while down on the foothills squirm Gnekkers scarce visible to the naked eye.

After lunch I go into my study and light my only pipe of the day, a relic of my bad old habit of puffing away morning noon and night. While I smoke my wife comes in and sits down for a talk. As in the mornings, I know what we're going to talk about in advance.

'You and I must have a serious talk, Nicholas,' she begins. 'About Liza, I mean—. Why won't you put your mind to it?'

'To what?'

'You pretend you don't see anything, but that's wrong, one mustn't be so off-hand. Gnekker has intentions towards Liza—what do you say about it?'

'That he's a bad man I can't say because I don't know him. That I don't like him I've told you a thousand times already.'

'Oh, this is impossible, really——'

She stands up and walks about in agitation.

'You can't adopt that attitude to a serious step,' says she. 'With a daughter's happiness at stake, one must put all personal considerations aside. All right, I know you don't like him—but if we turn him down now and break it off, what guarantee have you that Liza won't hold it against us for the rest of her life? There aren't too many young men about these days, heaven knows, and another one may not come along. He's very much in love with Liza, and she obviously likes him. He hasn't got a proper job, of course, but that can't be helped. He'll get fixed up somewhere in time, God willing. He's of good family and he's well off.'

'How do you know?'

'He said so himself. His father has a large house in Kharkov and an estate near by. What it comes to, Nicholas, is that you must definitely visit Kharkov.'

'What for?'

'You can go into things there—you know some of the local professors, and they'll help you. I'd go myself, but I'm a woman and I can't——'

'I shan't go to Kharkov,' I say gloomily.

My wife takes fright, and an anguished expression appears on her face.

'For God's sake, Nicholas,' she begs between sobs. 'For God's sake, take this burden from me—I'm in agony.'

The sight of her causes me suffering.

'All right then, Varya,' I say tenderly. 'All right, I'll run down to Kharkov if you like and do what you want.'

She presses her handkerchief to her eyes and goes off to cry in her room while I'm left on my own.

Somewhat later a lamp is brought in. Arm-chairs and lampshade throw on walls and floor the familiar shadows of which I have long since tired. Watching them, I feel as if night had fallen and my damned insomnia had started already. I lie on the bed, I get up and pace the room, then lie down again.

As a rule my nervous excitement reaches its highest pitch in the late afternoon. I begin crying for no good reason, and bury my head in the pillow—afraid of someone coming in, afraid of dying suddenly, ashamed of my tears, and altogether in the most unbearable state of mind. No longer, I feel, can I bear the sight of my lamp, of my books, of the shadows on the floor, nor can I endure the voices ringing in the drawing-room. Some force, unseen and inscrutable, is thrusting me roughly out of my home, and I leap up, quickly dress and slip into the street, heedful to elude the attention of my family. Where shall I go?

The answer to that question has been in my mind for some time—to Katya's.

III

As a rule she's lying on a Turkish divan or sofa, reading. Seeing me, she idly lifts her head, sits up and stretches out her hand.

'You're always lying down,' I say after pausing for breath. 'That's bad for you, you should be doing something.'

'Eh?'

'You should be doing something, I say.'

'Doing what? A woman can only do menial work or go on the stage.'

'Well then, go on the stage if you can't do the other kind of work.'

She says nothing.

'You ought to get married,' I say, half joking.

'There's no one to marry—no point in it either.'

'You can't go on like this.'

'Without a husband? A lot that matters—I could have as many men as I liked if I wanted.'

'That's not very nice, Katya.'

'What isn't?'

'What you just said.'

'Come on,' says Katya, noting my distress and wishing to remove the bad impression. 'Now, come with me—there you are.'

She takes me into a small, extremely comfortable room.

'There you are,' she says, pointing to the desk. 'I arranged this for you, you can work here. Come here every day and bring your work—they only interrupt you at home. You will work here, won't you?'

To avoid the offence of a refusal, I reply that I will indeed, and that I like the room very much. Then we both sit down in that comfortable room and start talking.

Warmth, comfort, a congenial presence—instead of pleasure, as of old, these things now evoke in me only a strong urge to complain and grouse. I'll somehow feel better, it seems, if I fuss and grumble.

'Things are in a bad way, my dear,' I begin with a sigh. 'Very bad——'

'What is?'

'Well, it's like this, my dear. The greatest, the most sacred right of kings is the right of pardon, and I've always felt like a king because I've availed myself of this right up to the limit. I've never judged, I've been indulgent, I've gladly forgiven all and sundry. Where others protested or waxed indignant, I merely advised or persuaded. Throughout my life my sole concern has been to make my company tolerable to my family, students, colleagues and servants. This attitude to others has had a formative influence on those around me, I know. But now I'm a king no longer. Something is going on inside me—some process fit only for slaves. Day and night evil thoughts haunt me, feelings hitherto unfamiliar have settled in my heart—hatred, scorn, indignation, outrage, fear. I've grown excessively severe, exacting, irritable, disagreeable, suspicious. What once provoked me to an extra joke and a jolly laugh, no more—even those things depress my spirits now. And my sense of logic has changed too. Where once I despised only money,

I now harbour malice against rich people, as if they were at fault—not against their money. Where once I hated violence and tyranny, I now hate those who employ violence, as if they alone were to blame—and not the rest of us for our inability to educate each other. What's the meaning of this? If these new thoughts and new feelings proceed from changed convictions, then where did this change come from? Has the world grown worse? And I better? Or was I blind before, and apathetic? Now, if the change derives from a general decline in my physical and intellectual powers—and I am ill, after all, I do lose weight every day—then my situation's pathetic, for my new thoughts must be abnormal and morbid. I should be ashamed of them, make little of them——'

'Illness is neither here nor there,' Katya breaks in. 'Your eyes have been opened, that's all, and you've seen what, for some reason, you once preferred to ignore. The main thing is, you must make a clean break with your family and get away—that's what I think.'

'Nonsense.'

'You don't love them, so why pretend? Call that a family! Nonentities! If they dropped dead today, not a soul would miss them tomorrow.'

Katya despises my wife and daughter as much as they hate her. Nowadays one can hardly talk about the right to despise other people. But put yourself in Katya's place, and admit such a right—then she's clearly as entitled to scorn my wife and Liza as they are to hate her.

'Nonentities!' she repeats. 'Did you get any lunch today? Don't tell me they remembered to tell you it was ready! Or that they haven't forgotten your existence!'

'Please be quiet, Katya,' I say sternly.

'Think I enjoy talking about them? I wish I'd never set eyes on them! Now, listen, my dear. Throw everything up and leave—go abroad, and the sooner the better.'

'Oh, rubbish! What about the university?'

'Leave the university as well—what do you want with it? It makes no sense, anyway. You've been lecturing for thirty years, and where are your pupils? Are there many distinguished scholars among them? Just try counting them! As for breeding the sort of doctor who exploits ignorance and earns his hundred thousand roubles—it doesn't need a good man or a brilliant intellect for that! You're not needed.'

I am aghast. 'My God, you're so harsh, so very harsh! Now, be quiet, or I'll leave—I don't know how to answer such rudeness.'

The maid comes in to announce tea, and over the samovar we

change the subject, thank God. Having had my grouse, I now wish to indulge another senile weakness—reminiscences. I tell Katya about my past—informing her, to my own amazement, of details that have survived all unsuspected in my memory, while she listens with bated breath, delighted and proud. I particularly like telling her how I was once at a school for clergy's sons, and dreamt of going on to the university.

'I used to walk in our school garden,' I tell her. 'A song or an accordion's grinding floats on the breeze from some faraway tavern, or a troika with bells careers past the school fence—and that's quite enough to fill my heart, and even my stomach, legs and arms, with a sudden happy glow.

'Listening to an accordion, or a dying peal of bells, I'd imagine myself a doctor, and paint pictures of the scene—each better than the last. Now my dreams have come true, as you see. I've received more than I dared to hope. For thirty years I've been a well-loved professor, I've had excellent colleagues, I've enjoyed honours and distinction. I've loved, I've married for love, I've had children. When I look back, in fact, my whole life seems a beautiful and accomplished composition. Now it only remains not to spoil the finale, for which purpose I have to die like a man. If death really is a menace, I have to meet it as befits a teacher, a scholar and the citizen of a Christian country—confidently and with equanimity. But I'm spoiling the finale. I feel I'm drowning, I run off to you, I ask for help, and—"Drown away," say you, "that's just what you should be doing".'

Then a bell sounds in the hall. Katya and I recognize the ring.

'It must be Michael Fyodorovich,' we say.

A minute later my colleague, the literary specialist Michael Fyodorovich, comes in—a tall, well-built, clean-shaven man of fifty with thick grey hair and black eyebrows. He's a good-natured man, an excellent colleague, and comes of an old, rather successful and accomplished family of gentry which has played a prominent part in our literary and educational history. He himself is intelligent, accomplished, highly educated—but he has his foibles. We're all peculiar, we're all freaks in some degree, but his quirks are somewhat extreme, and they're rather a menace to his friends. I know quite a few of them whom his eccentricities have blinded to his many virtues.

He enters and slowly peels off his gloves.

'Hallo,' says he in a deep, velvety voice. 'Having tea? How convenient. It's hellishly cold.'

Then he sits down at table, takes a glass and starts speaking immediately. Nothing is more typical of his delivery than his unfailing jocularity—a sort of cross between philosophy and buffoonery reminiscent of Shakespeare's grave-diggers. He always treats of serious topics—but never treats them seriously. Though his judgements are always harsh and acrimonious, the soft, level, jocular tone somehow prevents the harshness and acrimony from jarring, and one soon grows used to them. Each evening he brings along five or six items of university gossip with which he leads off when he sits down at table.

'Oh Lord,' he sighs with a sardonic twitch of his black eyebrows. 'There are some clowns in this world, I must say!'

'Meaning what?' asks Katya.

'I'm leaving a lecture this morning when I meet friend So-and-so on the stairs, the old fool. He walks along with that horsy chin jutting out as usual, looking for someone to hear him moan about his migraine, his wife and the students who won't go to his lectures. Well, think I, he's spotted me, and I'm lost, the game's up——'

And so it goes on, all in that style. Or else he leads off like this.

'I went to dear old Such-and-such's public lecture yesterday. The less said about this, the better—but I'm astonished that the dear old *alma mater* dares put such numskulls as this creature, such certified boobies, on public display. Why, the man's an imbecile in the international class—oh yes he is, European champion! He lectures, believe it or not, as if he was sucking a boiled sweet—champ, champ, champ! He panics, he can't keep track of his notes, while his wretched thoughts crawl along about as fast as an abbot on a bicycle, and above all you can't make head or tail of what he's driving at. It's so fiendishly dull, the very flies drop dead. The only comparable bore is the annual ceremony in the university hall, the day of our traditional oration, damnation take it!'

Then he makes an abrupt transition.

'About three years ago, as Nicholas here will remember, I had to give that oration. It was hot and stuffy, my uniform was too tight under the arms—sheer hell it was! I lecture for half an hour, one hour, an hour and a half, two hours. "Well," think I, "I've only ten pages left, praise the Lord!" And there are four pages at the end that I needn't bring in at all—I'd reckoned on leaving them out. So I reckon I've only six pages left. But then I glance in front of me, see? And I notice some general with a medal ribbon, and a bishop—sitting together in the front row. The poor creatures are bored rigid, their eyes are popping

out of their heads in their efforts to stay awake, yet they try to look as if they're attending, they make out that they understand and appreciate my lecture. "Very well," think I, "if you like it so much you can damn well have it, and serve you right!" So I go ahead and give them the last four pages too.'

As is the way of these sardonic people, only his eyes and eyebrows smile when he speaks. His eyes then express neither hatred nor malice, but a great deal of wit, and the peculiar foxy cunning only seen in very observant people. And talking of eyes, I've spotted another peculiarity in his. When he takes a glass from Katya, listens to her speak or glances after her as she leaves the room on some brief errand, I notice something tender, supplicatory and innocent in his look.

The maid takes the samovar away, and serves a large piece of cheese, some fruit and a bottle of Crimean champagne—a poorish vintage of which Katya had been fond in the Crimea. Picking up two packs of cards from the shelves, Michael Fyodorovich plays patience. But though he claims that certain forms of patience require much imagination and attention, he doesn't pause from his conversational diversions as he plays. Katya follows his cards keenly, helping him more by mime than words. She drinks no more than two glasses of wine in an evening, and I drink a quarter of a glass.

The rest of the bottle devolves upon Michael Fyodorovich, who can put away a great deal without ever getting drunk.

We discuss various problems, mainly on the loftiest level, during the game of patience, and our great love—science—comes in for rougher treatment than anything else.

'Science has had its day, thank God,' enunciates Michael Fyodorovich. 'It's day is done, indeed it is, and mankind already feels the need for some substitute. Science grew out of superstition, it was fed on superstition, and it now represents superstition's quintessence, like its outmoded granddams—alchemy, metaphysics and philosophy. And what have people got out of it, anyway? Between learned Europeans and the entirely unscientific Chinese, there's precious little difference, isn't there—and that purely external? The Chinese have done without science, and what have they missed?'

'Flies don't have science either,' I say. 'What of it?'

'Don't be angry, Nicholas, I only say this here, you know, it's between us three. I'm more discreet than you think, I wouldn't talk this way in public—God forbid! The masses hold the superstitious view that science and the arts are a cut above agriculture, trade and

handicraft. Our section of society lives on this superstition, and God forbid that you and I should destroy it.'

As the game of patience proceeds, the younger generation also finds itself in hot water.

'Our people have gone to seed,' sighs Michael Fyodorovich. 'I say nothing of ideals and all that, but if they could only work and think sensibly! It's Lermontov's "How sadly I regard the present generation" all over again.'

'Yes, they've degenerated terribly,' Katya agrees. 'Tell me, have you had one outstanding student in the last five or six years?'

'I can't speak for other professors, but I don't remember any, somehow.'

'I've seen many students in my day, many of your young scholars, many actors. And what do you think? Not once have I been privileged to meet an ordinary interesting person among them, let alone any star performers or high flyers. They're all so dim, so mediocre, so puffed up with pretensions——'

All this talk about things going to the bad—it always affects me as if I'd accidentally overheard unpleasant gossip about my daughter. I'm insulted by the sweeping nature of indictments built on such hackneyed truisms and bugbears as degeneracy, lack of idealism and harking back to the good old days. Every criticism—even one expressed in ladies' company—should be formulated with maximum precision, or else it isn't criticism, it's just baseless calumny unworthy of a decent man.

I'm an old man, I've been in university work for thirty years, but I see no degeneration or lack of idealism, I don't think things are worse now than they used to be. My porter Nicholas, whose experience has some bearing on the matter, calls today's students no better and no worse than those who went before.

If asked what I dislike about my present students, I shouldn't answer at once or say much, but I should be adequately specific. Knowing their defects, I don't need to resort to a fog of platitude. I dislike their smoking, spirit-drinking, marrying late in life, and being so happy-go-lucky—and often so callous—that they condone starvation among their fellows by not paying their dues to the students' aid society. They don't know modern languages, nor do they express themselves in correct Russian. Only yesterday a colleague—a specialist in hygiene—was complaining to me that he has to give twice as many lectures because their physics is weak and they're wholly ignorant of meteorology.

They gladly fall under the influence of the latest writers, and not the best ones at that, but they're quite indifferent to such classics as Shakespeare, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus or Pascal, say, and this inability to distinguish great from small reveals their lack of practical experience more than anything else. All difficult problems of a more or less social nature—for instance, that of colonizing unpopulated areas of the country—they decide by getting up a public subscription, not by scientific investigation and experiment, though this last procedure is well within their grasp and has a close bearing on their mission in life. They gladly become assistant surgeons, registrars, demonstrators and housemen, and they're ready to do these jobs up to the age of forty, though independence, a feeling of freedom and personal initiative are just as much needed in science as in art or commerce. I have pupils and audiences, but no helpers and successors. So I like them, I'm enthusiastic about them—but without being proud of them. And so on and so forth.

However numerous such defects may be, they can breed a pessimistic or abusive mood only in a poor-spirited, feeble individual. They're all adventitious and temporary, they derive exclusively from living conditions. A few decades will see them vanish or yield to other, new defects such as cannot be avoided, and will also alarm the craven-hearted in their turn. Students' misdemeanours often annoy me, but such vexation is nothing to the thirty years of enjoyment which I've had through talking and lecturing to my pupils, keeping an eye on their attitudes and comparing them with people in different walks of life.

Michael Fyodorovich casts his aspersions, and Katya listens, neither noticing the bottomless pit into which they are gradually sucked by the patently innocent diversion of condemning their neighbour. They don't sense how ordinary talk gradually turns into sneering and scoffing, or how they both start employing the techniques of downright muck-raking.

'You meet some really killing characters!' says Michael Fyodorovich. 'I dropped in on friend Yegor Petrovich yesterday, where I run across a student type, one of your medicals—in his third year, I think. He has a face in—well, in the Dobrolyubov style, with that stamp of profundity on his brow. We get talking.

'"Oh yes, young man," say I, "I was reading that some German, whose name I forget, has extracted a new alkaloid from the human brain—idiotin."

'Know what? He falls for it! And even adopts a respectful expression, as if to say "Good for us!" Then I went to the theatre the other day. I take my seat. Just in front, in the next row, sit a couple of them—one a member of the Chosen Race and evidently a law student, and the other shaggy creature a medico. The medical boy's as tight as a coot, pays no attention to the stage at all, and just snoozes away, nodding his head. But as soon as some actor launches into a noisy soliloquy, or simply raises his voice, my medico starts and pokes his neighbour in the ribs.

'"What's that?" he asks. "Noble sentiments, eh?"

'"Yes indeed," answers the Chosen One.

'"Hurray!" bellows our medico. "Elevating stuff, this! Bravo!"

'This drunken clot hasn't come to the theatre for art, you see, but for noble sentiments. He wants to be edified!'

Katya listens and laughs. She has a strange kind of guffaw, breathing in and out in rapid, even rhythm, as if playing a concertina, while her nostrils are the only part of her face to express amusement. But I feel downcast, and don't know what to say. I lose my temper, I flare up, I leap from my seat.

'Why don't you just shut up?' I shout. 'Why sit here poisoning the air with your breath like a couple of toads? Stop it!'

Without waiting for an end to their calumnies, I prepare to go home. It's high time anyway, gone ten o'clock.

'Well, I'll stay a bit longer,' says Michael Fyodorovich. 'Have I your permission, Miss Katya?'

'You have,' Katya answers.

'*Bene*. Then have them bring on another little bottle.'

They both see me into the hall with candles.

'You've grown very thin of late, and you've aged,' says Michael Fyodorovich as I put on my fur coat. 'What's up? Ill, are you?'

'Yes, a bit.'

'And he won't see a doctor,' Katya puts in gloomily.

'But why ever not? This won't do! God helps those who help themselves, dear man. My regards to your family, and my excuses for not calling on them. I'll come round and say good-bye in a day or two before I go abroad—I'll make a point of it. I leave next week.'

As I come away from Katya's I'm irritable, alarmed by the talk about my illness and annoyed with myself. I wonder whether I really should consult a colleague about my health. Then I immediately

picture him sounding my chest, after which he goes towards the window without speaking, thinks a little, and then turns to me, trying to prevent me from reading the truth in his face.

'I see nothing to worry about at the moment,' says he in a neutral voice. 'Still, I'd advise you to give up work, dear colleague.'

And that would rob me of my last hope.

What man lives without hope? Now that I am diagnosing my own condition and treating myself, I have times when I hope that I'm deceived by my own ignorance, that I'm wrong about the albumen and sugar that I find—wrong about my heart, too, and about the oedemas which I've twice noticed in the mornings. Perusing textbooks of therapy with true hypochondriac fervour, and changing my nostrums every day, I still fancy I may stumble on some consolation. But this is all so trivial.

Whether the sky's cloudy or aglow with moon and stars, I always gaze at it on my way back, thinking how death will shortly overtake me. One might suppose that my thoughts must be as profound as that sky on these occasions, and as bright and vivid.

Far from it! I think about myself, my wife, Liza, Gnekker, students, people in general. My thoughts are wretched and trivial, I'm not honest with myself, and all the time my outlook is that expressed by the famous Arakcheyev in a private letter: 'Nothing good can exist without evil in this world, and there's always more evil than good.' All is vile, in other words, there's nothing to live for, and the sixty-two years of my life must be written off. Catching myself thinking like this, I cultivate the conviction that such ideas are accidental, temporary, superficial.

'But if that's so,' I immediately think, 'why am I drawn to see those two toads every evening?'

I swear I'll never go to Katya's any more—yet I shall visit her again the very next evening, I know.

Tugging my door-bell and walking upstairs, I feel I've lost my family and don't want it back. These new, Arakcheyev-like ideas of mine obviously aren't accidental or temporary at all, they dominate my entire being. Sick in conscience, despondent, indolent, scarce moving my limbs, and feeling about fifty tons heavier, I go to bed and soon fall asleep.

Follows another sleepless night.

IV

Summer comes, life changes.

One fine morning Liza enters my room.

'Come, sir,' says she in jocular tone. 'All is ready.'

Sir is taken into the street, put in a cab and driven off. For want of anything better to do, I read the shop signs backwards as I pass. *Traktir*, the word for 'tavern', comes out as *Ritkart*, which would do as a baronial surname—the Baroness Ritkart. Then I drive through fields past a graveyard, which makes no impression on me at all, though I'll soon be lying there. Then I go through a wood, then through fields again. This is boring. After travelling for two hours, Sir is taken into the ground floor of a summer cottage and placed in a small, very jolly room with light blue wall-paper.

At night I sleep as little as before, but instead of waking and listening to my wife in the morning, I lie in bed—not asleep, but a prey to drowsiness, that semi-conscious state when you know you're not asleep, yet dream. I rise at noon and sit at my desk through force of habit, but instead of working I amuse myself with French books in yellow wrappers, which Katya sends me. To read Russian authors would be more patriotic, of course, but I'm not particularly disposed in their favour, I must confess. Two or three veterans apart, all modern literature seems to me less literature than a variety of cottage industry which exists solely to enjoy the patronage of persons reluctant to avail themselves of its products. Even the best of these homely artefacts can't be called noteworthy, nor can one praise them sincerely without qualification. The same applies to all those literary novelties that I've read during the last ten or fifteen years and which include nothing noteworthy, nothing which can be praised without a 'but'. Such a product may be witty and uplifting—but lacks talent. Or else it's talented and uplifting, but lacks wit. Or, finally, it may be talented and witty, but lacks uplift.

I wouldn't call these French books talented, witty or uplifting. They don't satisfy me either. But they're less boring than the Russian, and it's not unusual to find in them that element vital to originality—a feeling of personal freedom such as Russian authors lack. I can't remember one new work where the author wasn't at pains to hobble himself with all sorts of conditions and contracts with his conscience from the first page onwards. One fears to speak of the naked body, another has tied himself hand and foot with psychological analysis, a

third requires a 'warm attitude to man', while a fourth deliberately pads the thing out with whole pages of nature description so as not to be suspected of tendentiousness.

One insists on his work showing him as a townsman of the lower orders, another must be a gentleman and so on. They have premeditation, caution, an eye to the main chance, but they lack the freedom and courage to write what they like, and hence they lack the creative spirit.

All this relates to so-called belles-lettres.

As for learned Russian articles—on sociology, say, on art and all that—the reason I don't read them is sheer nervousness. As a boy and youth I was terrified of hall-porters and theatre ushers for some reason, and that terror is with me to this day. I still fear them. One fears only what one doesn't understand, it's said. And hard indeed it is to see quite why hall-porters and ushers should be so pompous, overweening and sublimely unmannerly. Reading learned articles fills me with just the same vague dread. That fantastic pomposity, this air of magisterial banter, those familiar allusions to foreign authors, the ability to preserve one's dignity while on a wild-goose chase—it's all rather beyond me, it terrifies me, and it's most unlike the modesty, the calm, gentlemanly tone to which I've grown accustomed when reading our natural scientists and medical authors. Articles apart, I find it hard to read even translations made or edited by your serious Russian. The presumptuously condescending tone of the introductions, the profusion of translator's notes which stop me concentrating, the question marks and the word *sic* in brackets with which the liberal translator has bespattered the whole article—these things encroach on the author's personality and on my independence as a reader, or so I feel. I was once called in to give expert evidence in a county court. During the adjournment a fellow-expert pointed out how rude the prosecutor had been to the accused, who included two ladies of good social standing. I don't think I was exaggerating in the least when I told my colleague that the prosecutor's manner was no ruder than that obtaining between the authors of learned articles. So offensive is this manner, in fact, that one can't speak of it without distaste. They either handle each other, or the writers whom they criticize, with such egregious obsequiousness that it lowers their own dignity—or, conversely, treat them with far scanter ceremony than I have my future son-in-law Gnekker in these jottings and musings. Allegations of irresponsibility, of impure motives—of all kinds of criminal activity, even—are the staple embellishment of learned articles. And that is, as young doctors like to say in their papers,

the *ultima ratio*! Such attitudes are inevitably reflected in the morals of the younger generation of writers, which is why I'm not one bit surprised that the new items accruing to our literature in the last ten or fifteen years contain heroes who drink too much vodka and heroines whose chastity leaves something to be desired.

I read French books and look out of the open window. I see the sharp points of my garden fence, two or three wizened little trees, and then—beyond the fence—a road, the fields, a broad belt of pine-wood. I often enjoy watching a little boy and girl, both with fair hair and torn clothes, as they climb the fence and laugh at my hairless pate. In their gleaming little eyes I read the words: 'Go up, thou bald head.' They must be pretty well the only people who care nothing for my fame and rank.

Out here I don't have callers every day, and I'll mention only the visits of Nicholas and Peter Ignatyevich. Nicholas usually comes on a Sunday or saint's day—supposedly on business, but really to see me. He arrives quite tipsy—which he never is in winter.

'What news?' I ask, going to meet him in the hall.

'Sir!' says he, pressing a hand to his heart and looking at me with the fervour of a lover. 'Sir! May God punish me, may lightning strike me where I stand! *Gaudeamus igitur juvenes* tra-la-la!'

He kisses me eagerly on shoulders, sleeves and buttons.

'Is all well?' I ask.

'Sir, I swear by Almighty——'

He keeps on swearing to no purpose and soon grows tedious, so I send him to the kitchen where they give him a meal.

Peter Ignatyevich also comes out on holidays, especially to look me up and share his thoughts. He usually sits at my table. Modest, dapper, judicious, not venturing to cross his legs or lean his elbows on the table, he recounts in a soft, level, smooth, pedantic little voice sundry supposedly fascinating and spicy novelties culled from journals and pamphlets. All these items are alike, all add up to something like this. A Frenchman has made a discovery. Someone else, a German, has caught him out by proving that this discovery was made back in 1870 by some American. Now someone else again, another German, has outmanœuvred both—proving that they slipped up by taking air bubbles for dark pigment under the microscope. Even when trying to amuse me, Peter Ignatyevich discourses in long-winded, circumstantial fashion like one defending his dissertation—giving a detailed catalogue of his bibliographical sources, endeavouring not to misquote his names

or the dates and issues of his journals, and never calling someone plain 'Petit', but always 'Jean-Jacques Petit'. Sometimes he stays for a meal, and spends the whole time telling these same pithy anecdotes which depress the whole table. Should Gnekker and Liza mention fugue and counterpoint, or Brahms and Bach, in his presence, he modestly drops his eyes and betrays embarrassment, ashamed for such trivialities to be invoked before two serious people like him and me.

In my present mood five minutes of him is enough to bore me as if I'd been seeing and hearing him from time immemorial. I loathe the poor fellow. His quiet, level voice and pedantic speech shrivel me up, his stories numb my brain.

He has the greatest good will for me, he only talks to me to give me pleasure, and I repay him by goggling back as if trying to hypnotize him.

'Go!' I think. 'Go, go, go!'

But not being susceptible to telepathy he just stays on and on and on.

When he's with me, I'm obsessed by the thought that he'll very likely be appointed to succeed me when I die, and my poor lecture-room seems to me like an oasis with a dried-up spring. I'm surly with Peter Ignatyevich—taciturn and gloomy, as if these thoughts were his fault, not mine. When he praises German scholars in his usual fashion, I no longer make fun of him good-humouredly, as once I did.

'Your Germans are asses,' I mutter gloomily.

It reminds me of when Professor Nikita Krylov was alive. He was once bathing with Pirogov in Revel, and lost his temper because the water was so cold. 'These Germans are scoundrels!' he cursed. I treat Peter Ignatyevich badly. Only when he's leaving—when I look through the window and glimpse his grey hat flickering behind the garden fence—do I want to call him back and say: 'Forgive me, dear fellow!'

Lunch is more boring than in winter. That same Gnekker, whom I now loathe and despise, eats with me almost daily. Where once I endured his presence in silence, I now make cutting remarks at his expense, causing my wife and Liza to blush. Yielding to malice, I often utter complete imbecilities without knowing why. For instance, I once gave Gnekker a long, contemptuous stare. Then I suddenly barked out, apropos of nothing:

'An eagle on occasion may swoop lower than a hen,
But the clouds the eagle soars through are beyond that chicken's ken.'

Most aggravating of all, Hen Gnekker turns out far cleverer than the professorial eagle. Knowing that he has my wife and daughter on his side, he pursues the tactic of answering my cutting remarks with condescending silence.

'The old boy has a screw loose,' he implies. 'So why talk to him?'

Or else he teases me good-humouredly. It's astonishing how petty one can be—I can spend the whole meal brooding on the day when Gnekker will turn out an impostor, Liza and my wife will realize their mistake, and I shall make fun of them. But fancy conceiving such inane ideas with one foot in the grave!

Nowadays we also have disagreements such as I could once conceive only through hearsay. Shameful as it is, I'll describe one which occurred the other afternoon.

I'm sitting in my room smoking a pipe. In comes my wife as usual, sits down and says what a good idea it would be to pop over to Kharkov now that the weather's warm and we're free, and find out what sort of man this Gnekker really is.

'All right, I'll go,' I agree.

Pleased with me, my wife gets up and goes to the door, but comes back at once.

'By the way, I've another request,' says she. 'I know you'll be angry, but it's my duty to warn you—. I'm sorry, Nicholas, but there's talk among our friends and neighbours about your visiting Katya so much. She's a clever, educated girl, I'm not denying that, and she's good company. But for someone at your time of life, and in your social position, to enjoy her society—well, it is rather odd, you know—. What's more, her reputation is hardly——'

I have a rush of blood to the head. My eyes flash, I jump up, I clutch my head, I stamp my feet.

'Leave me alone!' I shout in a voice unlike my own. 'Leave me alone! Leave me!'

My face must look terrible, and my voice must be strange indeed, for my wife suddenly blenches and shrieks, also in a desperate voice unlike her own. At our shouts Liza and Gnekker run in, followed by Yegor.

'Leave me alone!' I shout. 'Get out! Leave me!'

My legs are numb and bereft of sensation, I feel myself fall into someone's arms. Then I briefly hear the sound of weeping, and plunge into a swoon which lasts for two or three hours.

As for Katya, she visits me daily in the late afternoon, and neither our neighbours nor our friends can fail to notice that, of course. She

comes in for a minute, then takes me out for a drive. She keeps her own horse, and a new chaise bought this summer. By and large she lives pretty lavishly—having taken an expensive detached villa with a big garden, she has moved all her belongings there from town, and keeps two maids and a coachman.

'Katya,' I often ask her, 'what will you live on when you've spent all your father's money?'

'We'll see about that,' answers she.

'That money deserves to be taken more seriously, my dear. It was earned by a good man's honest labour.'

'So I'm aware, you've told me that before.'

First we drive through open country, then through the pine-wood which can be seen from my window. Nature seems as lovely as ever, though the devil whispers that when I'm dead in three or four months' time, none of these pines and firs, these birds and white clouds in the sky, will miss me. Katya likes driving, and is pleased that the day is fine, and I'm sitting beside her. She's in a good mood, and doesn't speak harshly.

'You're a very fine man, Nicholas Stepanovich,' she says. 'You're a rare specimen—no actor could play you. Now, take me, say, or Michael Fyodorovich—even a poor actor could play us. But no one could act you. I envy you too, I envy you terribly. What do I add up to, after all? What indeed?'

She thinks for a minute.

'I'm a negative phenomenon, aren't I?' she asks. 'Well, Nicholas Stepanovich?'

'Yes,' I reply.

'H'm. Then what am I to do?'

What can I tell her? 'Work', 'Give all you have to the poor', 'Know yourself'—these things are easily said, so easily that I don't know how to answer.

When teaching the art of healing, my colleagues on the therapy side advise one to 'individualize each separate case'. Following this advice, one comes to see that the techniques recommended in the manuals as best—and as fully applicable to a textbook case—turn out quite unsuitable in specific instances. Moral ailments are the same.

But I have to give some answer.

'You have too much spare time, my dear,' I say. 'You should find an occupation. Now, why shouldn't you go on the stage again if that's your real line?'

'I can't.'

'Your tone and manner are those of a victim. I don't like that, my dear. It's your own fault. Remember, you began by getting angry with people and the way things were done? But you did nothing to improve the things or the people. You didn't resist evil, you just caved in—so you're a victim of your own weakness, not a battle casualty. Well, you were young and inexperienced then, of course, but now everything may be different. So go ahead, honestly! You'll be working, serving the sacred cause of art——'

'Don't be so devious, Nicholas Stepanovich,' Katya breaks in. 'Let's agree once and for all that we can talk about actors, actresses and writers—but we'll leave art out of it. You're a marvellous, rare person, but you don't know enough about art to be sincere in calling it sacred. You have no feel for art, no ear. You've been so busy all your life, you've had no time to cultivate this feel. And anyway—I don't like this talk about art!' she goes on nervously. 'I dislike it! The thing's been vulgarized enough already, thank you very much!'

'Who vulgarized it?'

'Some by drunkenness, the newspapers by their patronizing attitude, and clever men by their theories.'

'Theories are neither here nor there.'

'Oh yes they are. When someone theorizes, it shows he doesn't understand.'

To prevent unpleasantness, I hurriedly change the subject, and then remain silent for a while. Only when we emerge from the wood and make for Katya's villa do I take up the topic again.

'You still haven't answered me,' I say. 'Why don't you want to go back to the stage?'

'Nicholas Stepanovich, this is really cruel!' she shrieks, suddenly flushing crimson. 'Do you want it spelt out for you? All right then, if that's what you want. I'm no good at it. I have no talent, and—and I have a lot of vanity. So there!'

After making this confession, she turns her face away and gives a powerful tug at the reins to hide the trembling of her hands.

Driving up to her villa, we see Michael Fyodorovich from afar strolling near the gate and impatiently awaiting us.

'There's that Michael Fyodorovich again,' says Katya, annoyed. 'Can't you get rid of him—please! I'm sick of him—he's half dead, confound him!'

Michael Fyodorovich should have gone abroad long ago, but puts

off his departure every week. One or two changes have occurred in him of late. He looks pinched, somehow. Wine makes him tipsy, which it never used to, and his black eyebrows are going grey. When our chaise pulls up by the gate, he can't hide his delight and impatience. He fussily helps the two of us down, firing rapid questions, laughing, rubbing his hands. That tender, supplicatory, innocent look which I'd previously noticed only in his eyes—his whole face is now suffused with it. He rejoices—yet feels ashamed of his joy, ashamed of this habit of calling on Katya every evening, and he finds it necessary to motivate his appearance with some obvious absurdity such as: 'I was just passing on an errand and thought I'd look in for a minute.'

We all three go indoors. First we drink tea, after which objects long familiar appear on the table—the two packs of cards, the large piece of cheese, the fruit, the bottle of Crimean champagne. Our topics of conversation are not new, they haven't changed since winter. The university comes in for abuse, as do students, literature and the theatre. Calumny clogs the stifling air, and it is no longer two toads, as in winter, which exhale their poisonous breath, but a whole trio of them. Besides the velvet baritone laugh and the loud guffaw like the sound of a concertina, the serving maid can also hear an unpleasant rattling snigger resembling the chuckle of a stage general in a farce.

V

There are terrible nights with thunder, lightning, rain and wind—'sparrow nights', country people call them. There was once such a sparrow night in my personal life.

I wake up after midnight, and suddenly jump out of bed. I'm on the point of dying quite suddenly, I somehow feel. Why this feeling? There's no physical sensation pointing to a sudden end, yet terror clutches at my heart, as if I'd just seen the huge glow of some sinister conflagration.

I quickly strike a light, drink water straight from the carafe, rush to the open window. The night is superb, with a smell of hay and some other very sweet scent. I see the sharp points of my garden fence, the sleepy, wizened little trees by the window, the road, the dark strip of wood. There's a very bright, peaceful moon in the sky, and not a single cloud. It's quiet, not a leaf moves. I feel as if all these things were looking at me, and listening for me to start dying.

It's an eerie feeling. I close the window and run to my bed. I feel for my pulse. Not finding it in my wrist, I feel for it in my temple, then in my chin, then again in my wrist—and all these places are cold, clammy with sweat. I breathe faster and faster, my body trembles, all my inside is moving, my face and bald pate feel covered with a spiders' web.

What shall I do? Call my family? No, there's no point—I've no idea what my wife and Liza could do if they came in.

I hide my head under the pillow, close my eyes and wait—just wait.

My back's cold, and feels as if it was being sucked inside me, and I sense that death is sure to sneak up quietly from behind.

'Kee-vee, kee-vee!' something suddenly shrieks in the night's stillness, and I don't know where it comes from—my chest or the street.

'Kee-vee, kee-vee!'

God, how appalling! I'd have another drink of water, but I'm scared to open my eyes, afraid to lift my head. This is an unreasoning, animal fear. Why I'm so scared, I haven't the faintest idea—whether because of an urge to live, or because new, as yet unknown, pain is in store for me.

In the room above me someone is groaning or laughing. I listen. Soon afterwards footsteps are heard on the stairs. Someone goes quickly down, then back up again. A minute later steps are again heard downstairs. Someone stops near my door and listens.

'Who's there?' I shout.

The door opens, I boldly open my eyes and see my wife—her face pale, her eyes tear-stained.

'Can't you sleep, Nicholas?' she asks.

'What is it?'

'Come and have a look at Liza, for God's sake. There's something wrong with her.'

'All right—I'll be glad to,' I mutter, delighted not to be alone. 'Very well—straight away.'

I follow my wife and hear her speaking, but am too upset to take in any of it. Her candle throws jumping patches of light on the steps, our long shadows quiver, my legs trip in the skirts of my dressing-gown, I gasp for breath, I feel as if someone's chasing me and trying to seize my back.

'I shall die here and now on these stairs,' I think. 'Now——'

But then we pass up the staircase and along the dark corridor with the Italian window, and enter Liza's room. She sits on the bed in her night-gown with her bare feet dangling. She is groaning.

'God, God!' she mutters, frowning in the light of our candle. 'I can't stand it, I can't——'

'Liza, my child,' I say. 'What's the matter?'

Seeing me, she shrieks and throws herself on my neck.

'My kind father,' she sobs. 'My good, kind father, my darling, my dearest! I don't know what's the matter, I feel so awful.'

She puts her arms round me, kisses me and babbles endearments such as I used to hear from her when she was a little girl.

'Be calm, child—really!' I say. 'You mustn't cry. I feel awful myself.'

I try to tuck her in, my wife gives her some water, and we both potter about haphazardly at her bedside. I jog my wife's shoulder with my own, reminded of the days when we used to bath our children together.

'Help her, can't you?' begs my wife. 'Do something!'

But what can I do? Nothing. Something's depressing the child, but I understand nothing, know nothing.

'Never mind,' is all I can mutter. 'It'll pass—. Sleep, sleep——'

To make things worse, dogs suddenly howl in our yard—quietly and hesitantly at first, but then in a rowdy duet. I never used to bother about omens like dogs howling or owls hooting, but now my heart sinks in anguish, and I hasten to find an explanation for the howling.

'It means nothing,' I think. 'It's just the way one organism affects another. My extreme nervous tension infected my wife, then Liza and the dog, and that's all. Such infection is behind all forebodings and premonitions.'

Returning to my room soon afterwards to write Liza a prescription, I no longer brood on my impending death, but just feel so downcast and forlorn that I actually regret not having died suddenly. I stand motionless in the centre of the room for a while, wondering what to prescribe for Liza, but the groans above my ceiling fade away, and I decide not to prescribe anything. But I still stand there——.

There's a deathly hush, a quiet so intense that it makes your ears tingle, as some writer once put it. Time passes slowly, and the strips of moonlight look as if they had congealed on the window-sill, for they don't budge.

Dawn is still a long way off.

But then the garden gate squeaks. Someone creeps in, breaks a twig off one of the scraggy saplings, and cautiously taps the window.

'Nicholas,' I hear a whisper. 'Nicholas Stepanovich!'

I open the window and feel as if I'm dreaming. Beneath the window, huddled against the wall and bathed in moonlight stands a black-garbed woman whose huge eyes stare at me. Her face is pale and stern —and weird, like marble, in the moonlight. Her chin quivers.

'It's me,' she says. 'Me—Katya.'

By moonlight all women's eyes look large and black, and people seem taller and paler, which is probably why I had failed to recognize her at first.

'What do you want?'

'I'm sorry,' she says, 'but I suddenly felt unutterably depressed, somehow. I couldn't bear it, so I came here, there was a light in your window and—and I decided to knock. I'm sorry—. Oh, I was so depressed, did you but know. What are you doing now?'

'Nothing—I can't sleep.'

'I had some premonition—it doesn't matter, anyway.'

She raises her eyebrows, tears shine in her eyes, and her whole face glows with that familiar, trustful look which I have not seen for so long.

'Nicholas Stepanovich,' she beseeches, stretching out both arms to me. 'My dear friend, I beg you—I implore you—. If you don't despise my affection and respect, do grant me this request.'

'What request?'

'Take my money.'

'Oh, really, don't be silly! What do I want with your money?'

'You can go somewhere for your health—you need treatment. You will take it, won't you, my dear?'

She stares avidly into my face.

'You will,' she repeats, 'won't you?'

'No, my dear, I won't,' I say. 'No thank you.'

She turns her back on me and bows her head. I must have refused her in a tone which brooked no discussion of money.

'Go home and sleep,' say I. 'We'll meet tomorrow.'

'So you don't consider me your friend?' she asks dejectedly.

'That's not what I'm saying, but your money's no good to me now.'

'I'm sorry,' she says, dropping her voice an octave. 'I see what you mean. To borrow money from someone like me—a retired actress—. Good-bye, anyway.'

And she leaves in such haste that I don't even have time to say good-bye.

VI

I'm in Kharkov.

It would be pointless, and beyond my powers, to fight against my present mood. So I've decided that the last days of my life shall at least be above reproach in the formal sense. If I'm in the wrong where my family's concerned—as I fully realize I am—I'll try to do what they want. If I'm to go to Kharkov, then to Kharkov I will go. Besides, I've grown so indifferent to everything lately that I really don't in the least care where I go—Kharkov, Paris or Berdichev.

I arrived at noon, and took a room in a hotel near the cathedral. The train's jolting upset me, I had draughts blowing right through me, and now I'm sitting on my bed, clutching my head and waiting for my nervous *tic* to start. I ought to visit some professors of my acquaintance today, but I have neither strength nor inclination.

The old corridor servant comes in and asks if I have bed linen. I keep him for five minutes, putting several questions about Gnekker, the object of my errand. The servant turns out to be a Kharkov man who knows the city inside out, but he doesn't remember any house belonging to a Gnekker. I ask about the country estates and the answer is the same.

The corridor clock strikes one, then two, then three.

These last months of my life, this waiting for death, seem to last far longer than the rest of my life put together. Never before could I resign myself to the slow passage of time as I can now. Waiting for a train at the station, or sitting through an examination once used to make a quarter of an hour seem an eternity, but now I can sit motionless all night on my bed, reflecting with total unconcern that tomorrow night will be just as long and colourless, and so will the night after.

Five o'clock strikes in the corridor, then six, then seven.

It grows dark.

There is a dull ache in my cheek—the onset of the *tic*. To occupy my mind, I revert to a point of view which I held before I became so apathetic.

'Why', I ask, 'should a distinguished man like myself, one of the heads of his profession, sit in this small hotel room, on this bed with the unfamiliar grey blanket. Why do I look at this cheap tin wash-stand? Why listen to that wretched clock rattling in the corridor? Is this in keeping with my fame and high social position?' I answer these questions with an ironical smile, tickled by my own youthful credulity

in once exaggerating the importance of fame and of the exclusive position supposedly enjoyed by notabilities. I'm well known, my name is invoked with awe, I've had my picture in *The Meadow* and *World Illustrated*—I've even read my biography in a German magazine. And the upshot? I sit all on my own in a strange town, on a strange bed, rubbing my aching cheek with my hand.

Family squabbles, hard-hearted creditors, rude railway officials, the nuisance of the internal passport system, expensive and unwholesome food in the buffets, general loutishness and rough manners—all these, and many other things too time-consuming to mention, affect me no less than any humble citizen unknown outside his own back alley. So what is there so special about my situation? Granted, I'm a celebrity a thousand times over, a great man, the pride of Russia. Granted, bulletins about my illness appear in all the papers, and my mail includes addresses of sympathy from colleagues, pupils and the general public. Yet these things won't save me from dying a miserable death on a strange bed in utter loneliness.

No one's to blame, of course, but I dislike being a celebrity, I'm sorry—I feel cheated, somehow.

At about ten o'clock I fall asleep, despite my *tic*. I sleep soundly, and would have gone on sleeping for a long time, had not someone woken me—soon after one o'clock comes a sudden knock on the door.

'Who's there?'

'A telegram.'

'You might have left it till the morning,' I say angrily, taking the telegram from the servant. 'Now I shan't get to sleep again.'

'Sorry, sir, but your light was on, so I thought you were awake.'

Tearing open the telegram, I first glance at the signature—my wife's. What can she want?

YESTERDAY GNEKKER SECRETLY MARRIED LIZA COME HOME

Reading the telegram, I feel momentary panic—not at what Liza and Gnekker have done, but at my own indifference to the news of their marriage. Philosophers and true sages are said to be aloof, but that's false, for such dispassionateness is spiritual atrophy and premature death.

I go to bed again, wondering how to occupy my mind. What shall I think about? I seem to have thought everything over already, and have nothing left capable of stimulating my ideas.

When dawn breaks, I sit up in bed, arms round my knees—and for

want of anything better to do I try to know myself. 'Know thyself'—excellent practical advice, that, and the only pity is, it didn't occur to the ancients to tell us the technique of following it.

When I wished to understand some other person or myself, it was not their actions—so dependent on other factors, all of them—that I used to consider, but their desires. Tell me what you want, and I'll tell you who you are.

Now I scrutinize myself. What do I want?

I want our wives, children, friends and pupils to love us as ordinary people—not for our reputation, not for how we're branded and labelled. What then? I'd like to have had helpers and successors. And then? I'd like to wake up a hundred years from now and cast at least a cursory glance at what's happening in science. I'd like to have lived another ten years or so.

And then?

The rest is nothing. I go on thinking—for a long time—but can't hit on anything. And rack my brains as I will, broadcast my thoughts where I may, I clearly see that there's something missing in my wishes—something vital, something really basic. My passion for science, my urge to live, my sitting on this strange bed, my urge to know myself, together with all my thoughts and feelings, and the conceptions which I form about everything—these things lack any common link capable of bonding them into a single entity. Each sensation, each idea of mine has its own separate being. Neither in my judgements about science, the stage, literature and my pupils, nor in the pictures painted by my imagination could even the most skilful analyst detect any 'general conception', or the God of a live human being.

And if one lacks that, one has nothing.

So wretched is my plight that serious illness, fear of death, the impact of circumstance and people, have sufficed to capsize and shatter my entire outlook as I formerly conceived it—everything which once gave my life its joy and significance. No wonder, then, if I have blackened my last months with thoughts and feelings worthy of a slave and savage, no wonder I'm so listless and don't notice the break of day. Unless a man has something stronger, something superior to all outside influences, he only needs to catch a bad cold to lose his balance entirely, to take every bird for a fowl of ill omen, and to hear the baying of hounds in every noise, while his pessimism or his optimism, together with all his thoughts, great and small, are significant solely as symptoms and in no other way.

I am beaten. And if so, there's no point in going on thinking and talking. I shall sit and await the future in silence.

In the morning the corridor waiter brings tea and the local paper. I mechanically read the announcements on the front page, the leading article, extracts from newspapers and magazines, and the Diary of the Day.

Amongst other things I find the following item in the Diary:

'Yesterday that well-known scholar and distinguished Professor, Nicholas Stepanovich So-and-so, arrived in Kharkov by express train, and is staying at the Such-and-such Hotel.'

Famous names are obviously created to live their own lives independently of those who bear them. My name is now quietly drifting round Kharkov. In another three months it will be painted on my tombstone in gold letters brilliant as the very sun, by which time I myself shall already be under the sod.

A light tap on the door. Someone wants me.

'Who's there? Come in.'

The door opens and I step back in surprise, hurriedly wrapping the folds of my dressing-gown about me. Before me stands Katya.

'Good morning,' she says, panting after her walk upstairs. 'Didn't expect me, did you? I, er, I've arrived too.'

She sits down.

'But why don't you say hallo?' she goes on in a halting voice, avoiding my eyes. 'I'm here too—came today. I heard you were at this hotel, and I called round.'

'Delighted to see you,' I say, shrugging my shoulders. 'But I'm amazed—dropping in out of the blue like this. What have you come for?'

'Me? Oh, nothing—I just came.'

Silence. Suddenly she gets up impulsively and comes to me.

'Nicholas Stepanovich,' she says, blenching and clasping her hands on her bosom. 'I can't go on living like this, really, Nicholas Stepanovich! Tell me quickly, for God's sake, this very instant—what am I to do? Tell me what to do?'

'But what can I say?' I ask in bewilderment. 'There's nothing I can say.'

'Tell me, I beg you,' she goes on, gasping, and shaking in every limb. 'I swear I can't live like this any longer, I can't stand it!'

She collapses on a chair and starts sobbing. Her head thrown back, she wrings her hands and stamps her feet. Her hat has fallen off her head and dangles by a piece of elastic, her hair is ruffled.

'Help me, help me!' she begs. 'I can't stand any more.'

She takes a handkerchief from her travelling bag, pulling out with it several letters which fall from her lap. I pick them off the floor, and on one I notice Michael Fyodorovich's handwriting and happen to read part of a word: 'passionat—'.

'There's nothing I can say, Katya,' I tell her.

'Help me!' she sobs, clutching my hand and kissing it. 'You're my father, aren't you? My only friend? You're clever, well educated, you've had a long life. You've been a teacher. Tell me what to do.'

'Honestly, Katya, I don't know——'

I am at a loss, embarrassed, moved by her sobbing, and I can hardly stand.

'Let's have lunch, Katya,' I say with a forced smile. 'And stop that crying.'

'I shall soon be dead, Katya,' I at once add in a low voice.

'Just say one word, just one word!' she cries, holding out her hands. 'What can I do?'

'Now, don't be so silly, really,' I mutter. 'I can't make you out. Such a sensible little girl, and suddenly all these tears—whatever next!'

Silence follows. Katya straightens her hair, dons her hat, bundles up her letters and thrusts them in her bag—all without speaking or hurrying. Her face, bosom and gloves are wet with tears, but her expression is now cold and forbidding.

I look at her, ashamed to be happier than she. Only on the brink of death, in the sunset of my life, have I noticed that I lack what my philosopher colleagues call a general idea. But this poor girl has never known—and never will know—any refuge in all her days on earth.

'Let's have lunch, Katya,' I say.

'No thanks,' she answers coldly.

Another minute passes in silence.

'I don't like Kharkov,' I say. 'It's so grey—a grey sort of town.'

'Yes, I suppose so. It's ugly. I shan't stay long—I'm just passing through. I'll leave today.'

'Where are you going?'

'To the Crimea—the Caucasus, I mean.'

'Oh. Will you be away long?'

'I don't know.'

Katya stands up and holds out her hand—smiling coldly, not meeting my eyes.

'So you won't be at my funeral?' I want to ask.

But she doesn't look at me. Her hand is cold and seems alien. I accompany her to the door in silence.

Now she has left me and is walking down the long corridor without looking back. She knows I'm watching her, and will probably turn round when she reaches the corner.

No, she hasn't turned. Her black dress has flashed before my eyes for the last time, her steps have died away.

Farewell, my treasure!

NEIGHBOURS

PETER IVASHIN was in very bad humour. His unmarried sister had gone to live with Vlasich, a married man. Somehow hoping to shake off the irksome, depressed mood which obsessed him indoors and out of doors, he would summon up his sense of fair play and all his high-minded, worthy principles. (Hadn't he always stood out for free love?) But it was no use and he could never help reaching the same conclusion as stupid Nanny: his sister had behaved badly, Vlasich had stolen his sister. It was all most distressing.

His mother stayed closeted in her room all day, Nanny spoke in whispers and kept sighing, his aunt was on the point of leaving every day, so they kept bringing her suitcases into the hall and then taking them back to her room. In house, courtyard and garden it was as quiet as if they had a corpse laid out. Aunt, servants, even the peasants . . . all seemed to give Ivashin enigmatic, baffled looks as if to say that his sister had been seduced and what was he going to do about it? And he blamed himself for doing nothing, though what he should actually *be* doing he had no idea.

Thus six days passed. On the afternoon of the seventh, a Sunday, a messenger rode over with a letter. The address was in a familiar feminine hand: 'Her Excell. Mrs. Anna Ivashin.' Ivashin rather felt that there was something provocative, defiant and liberal about the envelope, the handwriting and that unfinished word 'Excell.'. And female liberalism is intolerant, pitiless and harsh.

'She'd rather die than give in to her unhappy mother and ask forgiveness,' thought Ivashin, taking the letter to his mother.

Mother was lying on her bed fully clothed. Seeing her son, she abruptly sat up and patted the grey hairs which had strayed from under her cap.

'What is it, what is it?' she asked impatiently.

'This came,' said her son, handing over the letter.

The name Zina, even the word 'she', were not spoken in that house. They talked of Zina impersonally: 'this was sent,' 'a departure took place.' The mother recognized her daughter's writing, her face grew ugly and disagreeable, and the grey hairs once more escaped from her cap.

'Never!' she said, gesticulating as if the letter had scorched her fingers. 'No, no, never! Nothing would induce me.'

The mother sobbed hysterically in her grief and shame. She obviously wanted to read the letter, but pride would not permit her. Ivashin realized that he ought to open it himself and read it out, but he suddenly felt angrier than he had ever felt in his life and he rushed out into the yard.

'Say there will be no answer!' he shouted to the messenger. 'No answer, I say! Tell her that, you swine!'

He tore up the letter. Then tears came into his eyes and he went out into the fields, feeling cruel, guilty and wretched.

He was only twenty-seven years old, but he was already fat, he dressed like an old man in loose, roomy clothes and was short of breath. He had all the qualities of an old bachelor landowner. He never fell in love, never thought of marriage, and the only people he was fond of were his mother, his sister, Nanny and Vasilyich the gardener. He liked a good meal, his afternoon nap and conversation about politics or lofty abstractions. He had taken a university degree in his time, but had come to think of that as a sort of conscription incumbent on young men between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. Anyway, the thoughts which now daily haunted his mind . . . they had nothing to do with the university and his course of studies.

In the fields it was hot and still, as if rain was in the offing. The wood was steaming, and there was an oppressive, fragrant smell of pines and rotting leaves. Ivashin kept stopping to wipe his wet brow. He inspected his winter corn and his spring corn, went round his clover field, and twice chased off a partridge and her chicks at the edge of the wood. And all the time he was conscious that this insufferable situation could not go on for ever, that he must end it one way or the other. He might end it stupidly and brutally somehow, but end it he must.

How, though? What could he do, he wondered, casting supplicatory glances at sky and trees as if begging their help.

But sky and trees were mute, nor were high-minded principles of any avail. Common sense suggested that the agonizing problem admitted only a stupid solution and that today's scene with the messenger was not the last of its kind. He was afraid to think what might happen next.

The sun was setting as he made his way home, now feeling the problem to be utterly insoluble. To accept what had happened was impossible, but it was equally impossible not to accept it and there was no middle way. Removing his hat, he fanned himself with his handkerchief and was walking down the road with over a mile to go when he

heard a ringing behind him. It was an ingenious, highly successful combination of bells and chimes which sounded like tinkling glass. Only one person went abroad with this tintinnabulation: Inspector Medovsky of the police, a former hussar officer who had wasted his substance and had a pretty rough time, an invalid and a distant relative of Ivashin's. He was an old friend of the family and had a fatherly affection for Zina, whom he much admired.

'I was just coming to see you,' he said as he caught Ivashin up. 'Get in and I'll give you a lift.'

He was smiling and looked cheerful, clearly not yet aware that Zina had gone to live with Vlasich. He might have been informed, but if so he hadn't believed it. Ivashin found himself in an awkward situation.

'You're most welcome,' he muttered, blushing until tears came into his eyes and uncertain what lie to tell or how to tell it.

'Delighted,' he went on, trying to smile, 'but, er, Zina's away and Mother's ill.'

'What a pity,' said the Inspector, looking at Ivashin thoughtfully. 'And I was hoping to spend an evening with you. Where has Zina gone?'

'To the Sinitskys', and then she wanted to go on to a convent, I think. I don't know definitely.'

The Inspector talked a little longer, then turned back, and Ivashin walked home, horrified to think what the other would feel when he learnt the truth. Ivashin imagined his feelings and savoured them as he entered the house.

'Lord help us,' he thought.

Only his aunt was taking afternoon tea in the dining-room. Her face held its usual expression suggestive of a weak, defenceless woman, but one who would not permit herself to be insulted. Ivashin sat at the far end of the table (he disliked his aunt) and began drinking his tea in silence.

'Your mother missed lunch again today,' said his aunt. 'You might bear it in mind, Peter. Starving herself to death won't cure her troubles.'

Ivashin found it absurd for his aunt to meddle in other people's business and make her own departure depend on Zina's having left home. He felt like saying something rude, but restrained himself—realizing even as he did so that the time had come for action and that he could let things slide no longer. It was a matter of either doing something straight away or of falling down, screaming and banging his head on the floor. He pictured Vlasich and Zina, both free-thinking,

both well pleased with themselves, kissing under some maple-tree, and then his seven days' accumulated depression and anger all seemed to topple over on Vlasich.

'One man seduces and abducts my sister,' he thought. 'A second will come and cut my mother's throat, a third will set fire to the house or burgle us: and all this under the mask of friendship, lofty principles and sufferings.'

'I won't have it!' Ivashin suddenly shouted, thumping the table.

He jumped up and ran out of the dining-room. His estate-manager's horse was saddled up in the stables, so he mounted it and galloped off to see Vlasich.

Stormy emotions raged within him. He felt the urge to do something striking and impetuous even if it meant regretting it for the rest of his life. Should he call Vlasich a blackguard, slap his face, challenge him to a duel? But Vlasich wasn't the sort who fights duels. As for calling him a blackguard and slapping his face, that would only increase his wretchedness and make him retreat further inside himself. These miserable, meek specimens are the limit, they are more trouble than anyone. They get away with murder. When a miserable man counters a well-deserved reproach with his look of profound guilt and sickly smile, when he submissively bows his head before you . . . then, it seems, Justice herself has not the heart to strike.

'Never mind,' decided Ivashin. 'I'll horsewhip him in Zina's presence and I'll give him a piece of my mind.'

He rode through his woodland and scrub, and imagined Zina trying to justify what she had done by talking of women's rights, of the freedom of the individual, and by saying that there is no difference between being married in church and being a common-law wife. Just like a woman, she would argue about things she didn't understand, and she would probably end up by asking what this had to do with him and what right he had to interfere.

'True, I haven't any right,' muttered Ivashin. 'But so much the better. The ruder, the more in the wrong I am the better.'

The air was sultry, clouds of gnats hung low above the ground and peewits wept piteously in the scrub. There was every sign of rain, yet not a cloud in the sky. Crossing the boundary of his estate, Ivashin galloped over a level, smooth field—he often took this way, and he knew every bush and hollow. That object looming far ahead of him in the twilight like a dark cliff... it was a red church. He could picture it all in the smallest detail, even the plaster on the gate and the calves which

were always browsing on the hedge. Nearly a mile from the church, on the right, was the dark copse belonging to Count Koltovich and beyond that copse Vlasich's land began.

From behind church and Count's copse a huge black cloud advanced with white lightnings flashing on it.

'Well, here we are, Lord help us,' thought Ivashin.

The horse soon tired of the pace and Ivashin tired too. The thunder-head glared at him, apparently advising him to turn back, and he felt a little scared.

'I'll prove they're in the wrong,' he tried to reassure himself. 'They'll talk of free love and freedom of the individual, yet freedom means self-control, surely, not giving way to passions. It's sheer licentiousness, their freedom is.'

Here was the Count's large pond, dark blue and glowering under the cloud, breathing damp and slime. Near the log-path two willows—one old, one young—were leaning tenderly into each other. Ivashin and Vlasich had walked past this very spot a fortnight ago, softly singing the students' song about it being love that makes the world go round.

Wretched song!

Thunder rumbled as Ivashin rode through the wood, and the trees roared and bent in the wind. He must hurry. From the copse to Vlasich's estate he had less than a mile of meadow to cover along a path flanked on both sides by old birch-trees. Like Vlasich they were a wretched, dismal sight, being every bit as spindly and lanky as their owner. Heavy rain rustled in birches and grass. The wind suddenly dropped, there was a whiff of wet earth and poplars. Then Vlasich's yellow acacia hedge, also lanky and spindly, came into view. At the point where some lattice-work had collapsed his neglected orchard appeared.

No longer thinking about slapping Vlasich's face or horsewhipping him, Ivashin did not know what he was going to do at the man's house. He felt nervous. He was afraid on his own behalf and on his sister's—scared at the thought of seeing her any moment. How would she behave towards her brother? What would the two of them talk about? And should he not turn back while there was yet time? Thus brooding, he galloped down the avenue of lime-trees to the house, rounded the broad lilac bushes—and suddenly saw Vlasich.

Bare-headed, in cotton shirt and top-boots, stooping under the rain, Vlasich was going from a corner of the house towards the front door followed by a workman with a hammer and a box of nails. They must

have been mending a shutter which had been banging in the wind. Vlasich saw Ivashin and stopped.

'Is it you Peter?' he smiled. 'What a very nice surprise.'

'Yes, it's me, as you see,' said Ivashin quietly, brushing off rain-drops with both hands.

'Well, what a good idea. Delighted,' said Vlasich, but did not hold out his hand, obviously hesitating and waiting for the other to make the first move.

'Good for the oats, this,' he said with a glance at the sky.

'Quite so.'

They went silently into the house. A door on the right led from the hall into another hall and then into a reception room, and there was a door on the left into the small room occupied by Vlasich's manager in winter. Ivashin and Vlasich went into that room.

'Where did the rain catch you?' Vlasich asked.

'Not far from here, quite close to the house.'

Ivashin sat on the bed, glad of the rain's noise, glad that the room was dark. It was better that way—not so unnerving, and he need not look his companion in the eye. His rage had passed, but he felt afraid and vexed with himself. He had got off to a bad start, he felt, and his trip boded ill.

For some time neither man spoke and they pretended to be listening to the rain.

'Thanks, Peter,' began Vlasich, clearing his throat. 'Most obliged to you for coming. It's generous of you, very decent. I appreciate it, I value it greatly, believe you me.'

He looked out of the window and continued, standing in the middle of the room.

'Somehow everything happened secretly as if we were keeping you in the dark. Knowing that we might have hurt you, made you angry . . . it has cast a cloud over our happiness all this time. But let me defend myself. It was not that we didn't trust you, that wasn't why we were so secretive. In the first place, it all happened on the spur of the moment and there was no time to discuss things. Secondly, this is such an intimate, sensitive business and it was awkward to bring in a third party, even one as close to us as you. But the real point is, we were banking heavily on your generosity all along. You're the most generous of men, you're such a frightfully decent chap. I'm infinitely obliged to you. If you should ever need my life, then come and take it.'

Vlasich spoke in a low, hollow, deep voice, all on one note like a fog-horn. He was obviously upset. Ivashin felt that it was his turn to

speak now, and that for him to listen in silence really would be to pose as the most generous and frightfully decent of nit-wits—which was not what he had come for.

He got quickly to his feet.

'Look here, Gregory,' he panted in a low voice, 'you know I liked you—couldn't want a better husband for my sister. But what's happened is frightful, it doesn't bear thinking of.'

'What's so horrible, though?' asked Vlasich in quaking tones. 'It would be horrible if we had done wrong, but we haven't, have we?'

'Look here, Gregory, you know I'm not the least bit stuffy, but—well, I'm sorry to be so blunt, but you have both been very selfish, to my way of thinking. I shan't say anything to Zina about this, of course, it would only upset her, but you ought to know that Mother's sufferings are practically indescribable.'

'Yes, very lamentable,' sighed Vlasich. 'We foresaw that, Peter, but what on earth could we do about it? Just because your actions upset someone it doesn't mean they're wrong. It can't be helped. Any serious step you take . . . it's bound to upset somebody. If you went to fight for freedom that would hurt your mother too, it can't be helped. If you make your family's peace of mind your main priority it means good-bye to any idealism in life.'

Lightning flared beyond the window and the flash seemed to switch Vlasich's thoughts into a different channel. He sat down by Ivashin's side and started saying things which would have been far better left unsaid.

'I worship your sister, Peter,' he said. 'Visiting your place, I always felt I was on pilgrimage. I absolutely idolized Zina and now I worship her more each day. She is more than a wife to me! More sacred, I tell you!'

Vlasich waved his arms.

'I adore her. Since she has been living here I have entered my house as if it were a shrine. She is a rare, an outstanding, a most frightfully decent woman.'

What a ghastly rigmarole, thought Ivashin, irked by the word 'woman'.

'Why don't you get married properly?' he asked. 'How much does your wife want for a divorce?'

'Seventy-five thousand.'

'That's a bit much, but why not beat her down?'

'She won't give an inch. She's an awful woman, old man.'

Vlasich sighed. 'I never told you about her before, it has been such a hideous memory, but as the subject has come up I'll go on. I married her on a decent, chivalrous impulse. In our regiment, if you want the details, a certain battalion commander took up with her as a girl of eighteen—simply seduced her, in other words, lived with her a couple of months and then dropped her.

'She was in a most ghastly plight, old man. She was ashamed to go home to her parents, who wouldn't have her anyway, and her lover had deserted her. What could she do—set up as barrack-room whore? My fellow-officers were horrified. Not that they were little plaster saints themselves, but this was such a rotten show, even they found it a bit thick! Besides, no one in the regiment could stand that colonel. All the second lieutenants and ensigns were furious and they decided to do him in the eye by getting up a subscription for the wretched girl, see? So we junior officers met in conclave and each started putting down his five or ten roubles, when I had a rush of blood to the head. The situation seemed to cry out for some heroic gesture, so I dashed off to the girl and said how sorry I was—I spoke with tremendous feeling. On my way to see her, and then as I was speaking, I loved her passionately as a woman insulted and injured. Yes, quite so.

'Well—the upshot was, I proposed a week later. My superiors and comrades found my marriage unbecoming to an officer's dignity. That only added fuel to the flames, though. So I wrote a great epistle, see? I argued that what I had done should be inscribed in regimental history in letters of gold, and all that. I sent the letter to my colonel with copies to my brother-officers. Now, I was a bit upset, of course, and I did rather overstep the mark. I was asked to leave the regiment. I have a rough copy hidden somewhere, I'll let you read it some time. It's written with real feeling—I enjoyed some sublime moments of sheer decency, as you'll see. I resigned my commission and came here with my wife. My father had left a debt or two and I had no money, but my wife embarked on a social whirl from the start, dressing up and playing cards, so I had to mortgage my estate. She was no better than she should be if you see what I mean, and you are the only one of my neighbours who hasn't been her lover. About two years later I gave her some money—all I had at the time—to go away, and away she went to town. Yes, quite so.

'Now I'm paying the ghastly creature twelve hundred a year. There is a certain fly, old man, that puts its larva on a spider's back and the spider can't get rid of it. The grub attaches itself and drinks the spider's

heart's blood. That's just how this woman fixed on me. She's a regular vampire. She loaths and scorns me for my folly: for marrying someone like her, that is. She despises my chivalry. A wise man dropped her, says she, and a fool picked her up. Only a wretched half-wit could do what I did, she reckons. It really is a bit hard to take, old man. And by the way, old man, I've had a pretty raw deal, one way and another, it really has got me down.'

Ivashin became quite mystified as he listened to Vlasich. What ever could Zina see in the man? He was not young (he was forty-one), he was lean, lanky, narrow-chested, long-nosed and his beard was turning grey. He spoke like a fog-horn, he had a sickly smile and an ungainly trick of flapping his arms about when he was talking. Instead of being healthy, handsome, manly, urbane and good-humoured, he was just vaguely dim so far as looks went. He dressed so badly, everything about him was so dismal, he rejected poetry and painting as 'irrelevant to modern needs'—didn't appreciate them, in other words. Music left him cold. He was a poor farmer. His estate was in utter chaos, and was mortgaged too. He was paying twelve per cent on a second mortgage and on top of that he owed another ten thousand in personal loans. When his interest or alimony fell due he went round cadging money with the air of a man whose house is on fire. At these times he'd say oh, to hell with it, and he would sell up his whole winter store of firewood for five roubles or a straw rick for three, and then have his garden fence or some old seed-bed frames used to heat his stores. Pigs had ruined his pastures, the villagers' cattle trampled his saplings, and each winter there were fewer and fewer of his old trees left. Beehives and rusty pails bestrewed his vegetable plot and garden. He lacked all talents and gifts, even the humble knack of leading an average life. In practical matters he was an innocent, a weakling easily cheated and done down. No wonder the peasants said he was 'a bit touched'.

He was a liberal and was thought quite a firebrand in the county, but in this too he wore a humdrum air. There was no panache or verve about his free-thinking. Whether indignant, irate or enthusiastic, he was all on one note, so to speak—it all lacked flair, it fell so very flat. Even at times of extreme agitation he never raised his head or stood up straight. But the main snag was his trick of trotting out even his finest and loftiest ideas in a way that made them seem hackneyed and dated. Whenever he embarked on a sluggish, portentous-sounding exegesis, all about impulses of sublime integrity and the best years of his life, whenever he raved about young folk always being, and always having

been, in the van of social progress, whenever he condemned Russians for donning their dressing-gowns at thirty and forgetting their *alma mater*'s traditions, it all sounded like something you had read in a book long, long ago. When you stayed in his house he would put a Pisarev or Darwin on your bedside table, and if you said you had already read them he'd go and fetch a Dobrolyubov!

In the county this rated as free-thinking and many thought it an innocent, harmless quirk. Yet it made him profoundly unhappy. For him it was that maggot to which he had just alluded and which had fastened on him to batten on his life's blood. There was his past with that weird marriage *à la* Dostoyevsky, those long letters and the copies written in a poor, illegible hand but with great emotion, there were the interminable misunderstandings, explanations, disillusionments. Then there were his debts, his second mortgage, his wife's alimony and his monthly loans, none of which was any good to anybody, either him or anyone else. Now, in the present, he was still as restless as he always had been, he still sought some great mission in life and he still couldn't mind his own business. There were still these long letters and copies of them in season and out of season, there were still those exhausting, hackneyed tirades about the village community, reviving local handicrafts, starting up cheese-dairies—each speech exactly like the one before as if they were machine-made rather than hatched by a live brain. Finally, there was this scandal over Zina which might end heaven knew how.

And the thing was, Zina was so young, she was only twenty-two. She was pretty, elegant, high-spirited, she liked laughing, chattering, arguing, she was crazy about music. She was good with clothes and books, she knew how to create a civilized environment: at home she would never have put up with a room like this with its smell of boots and cheap vodka. She was a liberal too, but her free-thinking seemed to brim over with energy, with the pride of a young girl, vigorous, bold, eagerly yearning to excel and show more originality than others.

How *could* she love a Vlasich?

'The man's so quixotic, so pig-headed, so fanatical, so lunatic,' thought Ivashin. 'But she's as wishy-washy, characterless and pliable as me. She and I both give in quickly, we don't stand up for ourselves. She fell in love with him—but then I like him too, don't I, in spite of everything?'

Ivashin thought Vlasich a good, decent man, but narrow and one-sided. In Vlasich's emotions and sufferings, in his whole life, Ivashin saw no lofty aims, either near or distant, he saw only boredom and lack

of *savoir-vivre*. Vlasich's self-martyrdom, what he called his achievements and decent impulses . . . they struck Ivashin as so much wasted effort like firing off purposeless blank shots and using up a lot of powder. As for Vlasich's obsession with the outstanding integrity and rectitude of his own mental processes, that struck Ivashin as naïve—morbid, even. Then there was the man's lifelong knack of confusing the trivial and the sublime, his making a stupid marriage and regarding that as a stupendous feat—and then having affairs with women and calling them the triumph of ideals or something. None of it made any kind of sense.

Still, Ivashin did like him and felt that there was a certain power about him. He somehow never had the heart to contradict the man.

Vlasich sat down very near Ivashin in the dark, wanting to talk to the sound of the rain. He had already cleared his throat to tell some other long story like the history of his marriage, but Ivashin couldn't bear to hear it, tormented as he was by the thought of seeing his sister any moment.

'Yes, you have had a raw deal,' he said gently. 'But I'm sorry, we're digressing, you and I. This is beside the point.'

'Yes, yes, quite,' said Vlasich, rising to his feet. 'So let's get back to the subject. Our conscience is clear, Peter, I can tell you. We aren't married, but that we're man and wife in every real sense is neither for me to argue nor for you to hear. You're as free from prejudice as I am, so there can be no disagreement between us on that score, thank God. As for our future, you have no cause for apprehension. I shall work my fingers to the bone, I'll work day and night—I'll do all in my power to make Zina happy, in other words. Her life will be a beautiful thing. Shall I pull it off, you ask? I shall, old boy. When a man's obsessed with one idea every minute of the day it isn't hard for him to get his way. But let's go and see Zina, we must give her a nice surprise.'

Ivashin's heart pounded. He stood up and followed Vlasich into the hall, and then into the drawing-room. The huge, grim room contained only an upright piano and a long row of antique bronzed chairs on which no one ever sat. A single candle burnt on the piano. From the drawing-room they went silently into the dining-room. This too was spacious and uncomfortable. In the centre of the room was a round, two-leaved table with six legs. There was only one candle. A clock in a large red case like an icon-holder showed half past two.

Vlasich opened the door into the next room.

'Peter's here, Zina,' he said.

At once rapid footsteps were heard and Zina came into the dining-room—a tall, buxom, very pale girl, looking exactly as Ivashin had last seen her at home in her black skirt and red blouse with a large buckle on the belt. She put one arm round her brother and kissed him on the temple.

'What a storm!' she said. 'Gregory went off somewhere and I was left alone in the house.'

She betrayed no embarrassment, and she looked at her brother as frankly and openly as at home. Looking at her, Ivashin too ceased to feel embarrassed.

'But you aren't afraid of thunder, are you?' he said, sitting down at the table.

'No, but the rooms are so vast here. It's an old house, and the thunder makes it all rattle like a cupboardful of crockery.

'Altogether it's a nice little house,' she went on, sitting opposite her brother. 'Every room has some delightful association—Gregory's grandfather shot himself in my room, believe it or not.'

'We'll have some money in August and I'll do up the cottage in the garden,' said Vlasich.

'Somehow one always thinks of that grandfather when it thunders,' Zina went on. 'And in this dining-room a man was flogged to death.'

'It's a fact,' Vlasich confirmed, gazing wide-eyed at Ivashin. 'Some time in the Forties this place was leased to a certain Olivier, a Frenchman. His daughter's portrait is lying about in our attic now: a very pretty girl. This Olivier, my father told me, despised Russians as dunces and mocked them cruelly. For instance, he insisted that when the priest walked past the manor he should remove his cap a quarter of a mile away, and whenever the Olivier family drove through the village the church bells had to be rung. Serfs and small fry got even shorter shrift, of course. Now, one day one of the cheeriest members of the Russian tramping fraternity chanced to roll along—the lad had a bit of Gogol's theological student Khoma Brut about him. He asked for a night's lodging, the managers liked him and they let him stay in the office.

'There are a lot of versions of the story. Some say the boy incited the peasants, while others have it that Olivier's daughter fell in love with the boy. What really happened I don't know, except that Olivier called him in here one fine evening, cross-examined him and then gave orders to flog him. The master sits at this table drinking claret, see, while the grooms are beating the student. Olivier must have been trying to

wring something out of him. By morning the lad was dead of torture and they hid the body somewhere. They are said to have thrown it in Koltovich's pond. An official inquiry was started, but the Frenchman paid several thousand in the right quarter and went off to Alsace. His lease ran out just then and that was the end of the matter.'

'What scoundrels,' shuddered Zina.

'My father remembered Olivier and his daughter well. He said she was a remarkably beautiful girl, and eccentric to boot. Myself, I think the young fellow did both: incited the peasants *and* took the daughter's fancy. Perhaps, even, he wasn't a theological student at all, but someone travelling incognito.'

Zina grew pensive. The story of the student and the beautiful French girl had obviously run away with her imagination. Her appearance hadn't changed at all in the last week, Ivashin thought, she had only grown a little paler. She looked calm and normal as if she and her brother were now visiting Vlasich together. But some change had taken place in himself, Ivashin felt. The fact was that he had been able to discuss absolutely anything with her when she was still living at home, but now he couldn't even bring himself to ask her quite simply how she was getting on. The question seemed clumsy, superfluous. And a similar change must have affected her, for she was in no hurry to mention their mother, their home, her affair with Vlasich. She didn't try to justify herself, nor did she say that free unions are better than being married in church, but she remained calm, quietly pondering the story of Olivier.

Why, though, had they suddenly spoken about Olivier?

'You both got your shoulders wet in the rain,' Zina said with a happy smile, touched by this small resemblance between her brother and Vlasich.

Ivashin felt the full bitterness and horror of his situation. He remembered his deserted home, the closed piano and Zina's bright little room where no one went any more. He remembered that her small footprints had vanished from their garden paths and that now no one went bathing with a noisy laugh before afternoon tea. The things that had increasingly claimed his affections since earliest childhood, that he used to like contemplating sometimes when sitting in a stuffy classroom or lecture-hall—serenity, integrity, joy, everything that filled a home with life and light . . . those things had gone without trace, they had vanished and merged with the crude, clumsy story of some battalion commander, chivalrous subaltern, loose woman and grandfather who had shot himself.

To start talking about his mother, to think that there could be any return to the past . . . that would mean misunderstanding what was perfectly clear.

Ivashin's eyes brimmed with tears and his hand trembled where it lay on the table. Zina guessed what he was thinking about, and her eyes also reddened and glistened.

'Come here, Gregory,' she said to Vlasich.

Both went over to the window and started whispering. From Vlasich's way of bending down towards her and from her way of looking at him Ivashin again realized that the matter was settled, that it couldn't be mended and that there was nothing more to be said. Zina went out.

'Well, old boy,' said Vlasich, after a short pause, rubbing his hands and smiling. 'Just now I said we were happy, but that was a bit of poetic licence, so to speak. We haven't yet experienced happiness, in fact. Zina has been thinking of you and her mother all the time and she has been suffering, while I've suffered too, watching her. Hers is a free, undaunted nature, but it's hard to go against the grain, you know—besides which she's young. The servants call her Miss. It seems a trifle, but it upsets her. That's the way of it, old man.'

Zina brought in a dish of strawberries. She was followed by a little maidservant, seemingly meek and downtrodden, who put a jug of milk on the table and gave a very low bow. She had something in common with the antique furniture which was comparably torpid and dreary.

The sound of rain had ceased. Ivashin ate strawberries while Vlasich and Zina looked at him in silence. The time had come for a conversation pointless but unavoidable, and all three were depressed by the prospect. Ivashin's eyes again brimmed with tears. He pushed the bowl away, saying that it was time to go home, or else he would be late and it might rain again. The moment had arrived when it behoved Zina to speak of her family and her new life.

'How are things at home?' she asked rapidly, her pale face trembling. 'How's Mother?'

'Well, you know Mother—' answered Ivashin, not looking at her.

'You have thought a lot about what's happened, Peter,' she said, taking her brother by the sleeve, and he realized how hard it was for her to speak. 'You have given it a lot of thought, so tell me: is there any chance Mother will ever accept Gregory . . . and the situation in general?'

She stood close to her brother, facing him, and he marvelled at her beauty, and at his own apparent failure to notice it before. His sister, this sensitive, elegant girl who looked so much like their mother, now lived with Vlasich and shared Vlasich's home with a torpid maid and six-legged table in a house where a man had been flogged to death. And now she wouldn't be going home with her brother, but would stay the night here. All of this struck Ivashin as incredibly absurd.

'You know Mother,' he said, not answering her question. 'In my view you should conform with . . . you should, er, do something, sort of ask her forgiveness or——'

'But asking forgiveness would mean pretending we had done wrong. I don't mind telling lies to comfort Mother, but it won't work, will it? I know Mother.

'Well, we shall just have to see,' said Zina, cheering up now that the most unpleasant bit was over. 'We shall just have to put up with it for five or ten years and see what happens then.'

She took her brother's arm and pressed against his shoulder as they went through the dark hall.

They went on to the steps. Ivashin said good-bye, mounted his horse and started off at a walk. Zina and Vlasich walked a little way with him. It was quiet and warm, there was a delicious smell of hay. Between the clouds stars blazed vividly in the sky. Vlasich's old garden, witness of so many distressing episodes in its time, slumbered in the enveloping darkness and riding through it was saddening, somehow.

'This afternoon Zina and I experienced a number of truly sublime moments,' said Vlasich. 'I read her a first-rate article on the agricultural resettlement problem. You really must read it, old man, it has outstanding integrity. I couldn't resist writing to the author, care of the editor. I wrote only a single line: "I thank you and firmly shake your honest hand."'

Ivashin wanted to tell him not to meddle in other people's business for heaven's sake, but remained silent.

Vlasich walked by his right stirrup, Zina by the left. Both seemed to have forgotten that they had to go back home, that it was damp, that they had nearly reached Koltovich's copse. They were expecting something from him, Ivashin felt, but what it was they expected they didn't know themselves and he felt desperately sorry for them. Now, as they walked by his horse so meekly and pensively, he felt absolutely convinced that they were unhappy—that they never could be happy—and their love seemed a deplorable and irrevocable mistake. Pitying

them and aware that he could do nothing to help them, he fell prey to weakmindedness which made him ready for any sacrifice, could he but rid himself of this onerous feeling of compassion.

'I'll come and stay the night with you sometimes,' he said.

But that looked like giving in to them and didn't satisfy him. When they stopped to say good-bye near Koltovich's copse he leant towards Zina and touched her shoulder.

'You're quite right, Zina,' he said. 'You have done the right thing.'

To stop himself saying more and bursting into tears, he lashed his horse and galloped into the wood. Riding into darkness, he looked back, and saw Vlasich and Zina walking home along the path—he with long strides, she at his side with quick, jerky steps. They were conducting an animated conversation.

'I'm like a silly old woman,' thought Ivashin. 'I went there to solve a problem, but only complicated it. Ah well, never mind.'

He felt depressed. When the wood ended he rode at a walk, then stopped his horse near the pond. He wanted to sit and think. On the far side of the pond the rising moon was reflected as a red streak and there were hollow rumbles of thunder somewhere. Ivashin gazed steadily at the water, picturing his sister's despair, her anguished pallor and the dry eyes with which she would hide her degradation from the world. He imagined her pregnancy, their mother's death and funeral, Zina's horror. Nothing but death could break that proud, superstitious old woman. Appalling visions of the future appeared before him on the dark, smooth water, and amid pale feminine figures he saw himself—cowardly, weak, hunted-looking.

On the pond's right bank about a hundred yards away stood some dark, unmoving object—was it a man or a tall tree-stump? Ivashin remembered the murdered student who had been thrown into this pond.

'Olivier behaved cruelly,' he thought, gazing at the dark, ghostly figure. 'But at least he did solve his problem one way or the other, while I have solved nothing, I've only made a worse mess. He did and said what he thought, whereas I do and say what I don't think. Besides, I don't really know what I do think——'

He rode up to the dark figure. It was an old, rotting post, the relic of some building.

From Koltovich's copse and garden came a strong whiff of lily-of-the-valley and honey-laden herbs. Ivashin rode along the edge of the pond, gazed mournfully at the water and remembered his past life.

So far he had not done or said what he thought, he concluded, and others had repaid him in like coin, which was why all life now seemed as dark as this pond with its reflections of the night sky and its tangled water-weed. There was no mending matters either, he thought.

AN ANONYMOUS STORY

I

FOR reasons which I cannot at present specify I was compelled to take a job as footman to a St. Petersburg civil servant called George Orlov, a man of about thirty-five.

I entered Orlov's service because of his father, the well-known politician, whom I considered a serious enemy to my cause. I reckoned to study the father's plans and intentions in detail while living with the son: by overhearing conversations, and by finding papers and jottings on his desk.

The electric bell usually trilled in my footman's quarters at about eleven o'clock in the morning to inform me that my master was awake. When I went into his bedroom with his clean clothes and boots, Orlov would be sitting immobile in his bed, looking not so much sleepy as exhausted by sleeping, and staring fixedly without any sign of pleasure at his awakening. I would help him to dress while he submitted to me reluctantly and silently, ignoring my existence. Then, his head wet after washing, smelling of fresh scent, he would go into the dining-room for coffee. He sat at table, drank his coffee and leafed through newspapers, while Polya the maid and I stood by the door, respectfully watching him. Two adults were compelled to pay the gravest attention to a third drinking his coffee and munching his rusks: all very absurd and barbarous, no doubt, but I found nothing degrading in having to stand by that door though I was Orlov's equal in social standing and education.

I had incipient tuberculosis and there were a few other things wrong with me: a sight worse, perhaps, than tuberculosis. Whether it was the effect of illness, or of some new change of outlook which eluded my notice at the time, I was obsessed day in day out by a passionate, hypersensitive craving for ordinary everyday life. I yearned for peace of mind, health, fresh air, plenty to eat. I was becoming a day-dreamer, and as such I did not know exactly what I wanted. I might feel an urge to go to a monastery and to sit day after day by the window, gazing at trees and fields. Or I would imagine myself buying a dozen acres and settling down as a country squire. Or else I would swear to take up academic work and make a point of becoming a professor at a

provincial university. As a retired naval lieutenant I had visions of the sea, of our squadron, of the corvette on which I had sailed round the world. I wanted to experience once again the indescribable sensation of walking in a tropical forest, or of gazing at the sunset in the Bay of Bengal, when you swoon with ecstasy and feel homesick: both at the same time. I dreamt of mountains, women, music. With childlike curiosity I scrutinized people's faces and hung on their voices. As I stood by the door watching Orlov drink his coffee, I felt less like a servant than a man for whom everything on earth, even an Orlov, held some interest.

Orlov was a typical St. Petersburger in appearance, with narrow shoulders, elongated waist, sunken temples, eyes of indeterminate hue and sparse, faintly tinted vegetation on head, chin and upper lip. His face was well-groomed, worn, disagreeable: particularly disagreeable when he was thinking or sleeping. It is hardly necessary to describe a commonplace appearance, though. Besides, St. Petersburg is not Spain, a man's looks don't mean anything there even in affairs of the heart, being of value only to imposing servants and coachmen. If I have mentioned Orlov's face and hair, it is only because there was one notable feature about his looks, to wit: when he picked up a newspaper or book, whatever it might be, or when he met people, whoever *they* might be, his eyes began to smile ironically and his whole face took on an air of gentle mockery free from malice. Before reading or hearing anything he always held this irony at the ready, as a savage holds his shield. It was an irony of habit, an irony of the old school, and it had recently been coming into his face without any effort of will, probably, but as if by reflex. More of that later, though.

At about half past twelve he would take up a brief-case stuffed with papers and drive off, with an ironical air, to work. He would have his meal out and return after eight. I would light the lamp and candles in his study, and he would sit in a low chair, stretching his legs out on to another chair, and start reading in this sprawling position. He brought new books almost every day, or had them sent from the shops, and a mass of books in three languages (not counting Russian), already read and abandoned, lay in the corners and under the bed in my quarters. He read unusually fast. 'Tell me what you read,' it is said, 'and I shall tell you who you are.' That may be true, but it is absolutely impossible to judge an Orlov by the books which he reads. It was all such a hotch-potch, what with philosophy, French novels, political economy, finance, new poets and *Intermediary* editions. He read it all with equal speed, and always with that same ironical look in his eyes.

After ten o'clock he would dress carefully—often in evening clothes, very rarely in his official uniform—and leave the house. He would return towards morning.

I lived there peaceably and quietly, and there were no clashes between us. As a rule he ignored my existence, and he spoke to me without that ironical look on his face—not considering me human, obviously.

Only once did I see him angry. One evening, a week after I had entered his service, he came back from some dinner at about nine o'clock. His expression was bad-tempered and tired.

'There's a nasty smell in the flat,' he said as I followed him into the study to light the candles.

'But it's quite fresh in here, sir.'

'It stinks, I tell you,' he repeated irritably.

'I open the casement windows every day.'

'Don't you answer me back, you oaf!' he shouted.

I took umbrage, and was about to object. God knows how it would have ended but for the intervention of Polya, who knew her master better than I did.

'Yes, really, what a nasty smell,' she said, raising her eyebrows. 'Where can it come from? Stephen, open the casements in the drawing-room and light the fire.'

She clucked and fussed, and went through all the rooms, rustling her skirts and swishing her sprayer. But Orlov's bad mood remained. Keeping his temper with obvious effort, he sat at his desk and quickly wrote a letter. He wrote several lines, then gave an angry snort, tore up the letter and began writing again.

'To hell with them!' he muttered. 'Do they credit me with a super-human memory?'

The letter was written at last. He got up from the desk and addressed me.

'You are to go to Znamensky Square and deliver this letter to Mrs. Zinaida Krasnovsky in person. But first ask the porter whether her husband—Mr. Krasnovsky, that is—has returned. If he has, keep the letter and come back. Hey, wait a moment! If she should ask whether I have anyone with me, tell her two gentlemen have been here since eight o'clock writing something.'

I went to Znamensky Square. The porter told me that Mr. Krasnovsky was not yet back, and I went up to the second floor. The door was opened by a tall, fat, dark-complexioned servant with black side-whiskers. Sleepily, apathetically, churlishly, as flunkey to flunkey, he

asked what I wanted. Before I had time to answer a woman in a black dress came quickly into the hall from the drawing-room. She screwed up her eyes at me.

'Is Mrs. Krasnovsky in?' I asked.

'I am she.'

'A letter from Mr. Orlov.'

She unsealed the letter impatiently, held it in both hands, displaying her diamond rings, and began reading. I saw a white face with soft lines, a jutting chin, and long, dark lashes. She looked no more than twenty-five years old.

'Give him my regards and thank him,' she said when she had finished reading.

'Is anyone with Mr. Orlov?' she asked gently, happily, and as if ashamed to be mistrustful.

'Two gentlemen,' I answered. 'They are writing something.'

'Give him my regards and thank him,' she repeated, and went back silently, leaning her head on one side and reading the letter as she went.

I was meeting few women at the time, and this one, of whom I had only had a passing glimpse, made an impression on me. Walking home, remembering her face and delicate fragrance, I fell into a reverie. When I returned Orlov had left the house.

II

Well, I lived quietly and peaceably enough with my employer, and yet the pollution, the degrading element which I had so dreaded on becoming a footman . . . it was present and made itself felt every day. I was on bad terms with Polya. She was a sleek, spoilt little trollop who adored Orlov because he was the master and scorned me because I was the footman. To a real servant or a cook she was probably quite devastating, with her red cheeks, *retroussé* nose, screwed-up eyes and buxom build already verging on the plump. She powdered her face, she tinted her eyebrows and lips, she wore a corset, a bustle and a bangle made of coins. She walked with little tripping steps. When she walked she twisted or 'waggled' her shoulders and behind. Her rustling skirts, her creaking stays, her jingling bangle, this plebeian smell of lipstick, toilet-vinegar and scent stolen from the master . . . when I tidied the rooms with her of a morning, these things made me feel like her accomplice in some foul crime.

Whether because I did not help her to steal, or because I evinced no desire whatever to become her lover—which she probably took as an insult—or else, perhaps, because she sensed in me an alien being, she loathed me from the first day. My clumsiness, my unflunkeylike exterior, my illness . . . she found these things pitiful, and they disgusted her. I was coughing very badly at the time, and I occasionally kept her awake at night because her room was separated from mine by only a wooden screen.

'You kept me awake again,' she told me every morning. 'You ought to be in hospital, not in a gentleman's service.'

So sincerely did she think me not human, but a thing immeasurably beneath her, that she sometimes appeared before me wearing only her chemise like those Roman matrons who had no scruples about bathing in the presence of their slaves.

One lunch-time (we ordered soup and a roast from the restaurant every day) I was in a marvellous contemplative mood.

'Polya,' I asked her, 'do you believe in God?'

'Yes, of course I do.'

'Then you believe there will be a Day of Judgement?' I went on. 'And that we shall answer to God for all our misdeeds?'

She made no reply, only giving a scornful grimace. Now, as I looked at her smug, cold eyes, I saw that this well-integrated, perfectly rounded being was godless, conscienceless and lawless, and that I could never find a better paid accomplice should I ever require to commit murder, arson or burglary.

In this novel setting, unaccustomed as I was to being addressed curtly, and to the constant lying (saying 'the master's out' when he was in), I found my first week at Orlov's rather an ordeal. My valet's tail-coat made me feel as if I had donned a suit of armour. Later on I settled down. I performed my little services like any regular footman, I cleaned the rooms, I ran or drove around on errands. When Orlov did not wish to keep a rendezvous with Zinaida Krasnovsky, or when he forgot that he had promised to visit her, I would drive to Znamensky Square, deliver a note to her personally and tell lies. It all added up to something quite different from what I had envisaged on becoming a servant. Every day of my new life turned out a waste of time both for me and my cause, since Orlov never spoke of his father, nor did his guests either, and all I could learn about that well-known politician's activities was what I contrived, as I had previously contrived, to glean from newspapers and correspondence with my associates. The hundreds

of notes and papers which I found in the study and read . . . they lacked even the remotest connection with what I was seeking. Orlov was absolutely indifferent to his father's much-bruited activity, and looked as if he had never even heard of it, or as if his father had died long ago.

III

We had guests every Thursday.

I would order a joint of beef from the restaurant and telephone Yeliseyev's for caviare, cheese, oysters and the like. I bought playing cards. Polya was busy all day preparing the tea things and the supper service. This little bout of activity did rather vary our idle lives, to be honest, and Thursdays were our most interesting days.

There would be three guests only. The most substantial of them—and the most interesting, perhaps—was called Pekarsky: a tall, gaunt person of about forty-five, with a long, hooked nose, a large, black beard and a bald pate. His eyes were big and bulging, and his facial expression was as grave and pensive as a Greek philosopher's. He worked on a railway board and at a bank, he was legal consultant to an important government institution, he was on business terms with a mass of private persons as trustee, chairman of official receivers and so on. His civil service rank was quite low, and he modestly termed himself a 'barrister', but his influence was enormous. A note or card from him was enough to have you received out of turn by a celebrated doctor, a railway director or an important official. One could obtain a pretty senior post through his patronage, it was said, or hush up any unpleasantness whatever. He rated as highly intelligent, but his was a most peculiar and odd sort of brain. He could multiply 213 by 373 in his head in a flash, or convert pounds sterling to German marks without a pencil and tables. He was well up in railway matters and finance, and the entire world of administration was an open book to him. In civil cases he was reckoned a pretty artful advocate, and he was an awkward customer to tangle with at law. Yet this rare intellect was utterly baffled by many things known even to the most limited intelligence. Why do people feel bored? Why do they weep, shoot themselves—and murder others, even? Why do they fret about things and events which don't concern them personally, and why do they laugh when they read Gogol or Shchedrin? All that was utterly beyond his ken. Everything abstract, everything evanescent in the sphere of thought and feeling . . . it was as mysterious and boring to him as music to one

who has no ear. He took only the business view of people, dividing them into competent and incompetent. He had no other criterion. Honesty and integrity were merely signs of competence. Drinking, gambling and whoring were all right so long as they didn't interfere with business. Believing in God was rather stupid, but religion must be preserved, since the common people needed some restraining principle or else they wouldn't work. Punishments were only needed as a deterrent. There was no point in going away for one's holidays because life was quite all right in town. And so on. He was a widower without children, but he lived on as ample a scale as a family man, paying three thousand a year for his flat.

The second guest, Kukushkin, was young for the fairly senior rank which he held. He was a short man distinguished by the lack of proportion between his stout, podgy trunk and small, thin face: a highly disagreeable combination. His lips were puckered up, his little trimmed moustache looked as if it had been glued on with varnish. The creature had the manners of a lizard. He didn't enter a room, but rather slithered into it with mincing little steps, squirming and tittering, and he bared his teeth when he laughed. He was a clerk of special commissions to someone or other, and did nothing at all though he was paid a large salary: especially in summer when various assignments were invented for him. He was not so much a careerist to the marrow of his bones as, deeper still, to his last drop of blood, and a petty careerist to boot: one lacking in confidence, who had built his whole career on favours received. For the sake of some wretched foreign decoration, or of being mentioned in the newspapers as present with other august personages at some funeral or other service, he would stoop to any conceivable humiliation, beg, fawn and promise. He flattered Orlov and Pekarsky out of cowardice, considering them powerful, while he flattered Polya and me because we were in the service of an influential man. Whenever I helped him off with his coat he would titter and ask: 'Are you married, Stephen?' This was followed by scurrilous vulgarities by way of showing me special attention. Kukushkin flattered Orlov's weaknesses, his perversity and his complacency. To please Orlov he posed as an arrant cynic and atheist, and joined him in criticizing those to whom he elsewhere grovelled slavishly. When, at supper, the talk turned to women and love, he posed as a refined and sophisticated libertine. It is remarkable, by and large, how the gay dogs of St. Petersburg like talking about their unusual tastes. Some youthful officials of high rank make do very well with the embraces of their cook or a

wretched street-walker on the Nevsky Prospekt, but from the way they speak they are contaminated with all the vices of east and west, being honorary members of a round dozen iniquitous secret societies and already having a police record. Kukushkin told the most barefaced lies about himself, and people didn't so much disbelieve him as let his fantasies go in one ear and out of the other.

The third guest, Gruzin, was the son of a worthy and erudite senior official. He was the same age as Orlov, his colouring was fair, he had long hair, he was short-sighted and he wore gold-rimmed spectacles. I remember his long, pale fingers like a pianist's, and there was something of the musician and virtuoso about his whole figure, actually. Orchestral first violins have that same look. He coughed, he was subject to migraine, he seemed generally sickly and frail. At home they probably dressed and undressed him like a baby. He had been to law school, and had first worked in the legal department, had then been transferred to the Senate, and had left that, after which he had received a post in the Ministry of Works through his connections, but had soon left that too. In my time he had a job as section head in Orlov's division, but he used to say that he would soon be back in the legal department. His attitude to his work, and to this skipping from job to job, was extraordinarily flippant, and when people started talking seriously about ranks, decorations and salaries in his presence he would smile complacently and repeat Prutkov's aphorism about government service being 'the only place where you can learn the truth'. He had a little wife with a lined face who was very jealous, and five weedy little children. He was unfaithful to his wife, he loved his children only when he could see them. His general attitude to his family was one of indifference, rather, and he would make fun of it. He and his family lived on credit, and he borrowed here there and everywhere on every possible occasion, not exempting even office superiors and house-porters. His was a flabby nature so lazy that he didn't care what happened to him, but floated with the tide he knew not where and why. He went wherever he was taken. If he was taken to some low dive, he went. If wine was set before him he drank it, and if it wasn't he didn't. If people abused their wives in his presence he abused his, asserting that she had wrecked his life, and when wives were praised he would praise his too.

'I'm very fond of the poor thing,' he would say quite sincerely.

He had no fur coat, and always went round wrapped in a rug smelling of the nursery. When he became absorbed in thought at supper, rolling

bread balls and drinking a lot of red wine, I was practically certain, oddly enough, that there was something to him: something which he himself dimly sensed, very likely, but could not really fathom and appreciate, what with having so much fuss and vulgarity around him. He played the piano a little. He would sit down at the instrument, strike a couple of chords and quietly sing:

'What does the morrow hold for me?'

But then he would jump up at once as if scared, and retreat some distance from the piano.

The guests had usually forgathered by ten o'clock. They played cards in Orlov's study, while Polya and I served tea. Only now did I relish the full savour of a flunkey's life. To stand by that door, four or five hours on end, to keep the glasses filled, to change the ash-trays, to dash to the table and pick up a dropped piece of chalk or card—above all to stand, wait, be attentive without venturing to speak, cough or smile . . . all that is harder than the hardest physical labour, I can tell you. I once used to take four-hour watch at sea on stormy winter nights, and watch-keeping is incomparably easier, I find.

They would play cards until two or sometimes three o'clock, then stretch themselves and go into the dining-room for supper: 'a bit of a bite', as Orlov called it. At supper there was conversation. It usually began when Orlov, smiling with his eyes, mentioned a common acquaintance, or a book which he had just read, or some new appointment or project. The fawning Kukushkin chimed in, and there began what to me, in my mood of the time, was a most hideous exhibition. Orlov's and his friends' irony knew no bounds, it spared no one and nothing. They spoke of religion: with irony. They spoke of philosophy, of the meaning and purpose of life: with irony. If the peasant question cropped up there was still more irony. St. Petersburg has a peculiar breed of specialists in deriding every manifestation of life. They can't even pass a starving man or a suicide without some banal remark. But Orlov and his friends did not joke or jeer, they just ironized. They said there was no God, that individuality disappeared completely at death . . . and that there were no immortals outside the French Academy. There was no such thing as true goodness, and never could be since its existence presupposed human perfectibility: a contradiction in terms, that. Russia was just as tedious and poverty-stricken as Persia. Our intellectuals were hopeless, on Pekarsky's reckoning, consisting very largely of futile incompetents. As for our peasants, they were sunk in

drink, sloth, thieving and degeneracy. We had no science, our literature was primitive, our commerce was based on fraud and on the idea that 'you can't sell without cheating'. Everything else was the same, it was all absurd.

The wine would cheer them up by the end of supper, and the conversation became brighter. They made fun of Gruzin's family life, of Kukushkin's conquests, and of Pekarsky, who reputedly headed one page in his cash book *To Charity* and another *To Demands of Nature*. There were no faithful wives, they said, there was no wife with whom, given the knack, one couldn't have one's bit of fun without leaving her drawing-room at the very time when her husband was in his study next door. Adolescent girls were corrupt and no better than they should be. Orlov kept a letter written by some fourteen-year-old schoolgirl. On her way home from school she had 'picked up such a nice officer' on the Nevsky, said she, and he had taken her home and kept her there till late at night, and then she had rushed off to write to her girl-friend and share her ecstasies. Chastity had never existed, according to them, there was no such thing, nor was there any need for it, obviously: humanity had managed pretty well without it so far. And the harm done by 'loose living' was much exaggerated. A certain perversion specified in our penal code . . . it hadn't stopped Diogenes being a philosopher and teacher. Caesar and Cicero were lechers, but also great men. Cato married a young girl in his old age, yet continued to rank as an austere, ascetic custodian of morals.

At three or four in the morning the party would break up, or they would drive out of town together—or else to one Barbara Osipovna's on Officer Street—while I would retire to my room where my headache and coughing kept me awake for some time.

IV

I remember a ring on the door-bell one Sunday morning about three weeks after I had entered Orlov's service. It was about half past ten and he was still asleep. I opened the door, and you can picture my astonishment when I saw a veiled lady on the landing.

'Has Mr. Orlov got up yet?' she asked. I recognized the voice of the Zinaida Krasnovsky to whom I had taken letters in Znamensky Square. Whether I had time or wit to answer her, I do not recollect, for I was so taken aback by her arrival. Not that she needed an answer, anyway. She had darted past me in a flash, filling the hall with the fragrance of

her scent, which I still remember vividly. Then she disappeared into the flat and her footsteps died away. Not a sound was heard for at least half an hour. Then there was another ring at the door-bell. This time some dolled-up girl (evidently a maid from a wealthy household) and our porter, both puffing, brought in two suitcases and a dress-basket.

'These are for Mrs. Krasnovsky,' said the girl.

She went down without another word. All this was most mysterious and provoked a sly grin from Polya, who doted on her master's capers. 'He isn't half a one,' she seemed to say, and she walked round on tiptoe the whole time. Then, at last, steps were heard, and Zinaida came quickly into the hall.

'Stephen,' she said, seeing me at the door of my room, 'help Mr. Orlov to get dressed.'

When I went into Orlov's room with his clothes and boots he was sitting on his bed with his feet dangling on the bearskin rug, his whole being expressive of discomfiture. He ignored me, having no interest in my menial opinion. It was in his own eyes, in the eyes of his inner self, that he felt disconcerted and embarrassed, that was obvious. He dressed, washed and spent some time fussing with his brushes and combs: silently, unhurriedly, as if taking time to ponder and work out where he stood, and his very back betrayed his dismay and annoyance with himself.

They had coffee together. Zinaida poured out for both of them, then put her elbows on the table and laughed.

'I still can't believe it,' she said. 'When you've been travelling for ages, and at last reach your hotel, you still can't believe you are at journey's end. It's so nice to breathe freely.'

Looking like a mischievous little girl, she sighed with relief and laughed again.

'You will excuse me,' said Orlov with a nod at the newspapers. 'Reading at breakfast is an addiction of mine. But I can do two things at once, I can both read and listen.'

'No, read away, do. You shall keep all your old habits and your freedom. Why are you so glum, though? Are you always like this in the mornings, or is it only today? Aren't you pleased?'

'Oh, very much so. But I must confess to being somewhat non-plussed.'

'Now, why? You've had plenty of time to prepare for my invasion, I've been threatening you with it every day.'

'True, but I had not expected you to execute that threat on this particular morning.'

'Well, I hadn't expected to either, but it's better this way—far better, darling. It's best to take the plunge and get it over with.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Darling!' she said, screwing up her eyes. 'All's well that ends well, but how much trouble there was before we reached this happy ending! Don't mind my laughing. I'm so glad and happy, but I feel more like crying than laughing.

'Yesterday I won a pitched battle,' she went on in French. 'God alone knows how I suffered. But I'm laughing because I just can't believe it. Sitting drinking coffee with you . . . I feel I must be dreaming it, it can't be real.'

Continuing in French, she told how she had broken with her husband on the previous day, her eyes brimming with tears and laughing by turns as she gazed at Orlov enraptured. Her husband had long suspected her, she said, but had avoided the subject. They had quarrelled very frequently, but he had a way of retreating into silence when things reached boiling point—he would retire to his study to avoid blurting out his suspicions in the heat of the moment, and also to cut short any admissions on her part. Now, Zinaida had felt guilty, despicable and incapable of taking any bold, serious step, for which reason she had hated herself and her husband more and more every day, and had suffered the torments of the damned. But when, during their quarrel of the previous day, he had shouted tearfully 'My God, when *will* all this end?' and had retired to his study, she had pounced after him like a cat after a mouse, she had stopped him closing the door behind him, and she had shouted that she hated him from the bottom of her heart. Then he had admitted her to the study and she had told him everything, confessing that she loved another man, that this other man was her true and most lawful husband, and that she considered it her moral duty to go away and join him that very day, come what might, and even under artillery bombardment if necessary.

'You have a marked romantic streak,' Orlov put in, his eyes glued to his newspaper.

She laughed and went on talking, leaving her coffee untouched. Her cheeks were burning, which rather disconcerted her, and she looked at me and Polya in embarrassment. From the rest of her tale I learnt that her husband had replied with reproaches and threats, and finally with tears—it would have been truer to say that it was he, not she, who had won their pitched battle.

'Yes, darling, as long as I was worked up it all went off marvellously,' she said. 'But with nightfall I lost heart. You don't believe in God, George, but I do believe a little and I'm afraid of retribution. God requires us to be patient, generous and unselfish, but here am I refusing to be patient and wanting to build my life my own way. But is that right? What if it's wrong in God's eyes? My husband came in at two o'clock in the morning.

'"You'll never dare leave me," he said. "I'll have you brought back by the police and make a scene."

'Then, a little later, I saw him in the doorway again, looking like a ghost. "Have pity on me, you might damage my career by running away."

'These words shocked me, they made me feel rotten. The retribution's started, thought I, and I began trembling with fear and crying. I felt as though the ceiling would fall in on me, as if I should be dragged off to the police station then and there, as if you'd get tired of me. God knows what I didn't feel, in other words! I shall enter a convent, thought I, I'll become a nurse, I'll renounce happiness, but then I remembered that you loved me, that I had no right to dispose of myself without your knowledge—oh, my head was in such a whirl and I didn't know what to do or think, I was so frantic. Then the sun rose and I cheered up again. As soon as morning came I dashed off here. Oh, what I've been through, darling! I haven't slept the last two nights.'

She was tired and excited. She wanted to sleep, to go on talking for ever, to laugh, cry, and drive off for lunch in a restaurant and savour her new freedom: all these things at one and the same time.

'Your flat is comfortable, but it's a bit small for two, I'm afraid,' she said, quickly touring all the rooms after breakfast. 'Which is my room? I like this one because it's next to your study.'

At about half past one she changed her dress in the room next to the study, which she thereafter termed hers, and went out to lunch with Orlov. They also dined in a restaurant, and they spent the long gap between lunch and dinner shopping. I was opening the door and accepting sundry purchases from shop-assistants and errand-boys till late that night. Amongst other things they brought a magnificent pier-glass, a dressing-table, a bedstead and a sumptuous tea service which we didn't need. They brought a whole tribe of copper saucepans which we arranged in a row on the shelf in our cold, empty kitchen. When we unpacked the tea service Polya's eyes gleamed and she looked at me two or three times with hatred, and with fear that I, not she, might be

first to steal one of those elegant cups. They brought a very expensive but inconvenient lady's writing desk. Zinaida obviously intended to settle in permanently and set up house with us.

At about half past nine she and Orlov returned. Proudly conscious of having achieved something bold and original, passionately in love, and (as she supposed) passionately loved, deliciously tired and anticipating deep, sweet sleep, Zinaida was revelling in her new life. She kept clasping her hands tightly together from sheer high spirits, she declared that everything was marvellous, she swore to love for ever. These vows and the innocent, almost infantile, conviction that she was deeply loved in return and would be loved for ever . . . it all made her look five years younger. She talked charming nonsense, laughing at herself.

'There is no greater blessing than freedom,' she announced, forcing herself to say something earnest and significant. 'Why, it's all so silly, isn't it? We attach no value to our own views, however wise, and yet we are terrified of what various half-wits think. Up to the last minute I was afraid of what people might say, but as soon as I followed my own inclinations and decided to live my own way, my eyes were opened, I got over my stupid fears, and now I'm happy, and I wish everyone else could be as happy.'

But then her chain of thought broke and she spoke of taking a new flat, of wallpaper, of horses, of a trip to Switzerland and Italy. But Orlov was tired by his voyage round restaurants and shops, and still felt the self-conscious discomfiture which I had noticed in him that morning. He smiled, but more from politeness than pleasure, and when she said anything serious he agreed ironically.

'Yes, yes, of course.'

'You must hurry up and find us a good cook, Stephen,' she told me.

'There's no need for any hurry on the kitchen front,' said Orlov with a cold look at me. 'We must move into our new flat first.'

He had never had his cooking done at home or kept horses, 'not liking dirty things about the place', as he said, and he only put up with me and Polya in his flat from sheer necessity. So-called domesticity with its mundane joys and squabbles . . . it jarred on him as a form of vulgarity. To be pregnant, or have children and speak of them, that was bad form and suburban. I was now extremely curious to see how these two creatures would manage together in the same dwelling: she domesticated, very much the housewife with her copper saucepans and her dreams of a good cook and horses, and he who so often told his

friends that a decent, clean-living man's apartment should be like a warship. There should be nothing superfluous in it: no women, no children, no bits and pieces, no kitchen utensils.

V

Now I shall tell you what happened on the following Thursday. Orlov and Zinaida ate at Contant's or Donon's that day. Orlov came home alone and Zinaida drove off—as I later learnt, to the Old Town to see her former governess and wait till our guests had gone. Orlov was not keen on showing her to his friends: I realized that at breakfast when he began assuring her that he must cancel his Thursdays for the sake of her peace of mind.

As usual the guests arrived almost simultaneously.

'Is the mistress at home?' Kukushkin asked me in a whisper.

'No, sir,' I answered.

He came in with sly, glinting eyes, smiling enigmatically, rubbing his cold hands.

'Congratulations, my good sir,' he told Orlov, vibrating all over with an obsequious, ingratiating laugh. 'Be ye fruitful, and multiply ye, like unto the cedars of Lebanon.'

Making for the bedroom, the guests uttered some witticisms about a pair of lady's slippers, a rug which had been placed between the two beds and a grey blouse hanging on the back of a bed. They were amused by the idea of one so obstinate, one who despised all the mundane details of love, suddenly being caught in female toils in so simple and commonplace a manner.

'That which we mocked, to that have we bowed the knee,' Kukushkin repeated several times. He had, I may say, the disagreeable affectation of parading what sounded like biblical texts.

'Hush!' he whispered, raising a finger to his lips when they came out of the bedroom into the room next to the study. 'Quiet! Here it is that Gretchen dreams of her Faust!'

He roared with laughter as if he had said something terribly funny. I observed Gruzin, expecting this laugh to jar on his musical ear, but I was wrong. His lean, good-natured face beamed with pleasure. When they sat down to cards he said—pronouncing the letter *r* in his throat, and choking with laughter—that dear Georgie only needed a cherry-wood pipe and guitar for his cup of domestic felicity to run over. Pekarsky laughed sedately, but his tense expression showed that he

found Orlov's new love affair distasteful. He could not understand exactly what had happened.

'But what about the husband?' he asked in perplexity after they had played three rubbers.

'I don't know,' answered Orlov.

Pekarsky combed his great beard with his fingers, plunged deep in thought, and did not speak again until supper-time.

'I'm sorry, but I don't understand you two, I must say,' said he, slowly drawling out each word, when they had sat down to supper. 'You could love each other and break the seventh commandment to your hearts' content—that I could understand, I could see the point of that. But why make the husband a party to your secrets? Was there really any need?'

'Oh, does it really matter?'

'H'm,' Pekarsky brooded.

'Well, I'll tell you one thing, old chap,' he went on, obviously racking his brains. 'Should I ever marry again, and should you conceive the notion of presenting me with a pair of horns, please do it so that I don't notice. It is far more honest to deceive a man than to wreck his daily routine and reputation. Oh, I can see what you're after. You both think that by living together openly you are behaving in an exceptionally decent and liberal manner, but I don't hold with this, er—what's it called?—this romanticism.'

Orlov did not answer. He was in a bad mood and disinclined to speak. Still baffled, Pekarsky drummed his fingers on the table and thought for a moment.

'I still don't understand you two,' he said. 'You're not a student, she's not a little seamstress. You both have means. You could set her up in a separate establishment, I take it.'

'No, I couldn't. Read your Turgenev.'

'Oh? Why? I already have read him.'

'In his works Turgenev preaches that every superior, right-minded young woman should follow her beloved to the ends of the earth and serve his ideals,' said Orlov, screwing up his eyes ironically. 'The ends of the earth . . . that's poetic licence, since the whole globe with all its regions is subsumed in the dwelling of the man she loves. Not sharing your dwelling with the woman who loves you, that means denying her high destiny and failing to share her ideals. Yes, old boy, the prescription is Turgenev's, but it's me who has to take the flaming medicine!'

'I can't see where Turgenev comes in,' said Gruzin softly, shrugging his shoulders. 'Do you remember *Three Meetings*, George, and how he's walking somewhere in Italy late one evening, and suddenly hears "*Vieni, pensando a me segretamente*"?'

Gruzin started humming it. 'Good stuff, that.'

'But she didn't force herself on you, did she?' Pekarsky asked. 'It's what you yourself wanted.'

'Oh, do have a heart! Far from wanting it, I couldn't even conceive of such a possibility. When she mentioned coming to live with me I thought she was just having her little joke.'

Everyone laughed.

'How *could* I want such a thing?' continued Orlov in the tone of one put on the defensive. 'I am not a Turgenev hero, and should I ever require to liberate Bulgaria I could dispense with any female escort. I regard love principally as an element essential to my physical nature: one primitive and inimical to my whole ethos. I must satisfy it with discretion or give it up altogether, otherwise it will introduce elements as impure as itself into my life. To make it a pleasure instead of a torment I try to beautify it and surround it with a multitude of illusions. I won't go to a woman unless I am assured beforehand that she will be beautiful and attractive. Nor will I visit her unless I'm on the top of my form. Only under such conditions do we manage to deceive each other, and feel that we love and are happy. But what do I want with copper saucepans and untidy hair? Or with being seen when I haven't washed? And am in a bad mood? In her naïve way Zinaida wants to make me like something I've been dodging all my life. She wants my flat to smell of cooking and washing up. She wants to move into a new establishment with tremendous éclat and drive about with her own horses, she needs must count my underwear, she must worry about my health, she must be constantly meddling in my private life, and she must dog my every step, while all the time sincerely assuring me that I can retain my old habits and my freedom. She is convinced that we're soon going off on our honeymoon, as if we had just got married —she wishes to be constantly at my side in trains and hotels, in other words, whereas I like reading when I travel and can't stand conversation.'

'Then try and talk some sense into her,' said Pekarsky.

'Eh? Do you think she would understand me? Why, we think so differently! Leaving Daddy and Mummy, or one's husband, going off with the man one loves . . . that's civic courage at its highest in her

view, whereas to me it's sheer childishness. To fall in love and have an affair . . . to her it means beginning a new life, while to me it means nothing. Love, man . . . they're her be-all and end-all, and perhaps the theory of the subconscious is affecting her here. You just try persuading her that love is only a simple need like food and clothing, that it really isn't the end of the world if husbands and wives misbehave, that one may be a lecher and seducer yet also a man of genius and integrity—and that, conversely, someone who renounces the pleasures of love may be a stupid, nasty animal all the same. Modern civilized man, even on a low level—your French worker, say—spends ten *sous* a day on his dinner, five *sous* on the wine with his dinner, and five to ten *sous* on his woman, and he gives all his mind and nerves to his work. Now, Zinaida doesn't pay for love in *sous*, she gives her whole soul. I might well try to talk some sense into her, but she would answer by crying out in all sincerity that I've ruined her and that she has nothing left to live for.'

'Then don't talk to her,' said Pekarsky. 'Just take a separate flat for her, and that will be that.'

'It's easy enough to say——'

There was a short pause.

'But she is so charming,' said Kukushkin. 'She's delightful. Such women think they'll love for ever, they surrender themselves with such feeling.'

'One must keep one's wits about one,' said Orlov. 'One must use one's brain. Experiences culled from everyday life, and enshrined in countless novels and plays . . . they all confirm that the adulteries and cohabitations of decent people never last more than two or three years at the outside, however much they may have loved each other at the start. That she must know. So all these changes of residence, these saucepans, these hopes for eternal love and harmony simply add up to a wish to bamboozle herself and me. She *is* charming and delightful, no doubt about it. But she has turned my life upside down. All that I have hitherto considered trivial nonsense . . . she makes me elevate it to the status of a serious problem, so I'm serving an idol which I have never worshipped. She *is* charming, she *is* delightful, but when I drive home from work nowadays I'm somehow in a bad mood, as if I expect to find some inconvenience at home like workmen having dismantled all our stoves and left great piles of bricks everywhere. I'm not paying for my love in *sous* now, in other words, but with part of my peace of mind and my nerves. And that's pretty bad.'

'Oh, if only she could hear this wicked man!' sighed Kukushkin.

'My dear sir,' he added theatrically, 'I will liberate you from the onerous obligation of loving this charming creature: I'll cut you out with Zinaida.'

'Go ahead,' said Orlov nonchalantly.

Kukushkin laughed a shrill little laugh for half a minute, shaking all over, and then spoke. 'Now see here, I'm not joking. And don't let's have any of the Othello business afterwards!'

Everyone started talking about Kukushkin's unflagging love life, about how irresistible he was to women, how dangerous to husbands, and how devils would barbecue him in the next world because he was so dissolute. He said nothing, he just screwed up his eyes, and when people named ladies of his acquaintance he would wag his little finger as if warning that other people's secrets must not be divulged.

Orlov suddenly looked at his watch.

The guests understood and prepared to leave. On this occasion I remember Gruzin, who had drunk too much wine, taking an unconscionable time getting ready. He donned an overcoat resembling the coats made for children in poor families, put his collar up and began telling some long-winded story. Then, noticing that no one was listening to him, he shouldered that rug smelling of the nursery, assumed a hunted, wheedling air and begged me to find his cap.

'My dear old George,' he said tenderly. 'Now, listen: how about a trip out of town, old boy?'

'You go, I can't. I now have married status.'

'She's a marvellous woman, she won't be angry. Come on, my good lord and master. It's wonderful weather, there's a bit of a snow-storm and a spot of frost. You need a thorough shake-up, believe me. You're out of sorts, damn it——'

Orlov stretched, yawned and looked at Pekarsky.

'You going?' he asked hesitantly.

'I don't know, I might.'

'A drinking expedition, eh? Oh, all right, I'll come,' Orlov decided after some hesitation. 'Wait a moment, I'll get some money.'

He went into the study and Gruzin waddled after him, trailing his rug. A minute later both returned to the hall. Tipsy and very pleased with himself, Gruzin was crumpling a ten-rouble note in his hand.

'We'll settle up tomorrow,' he said. 'And she's so good-natured, she won't be angry. She's godmother to my little Liza, I'm fond of the poor girl. Oh, my dear chap!'—he gave a sudden happy laugh and pressed

his forehead on Pekarsky's back—'Oh, my dear old Pekarsky! You legal eagle, you crusty old fogy, you. . . . But you're fond of women, that I'll wager.'

'Fat ones, incidentally,' said Orlov, putting his coat on. 'But let's be off, or we shall meet her on the way out.'

'*Vieni, pensando a me segretamente*,' hummed Gruzin.

They left at last. Orlov was away all night, and returned for lunch next day.

VI

Zinaida had lost a little gold watch, a present from her father. Its disappearance surprised and alarmed her. She spent half the day going round the flat, looking frantically at tables and window-sills, but that watch seemed to have vanished into thin air.

A day or two later she left her purse in the hall on returning from some expedition. Luckily for me it was Polya, not I, who had helped her off with her coat on that occasion. When the purse was missed it was no longer in the hall.

Zinaida was puzzled. 'This is most odd. I distinctly remember taking it out of my pocket to pay the cabman, and then I put it down here near the looking-glass. Highly peculiar!'

I had not stolen it, yet I felt as if I had and had been caught in the act. Tears even came to my eyes.

'We must be haunted,' Zinaida told Orlov in French as they sat down to their meal. 'I lost my purse in the hall today—and now, lo and behold, it has turned up on my table! But it was in no disinterested spirit that our ghost performed this trick. He took a gold coin and twenty roubles in notes for his pains.'

'First your watch is missing, then it's money,' said Orlov. 'Why does that sort of thing never happen to me?'

A minute later Zinaida had forgotten the ghost's trick, and was laughing as she told how she had ordered some writing-paper last week, but had forgotten to give her new address, so the shop had sent the paper to her husband at her old home and he had had to pay a bill of twelve roubles. Then she suddenly fixed her eyes on Polya and stared at her, while blushing and feeling such embarrassment that she changed the subject.

When I took their coffee into the study Orlov was standing with his back to the fire, and she was sitting in an arm-chair facing him.

'No, I am *not* in a bad mood,' she was saying in French. 'But I've started putting two and two together now, and I understand the whole thing. I can name the day, and even the hour, when she stole my watch. And what about that purse? There's no room for doubt.'

She laughed and accepted some coffee from me. 'Oh, now I understand why I'm always losing my handkerchiefs and gloves. Say what you like, I'm going to dismiss that thieving magpie tomorrow and send Stephen for my Sophia. Sophia doesn't steal and she hasn't such an, er, repulsive appearance.'

'You're in a bad mood. Tomorrow you'll feel differently, and you'll realize that one can't just dismiss a person simply on suspicion.'

'It's not suspicion, I'm absolutely certain,' said Zinaida. 'While I suspected this plebeian with the sorrowful countenance, this valet of yours, I said not a word. I am hurt that you don't trust me, George.'

'If we disagree about something it doesn't follow that I mistrust you.

'Let us suppose you're right,' said Orlov, turning to the fire and throwing his cigarette-end in it. 'Even so, there is still no need to get excited. Actually, to be perfectly frank, I had never expected my humble establishment to cause you so much serious worry and upset. If you have lost a gold coin, never mind, I'll give you a hundred gold coins. But to alter my routine, to pick a new maid off the streets and wait for her to learn the ropes . . . it all takes time, it's boring, and it's not my line. Our present maid is fat, admittedly, and she may have a weakness for gloves and handkerchiefs, but she is also well-behaved and well-trained, and she doesn't squeak when Kukushkin pinches her.'

'In other words you can't bear to part with her. Then why not say so?'

'Are you jealous?'

'Yes, I am,' Zinaida said decisively.

'Most grateful, I'm sure.'

'Yes, I am jealous,' she repeated, and tears gleamed in her eyes. 'No, this isn't jealousy, it's something worse. I don't know what to call it.'

She clutched her temples. 'Men are so foul,' she continued impetuously. 'It's awful.'

'I don't know what you find so awful.'

'I've never seen it and I know nothing about it, but you men are said to start off with housemaids when you are quite small, after which you get used to it and no longer feel any repugnance. I know nothing whatever about it, but I've even read that——'

Then she adopted a fondly wheedling tone and went up to Orlov. 'You're so right, of course, George, I really am in a bad mood today. I can't help it, though, you must see that. She disgusts me, and I'm afraid of her. I can't bear the sight of her.'

'Surely you can rise above such trivialities,' said Orlov, shrugging his shoulders in perplexity and moving away from the fire. 'It's simple enough, isn't it? Just take no notice of her, then she won't disgust you—and you won't need to dramatize these pin-pricks either.'

I left the study, and what answer Orlov received I do not know. Whatever it was, Polya stayed on. After this Zinaida never asked her to do anything, obviously trying to dispense with her services. When Polya handed her anything—or merely passed by, even, her bangle jingling, her skirts crackling—Zinaida shuddered.

Had Gruzin or Pekarsky asked Orlov to discharge Polya he would have done so without turning a hair, I think, nor would he have troubled to give any explanation whatever, being complaisant, like all apathetic people. But with Zinaida he was stubborn even over trifles for some reason: to the point of sheer pig-headedness on occasion. So if Zinaida took a liking to anything he was sure to dislike it, I knew that by now. When she came back from shopping eager to show off her new purchases he would give them a passing glance, remarking icily that the more the flat was cluttered up with rubbish the less air there was to breathe. Sometimes he would put on evening dress to go out and would say good-bye to Zinaida, but would then suddenly decide to stay at home out of sheer perversity. At such times he only stayed in so that he could be miserable, I felt.

'But why stay in?' Zinaida would ask with pretended annoyance, yet radiant with pleasure. 'Now, why? You are not used to staying in of an evening, and I don't want you to change your habits on my account. So do go out, please, or else I shall feel guilty.'

'No one's blaming you for anything, are they?' Orlov would ask.

He would sprawl in his study arm-chair with a martyred look and take up a book, shielding his eyes with his hand. But soon the book would fall from his grasp, he would turn heavily in his chair and put his hand up again as if to keep the sun out of his eyes. Now he was annoyed with himself for not having gone out.

'May I come in?' Zinaida would ask, hesitantly entering the study. 'Are you reading? I was a bit bored, so I've looked in for a moment just for a peep.'

I remember her coming in one evening in this same hesitant fashion and at some ill-chosen moment. She sank on the rug at Orlov's feet, and her gentle, timorous movements showed that his mood puzzled and scared her.

'You are always reading,' she began artfully, with an obvious wish to flatter. 'Do you know the secret of your success, George? You're an intelligent, educated man. What book have you there?'

Orlov answered. Some minutes passed in silence: minutes which seemed hours to me. I was standing in the drawing-room where I could watch them both, and I was afraid of coughing.

'There is something I wanted to tell you,' Zinaida softly announced, and laughed. 'Shall I? You may laugh at me, you may say I'm flattering myself, but you know, I do so terribly much want to think you stayed in tonight on my behalf, so that we could spend the evening together. Did you? May I think that?'

'Pray do,' said Orlov, screening his eyes. 'True happiness lies in the capacity to conceive things not only as they are, but also as they are not.'

'That was a very long sentence, I didn't quite understand it. Do you mean that happy people live in their imaginations? That is certainly true. I like sitting in your study in the evenings and letting my thoughts carry me far, far away. It's nice to day-dream a little. Shall we dream aloud together, George?'

'Never having attended a girls' boarding school, I am unacquainted with the technique.'

'You're in a bad mood, are you?' Zinaida asked, taking Orlov's hand. 'Tell me, why? I am afraid of you when you're like this. I don't know whether you have a headache or are angry with me——'

More long minutes passed in silence.

'Why have you changed?' she asked softly. 'Why aren't you so tender and cheerful any more, as you were in Znamensky Square? I have lived with you for a month, nearly, but I feel we haven't begun living yet, we haven't had a proper talk. You always fob me off with jokes or with long, bleak answers like a teacher's. There's something bleak about your jokes too. Why have you stopped speaking to me seriously?'

'I always speak seriously.'

'Well, let's have a talk. For God's sake, George.'

'Carry on then. What shall we talk about.'

'About our life, our future,' said Zinaida dreamily. 'I keep making plans for the future, I always enjoy that. I'll start by asking when you mean to give up your job, George.'

'But why ever should I?' Orlov asked, removing his hand from his forehead.

'No one with your views can work for the government, you're out of place there.'

'My *views*?' Orlov asked. 'What views? By conviction and temperament I am an ordinary civil servant: a typical red-tape merchant. You are mistaking me for someone else, I venture to assure you.'

'You're joking again, George.'

'Not a bit of it. The Civil Service may not satisfy me, but still it does suit me better than anything else. I am used to it, and I'm with people of my own sort there. There at least I'm not an odd-man-out, and I feel reasonably all right.'

'You hate the Civil Service, it sickens you.'

'Oh, it does, does it? If I resign, if I start dreaming aloud and letting myself float off into some other world, you don't suppose I'll find that world any less hateful than my job, do you?'

'You're so keen on contradicting me you even disparage yourself.' Zinaida was hurt and stood up. 'I'm sorry I ever started this conversation.'

'But why so angry? I'm not angry because you're *not* in the Civil Service, am I? Everyone lives his own life.'

'But *do* you live your own life? *Are* you free?' Zinaida went on, throwing up her arms in despair. 'Spending all your time writing papers repugnant to your convictions, doing what you are told, visiting your superiors to wish them a Happy New Year, all that incessant card-playing—and then, to cap it all, serving a system which you *must* find uncongenial . . . no, George, no! Don't make such clumsy jokes. Oh, you are awful. As a man of high ideals you should serve only your ideals.'

'You really are mistaking me for someone else,' sighed Orlov.

'Why don't you just tell me you don't want to talk to me?' Zinaida brought out through tears. 'You're fed up with me, that's all.'

'Now, look here, my dear,' Orlov admonished her, sitting up in his arm-chair. 'As you yourself so kindly remarked, I am an intelligent, educated man. Now, one can't teach an old dog new tricks. Those ideas, small and great, which you have in mind when calling me an idealist . . . I know all about all of them. So if I prefer my job and my cards to those ideals I presumably have grounds for doing so. That is the first point. And, secondly, you have never been a civil servant so far as I am aware, and you can only cull your views on government work

from anecdotes and trashy novels. It might therefore be a good idea if we agreed once and for all to talk neither about things which we have known all about all along nor about things outside our sphere of competence.'

'Why, why speak to me like that?' Zinaida asked, stepping back in horror. 'Think what you are saying, George, for God's sake.'

Her voice quivered and broke. Though obviously trying to hold back her tears, she suddenly burst out sobbing.

'George, darling, this is killing me,' she said in French, quickly falling to her knees before Orlov and laying her head on his lap. 'I'm so worn out and exhausted I just can't cope any more, I really can't. As a little girl I had that horrible depraved stepmother, then there was my husband, and now there's you . . . you. . . . I'm absolutely crazy about you, and you give me this callous irony in return!

'And then there's that awful, impudent maid,' she went on, sobbing. 'Yes, yes, I see. I'm not your wife or helpmate, I'm just a woman you don't respect because she is your mistress. I shall commit suicide.'

I had not expected these words and tears to produce so strong an impression on Orlov. He flushed, stirring uneasily in his chair, and the irony on his face gave way to a sort of mindless dread. He looked exactly like a schoolboy.

'Darling, I swear you've misunderstood me,' he muttered frantically, touching her hair and shoulders. 'Do forgive me, I implore you. I was in the wrong and I, er, hate myself.'

'I offend you by my complaints and whining. You have such integrity, you're so generous. You are an exceptional man, I'm conscious of that every minute of the day, but I've been so utterly depressed all this time——'

Zinaida embraced Orlov impulsively and kissed his cheek.

'Just stop crying, please,' he said.

'Yes, yes. I have already cried my eyes out, and I feel better.'

'As for the maid, she'll be gone tomorrow,' he said, still squirming in his chair.

'No, let her stay, George, do you hear? I'm not afraid of her any more. One must rise above such trivialities and not imagine silly things. You're so right. You're a rare, exceptional person.'

She soon stopped crying. With the tear-drops still wet on her lashes, she sat on Orlov's lap and recounted in hushed tones some pathetic tale: a reminiscence of her childhood and youth, or something like that. She stroked his face and kissed him, scrutinizing his beringed hands

and the seals on his watch-chain. She was carried away by what she was saying, by having her lover near her, and her voice sounded unusually pure and candid: because her recent tears had cleansed and freshened her spirits, very likely. Orlov played with her auburn hair and kissed her hands, touching them soundlessly with his lips.

Then they had tea in the study and Zinaida read some letters aloud. They went to bed at about half past twelve.

That night my side ached mightily, and dawn broke before I was able to get warm or doze off. I heard Orlov go out of the bedroom into his study. After sitting there for about an hour he rang. My pain and fatigue made me forget all etiquette and conventions on this earth, and I went into the study barefoot, wearing only my underclothes. Orlov stood awaiting me in the doorway in dressing-gown and cap.

'Report properly dressed when you're called,' he said sternly. 'Fetch fresh candles, will you?'

I tried to apologize, but suddenly had a terrible coughing fit and clutched the door-post with one hand to stop myself falling.

'Are you ill?' Orlov asked.

I think this was the first occasion on which he had addressed me politely during the whole time we had known each other. Why he did it God alone knows. Wearing underclothes, my face distorted by coughing, I was probably playing my part very badly and little resembled a servant.

'Why do you work then if you're so ill?' he asked.

'Because I don't want to die of starvation.'

'Oh, what a filthy business it all is, really!' he said quietly, going to his desk.

Throwing on a frock-coat, I fitted and lit fresh candles, while he sat near the desk with his legs on the arm-chair and cut the pages of a book.

I left him engrossed in his reading, and his book no longer tended to fall from his grasp as it had in the evening.

VII

As I now write these lines my hand is restrained by a fear drilled into me since childhood, of seeming sentimental and ridiculous. I am incapable of being natural when I want to show affection and speak tenderly. And it is this very fear, combined with lack of experience, which now makes it quite impossible for me to convey with full precision my emotions of the time.

I was not in love with Zinaida, but my ordinary human liking for her contained far more youth, spontaneity and joy than was to be found in Orlov's love.

Plying my boot-brush or broom of a morning, I would wait with bated breath to hear her voice and steps. To stand and watch her drinking coffee and eating breakfast, to hold her fur coat for her in the hall, to put galoshes on her little feet while she placed a hand on my shoulders, and later to wait for the hall-porter's ring from downstairs and meet her at the door—rosy-cheeked, cold, powdered with snow—hearing her impulsive exclamations about the cold or the sledge-driver . . . ah, if you did but know how much it all meant to me! I wanted to fall in love and have a family, and I wanted my future wife to have a face and voice just like hers. I dreamt of it at mealtimes, on errands in the street and when I lay awake at night. The finicky Orlov spurned women's frippery, children, cooking and copper saucepans, but I garnered all these things together and watchfully cherished them in my dreams. I doted on them, I begged fate to grant me them, and I had visions of a wife, a nursery, garden paths and a little cottage.

Had I fallen in love with Zinaida I should never have dared to hope for the miracle of being loved in return, I knew, but that consideration did not trouble me. In my discreet, gentle feeling, akin to ordinary affection, there was neither jealousy nor even envy of Orlov, since I realized that, for someone as incapacitated as I was, personal happiness was possible only in dreams.

When Zinaida waited up night after night for her George, looking at her book without moving or turning the pages, or when she shuddered and blenched because Polya was crossing the room, I suffered with her and I was tempted to lance this painful abscess at once by letting her know what was said in the place at supper-time on Thursdays. But how was I to do it? More and more often I saw her in tears. During the first weeks she had laughed and sung to herself even when Orlov was out, but by the second month our flat was plunged in dismal silence broken only on Thursdays.

She flattered Orlov. Just to win a spurious smile or kiss from him she would go down on her knees and cuddle up like a little dog. Even when she was most depressed she could not pass a looking-glass without glancing at herself and straightening her hair. I was puzzled by her continued interest in clothes and delight in making purchases—somehow it didn't quite square with her deep-felt grief. She followed fashion and ordered expensive dresses. But what use was that to anyone?

I particularly remember one new dress costing four hundred roubles. Fancy paying that much money for one more useless frock when charwomen slave away for only twenty copecks a day *and* provide their own food, besides which the girls who make Venice and Brussels lace receive only half a franc a day, being expected to earn the balance by immorality! Why couldn't Zinaida see the point? It puzzled me, grieved me. But she only had to leave the house and I was finding excuses and explanations for all that, and looking forward to the hall-porter's ring from downstairs.

She treated me like a servant, a lower form of life, as one may pat a dog while ignoring its existence. I received orders, I was asked questions, but my presence passed unremarked. The master and mistress thought it unseemly to talk to me more than was accepted. Had I interrupted their conversation or burst out laughing while serving their meals, they would surely have deemed me insane and given me my notice. And yet Zinaida did wish me well. When she sent me on errands—when she explained the workings of a new lamp or anything like that—her expression was unusually serene, kindly and cordial, and she looked me straight in the eye. At such times I always felt that she gratefully remembered my bringing her letters to Znamensky Square. Polya thought me her favourite and hated me for that.

'Go on then, *that mistress of yours* wants you,' she would say with a sarcastic grin when Zinaida rang.

Zinaida treated me as a lower form of life, not suspecting that if anyone was humiliated in that house it was she herself! She failed to realize that I, a servant, suffered on her behalf, wondering twenty times a day what the future held for her and how it would all end. Matters deteriorated noticeably each day. Disliking tears as he did, Orlov began to show obvious fear of conversations and to shy off them after that evening's discussion about his job. When Zinaida began arguing or appealing, when she seemed on the verge of tears, he would make some plausible excuse and go to his study, or else leave the house altogether. He took to spending more and more nights away from home, and he ate out more frequently still. It was now he who asked his friends to take him off somewhere on Thursdays. Zinaida still longed to have the cooking done at home, to move into a new flat, to travel abroad—but day-dreams these day-dreams remained. Meals were brought in from the restaurant, and Orlov asked her not to broach the question of moving house until they had returned from abroad, observing with regard to the said expedition that they could not set off until he had

grown his hair long since trailing from hotel to hotel in pursuit of ideals was impermissible without flowing locks.

It was the last straw when Kukushkin began showing up of an evening during Orlov's absence. There was nothing exceptionable about his behaviour, but I just could not forget his once mentioning his intention of cutting Orlov out with Zinaida. Regaled on tea and claret, he sniggered and tried to curry favour by assuring Zinaida that a free union was superior to holy wedlock in every way, and that every respectable person should really come and do her homage now.

VIII

Christmas passed tediously in vague anticipation of some mishap. At breakfast on New Year's Eve Orlov suddenly announced that his office was sending him on some special mission to a Senator who was conducting a certain inspection in the provinces.

'One doesn't feel like going, but one can't think of any excuse,' he said with a vexed air. 'One must go, there's nothing for it.'

At this news Zinaida's eyes reddened instantly.

'Is it for long?' she asked.

'About five days.'

'I'm glad you are going, quite honestly,' she said after a little thought. 'It will make a change. You will fall in love on the way and tell me all about it later.'

Whenever possible she tried to let Orlov see that she was no burden to him, and that he could do as he pleased, but this naïve, blatantly transparent stratagem deceived no one, only reminding him once again that he was not free.

'I am leaving this evening,' he said, and started reading the newspapers.

Zinaida was all for seeing him off at the station, but he dissuaded her, saying that he was not going to America and wouldn't be away five years, but only five days at the most.

They said good-bye at about half past seven. He put one arm round her, kissing her on forehead and lips.

'Now, you be a good little girl and don't fret while I'm away,' he said with a warmth and sincerity which touched even me. 'God preserve you.'

She gazed avidly into his face to imprint those precious features on her memory the more firmly, then twined her arms gracefully round his neck and laid her head on his chest.

'Forgive our misunderstandings,' she said in French. 'Husband and wife can't help quarrelling if they love one another, and I'm absolutely crazy about you. Don't forget me. Send lots of telegrams giving me all the details.'

Orlov kissed her again and left, looking awkward, not uttering a word. When he heard the door-lock click behind him he paused half way downstairs, deep in thought, and glanced upwards. Had but a sound reached him from above just then he would have turned back, I felt. But all was quiet. He adjusted his cloak and began walking downstairs hesitantly.

Hired sledges had long been awaiting him at the door. Orlov climbed into one and I took his two suitcases into the other. There was a hard frost and fires smoked at the crossroads. As we hurtled along, the cold wind nipped my face and hands, taking my breath away. I shut my eyes and thought what a marvellous woman she was, and how much she loved him. People actually collect rubbish in back yards nowadays, and sell it to obtain money for charity, while even broken glass is thought a useful commodity. And yet so rare a treasure as the love of an elegant, intelligent, decent young woman was going completely begging. One of the early sociologists regarded every evil passion as a potential force for good, given the skill to apply it, yet with us a fine, noble passion is born only to fade away: paralysed, aimless, uncomprehended or vulgarized. Why?

The sledges suddenly halted. I opened my eyes and saw that we had stopped in Sergiyevsky Street near the large apartment house where Pekarsky lived. Orlov got out of his sledge and vanished into the entry. Five minutes later Pekarsky's man appeared in the doorway bareheaded.

'You deaf or something?' he shouted at me, furious with the piercing cold. 'Send those drivers off and come upstairs, you're wanted.'

Mystified, I made my way to the first floor. I had been in Pekarsky's flat before—had stood in the hall and looked into the drawing-room, that is—and after the damp, gloomy street it had impressed me each time with the glitter of its picture-frames, bronzes and expensive furniture. Now, amid all this glory, I saw Gruzin, Kukushkin and, a little later, Orlov.

'Look here, Stephen,' said he, coming up to me. 'I shall be staying here till Friday or Saturday. If any letters or telegrams come, bring them here every day. At home, of course, you will say I've left town and sent my regards. You may go.'

When I returned Zinaida was lying on the sofa in the drawing-room eating a pear. Only one candle was burning in the holder.

'You caught the train all right then?' Zinaida asked.

'Yes, ma'am. The master sends his regards.'

I went to my room and lay down too. There was nothing to do, and I did not feel like reading. I was neither surprised nor indignant, I was merely racking my brains to understand the need for such deception. Why, only a boy in his teens would trick his mistress like that! And he, so well-read, so very rational a being . . . surely he could have concocted something a little cleverer! I rated his intelligence pretty high, quite frankly. Had he needed to deceive his Minister or some other powerful man, he would have applied plenty of energy and skill to that, I thought, but now that deceiving a woman was involved any old idea would do—obviously. If the trick came off, so much the better, and if it didn't come off, no matter, for one could tell another lie equally glib and equally hasty without any mental effort whatever.

At midnight there was a shifting of chairs and a cheering on the floor above ours as people greeted the New Year. Zinaida rang for me from the room next to the study. Her energy sapped from lying down so long, she was sitting at her table writing on a piece of paper.

'I must send a telegram,' she said with a smile. 'Drive to the station as quick as you can and ask them to send this after him.'

Coming out into the street, I read her jotting.

'Best New Year wishes. Telegraph quickly. Miss you terribly. Seems like eternity. Sorry I cannot wire a thousand kisses and my very heart. Enjoy yourself, darling,

'ZINAIDA'

I sent the telegram and gave her the receipt next morning.

IX

The worst thing was that Orlov had thoughtlessly let Polya into the secret of his deception by asking her to bring his shirts to Sergiyevsky Street. After that she looked at Zinaida with a gloating hatred beyond my comprehension. She kept snorting with pleasure in her room and in the hall.

'She has outstayed her welcome and it's time she took herself off,' she said triumphantly. 'You would think she could see that for herself——'

She already sensed that Zinaida would not be with us much longer, so she pilfered everything she could lay her hands on while the going was good: scent bottles, tortoiseshell hairpins, handkerchiefs and shoes. On the second of January, Zinaida called me to her room and informed me in hushed tones that her black dress was missing. Then she went round the whole flat, pale-faced, looking frightened and indignant, talking to herself.

'Really! No, I must say! Did you ever hear of such impudence?'

At lunch she tried to help herself to soup, but could not do so because her hands were shaking. So were her lips. She kept glancing helplessly at the soup and pies, waiting for the trembling to pass off. Then she suddenly lost her self-control and looked at Polya.

'You may leave today, Polya,' she said. 'Stephen can manage on his own.'

'No, madam,' said Polya, 'I shall be staying, madam.'

'There is no need for that, you can clear out once and for all!' Zinaida went on, standing up in a great pother. 'You can look for another job. You leave here this instant!'

'I can't go without the master's orders. It was him took me on and what he says goes.'

'I can give you orders too!' said Zinaida, flushing crimson. 'I'm the mistress in this house.'

'Mistress you may be, madam, but only the master can dismiss me. It was him took me on.'

'How dare you stay here one minute longer!' shouted Zinaida and hit her plate with her knife. 'You are a thief, do you hear me?'

Zinaida threw her napkin on the table and rushed out of the dining-room with a pathetic, martyred look. Polya went out too, sobbing aloud and reciting some incantation. The soup and grouse grew cold, and all these restaurant delicacies on the table now wore a meagre, felonious, Polya-like air. Two pies on a little plate had a most pathetic, criminal look.

'We shall be taken back to our restaurant this afternoon,' they seemed to say. 'And tomorrow we shall be served up for lunch again to some civil servant or well-known singer.'

Polya's voice carried from her room. 'Some mistress, I must say! I could have been that kind of a mistress long ago, but I wouldn't demean meself. We shall see who'll leave here first, that we shall!'

Zinaida rang. She was sitting in a corner of her room with the air of having been put there as a punishment.

'There isn't a telegram, is there?' she asked.

'No, ma'am.'

'Ask the porter, there might be one.

'And don't go out of the house,' she called after me. 'I'm afraid to be here on my own.'

I had to run down to the porter every hour after that and ask if there was a telegram. What an unnerving time, though, honestly! Zinaida ate and had tea in her room to avoid seeing Polya, she slept there on a short crescent-shaped divan and she made her own bed. For the first few days it was I who took the telegrams, but when no answer came she ceased to trust me and went to the post office herself. Looking at her, I too anxiously awaited a wire. I hoped he might have contrived some deception: arranging for her to receive a telegram from some railway station, for instance. If he was too engrossed with his cards, or had taken up with another woman, Gruzin and Kukushkin would surely remind him of us, I thought. But we waited in vain. I went into Zinaida's room half a dozen times a day to tell her the truth, but there she would be with shoulders drooping and lips moving, looking rather like a goat. I went away again without a word. Pity and compassion had quite unmanned me. Apparently unaffected by all this, Polya was cheerful and jolly, tidying the master's study and bedroom, ferreting in cupboards, clattering dishes. When she passed Zinaida's door she would hum something and cough. She was glad that Zinaida was hiding from her. In the evening she would go off somewhere and ring the doorbell at about two or three in the morning, when I had to open up to her and listen to her remarks about my cough. At once another ring would be heard and I would run to the room next to the study. Zinaida would stick her head through the doorway.

'Who was that ringing?' she would ask, looking at my hands to see if I was holding a telegram.

When, on Saturday, there was a ring downstairs at last, and a well-known voice was heard on the staircase, she was so happy that she burst into tears. She rushed to greet him, embraced him, kissed his chest and sleeves, and said something unintelligible. The porter carried the suitcases up, and Polya's jolly voice was heard. It was as if he was just starting his holidays.

'Why didn't you telegraph?' asked Zinaida, panting with joy. 'Why? I've suffered such torments, I've hardly survived. Oh, my God!'

'It's all perfectly simple,' Orlov said. 'The Senator and I left for Moscow on the very first day, so I didn't get your wires. I'll give you a

detailed account this afternoon, dearest, but now I must sleep, sleep, sleep. The train was so tiring.'

He had obviously been up all night: playing cards, probably, and drinking a lot. Zinaida tucked him up in bed, and after that we all went round on tiptoe until evening. Lunch passed off quite successfully, but when they went to have coffee in the study the argument began. Zinaida said something rapidly in a low voice. She was speaking French, her words gurgling like a stream, after which a loud sigh came from Orlov, followed by his voice.

'My God!' he said in French. 'Have you really no more interesting news than this eternal lament about the wicked maidservant?'

'But, darling, she did rob me, and she was most impudent.'

'Then why doesn't she rob me? Why isn't she impudent to me? Why do *I* never notice maids or porters or footmen? You are behaving like a spoilt child, my dear, you don't know your own mind. I suspect you may be pregnant, actually. When I offered to dismiss her it was you who insisted on her staying. And now you want me to get rid of her. Well, in a case like this I can be stubborn too, I answer fad with fad. You want her to go away. Very well then, I want her to stay. It's the only way to cure you of your nerves.'

'Oh, all right, all right,' said Zinaida in panic. 'Let us change the subject. Let's leave it till tomorrow. Now tell me about Moscow. How was Moscow?'

X

The following day was the seventh of January (St. John the Baptist's Day) and after lunch Orlov put on his black dress-coat and decoration to go and wish his father many happy returns of his name-day. He had to leave at two o'clock, and it was only half past one when he had finished dressing. How should he spend the thirty minutes? He paced the drawing-room declaiming congratulatory verses which he had once recited to his father and mother as a child. Zinaida was sitting there too, being about to visit her dressmaker or go shopping, and she listened with a smile. How their conversation began I do not know, but when I took Orlov his gloves he was standing in front of Zinaida and peevishly pleading with her.

'In the name of God, in the name of all that is sacred, don't keep churning out the same old truisms. What an unfortunate faculty some clever, intellectually active ladies have for talking with an air of

profundity and enthusiasm about things that have been boring even schoolboys to distraction for years! Oh, if you would but eliminate all these serious problems from our connubial programme, how grateful I should be!'

'Women may not dare hold views of their own, it seems.'

'I concede you total freedom. Be as liberal as you like, quote what authors you will, but do grant *me* a concession. Just don't discuss either of two subjects in my presence: the evils of upper-class society and the defects of marriage as an institution. Now, get this into your head once and for all. The upper class is always abused in contrast with the world of tradesfolk, priests, workmen, peasants and every other sort of vulgar lout. Both classes are repugnant to me, but were I asked to make an honest choice between the two I should opt for the upper class without hesitation, and there would be nothing spurious or affected about it because my tastes are all on that side. Our world may be trivial, it may be empty, but you and I do at any rate speak decent French, we do read the occasional book, and we don't go around bashing each other in the ribs even when we are having a serious quarrel. Now, as for the *hoi polloi*, the riff-raff, the beard-and-caftan brigade, with them it's all "we aims to give satisfaction, 'alf a mo', gorblimey," not to mention their unbridled licentiousness, their pot-house manners and their idolatrous superstitions.'

'The peasant and tradesman do feed us.'

'So what? That reflects as much discredit on them as it does on me. If they feed me, if they doff their caps to me, it only means they lack the wit and honesty to do otherwise. I am not blaming anyone, I am not praising anyone, all I'm saying is that where upper and lower class are concerned it's six of one to half a dozen of the other. My heart and mind are against both, but my tastes are with the former.

'Now then, with regard to marriage being an unnatural institution,' Orlov went on with a glance at his watch. 'It is high time you realized that it's not a matter of natural or unnatural, but of people not knowing what they want out of marriage. What *do* you expect from it? Cohabitation, licit or illicit, and all manner of unions and liaisons, good and bad . . . they all boil down to the same basic element. You ladies live exclusively for that element, it's the very stuff of life to you, and without it you'd find existence meaningless. Outside it you have no other needs and so you grab hold of it. But ever since you started reading serious fiction you have been ashamed of grabbing hold of it—you dash from pillar to post, you rush headlong from man to man, and then try to

justify the whole imbroglio by saying how unnatural a thing is marriage. But if you can't or won't renounce that essence, your greatest enemy and bugbear, if you mean to go on truckling to it so obsequiously, then what serious discussion can there be? Whatever you say will only be pretentious nonsense and I shan't believe it.'

I went to ask the hall-porter whether the hired sledge had come, and on my return I found them quarrelling. There was a squall in the offing, as sailors say.

'Today you wish to shock me with your cynicism, I see,' said Zinaida, pacing the drawing-room in great agitation. 'I find your words quite disgusting. I am innocent in the eyes of God and man, and I have nothing to reproach myself with, either. I left my husband for you, and I am proud of it. Yes, I swear: proud, on my word of honour.'

'Well, that's all right then.'

'If you have a shred of decency and honesty in you, then you too must be proud of what I have done. It lifts us both above thousands of people who would like to do the same as I, but don't dare through cowardice or meanness. But you aren't a decent person. You fear freedom, you deride an honest impulse because you are afraid of some ignoramus suspecting *you* of being honest. You're afraid to show me to your friends, and there's nothing you hate more than driving down the street with me—that's true, isn't it? Why have you never introduced me to your father and cousin, that's what I want to know?

'Oh, I am sick of this, I must say,' shouted Zinaida, stamping. 'I insist on having my rights, so kindly introduce me to your father.'

'Go and introduce yourself if you want, he interviews petitioners each morning from ten to ten thirty.'

'Oh, you really *are* foul,' said Zinaida, frantically wringing her hands. 'Even if you don't mean it, even if you're not saying what you think, that cruel joke alone makes you detestable. Oh, you are *foul*, I must say.'

'We're barking up the wrong tree, you and I, this way we'll never get anywhere. What it comes to is this: you made a mistake and you won't admit it. You took me for a hero, you credited me with certain unusual notions and ideals, but then I turned out to be just a common-or-garden bureaucrat who plays cards and isn't the least bit keen on ideals. I am a worthy representative of that same tainted society which you have fled, outraged by its emptiness and vulgarity. Well, why not be fair and admit as much? Lavish your indignation on yourself, not me, for the mistake's yours, not mine.'

'All right, I admit it: I made a mistake.'

'Well, that's all right then. We have reached the point at last, thank God. Now, bear with me a little longer if you will be so kind. I cannot rise to your heights, being too depraved, nor can you demean yourself to my level, since you are too superior. So there's only one way out——'

'What's that?' asked Zinaida quickly, holding her breath and suddenly turning white as a sheet.

'We must have recourse to logic, and——'

'Why, oh why, do you torture me like this, George?' Zinaida suddenly asked in Russian, her voice breaking. 'Try to understand how much I suffer——'

Dreading her tears, Orlov darted into his study and then for some reason—whether to hurt her more, or remembering that it was usual practice in such cases—locked the door behind him. She screamed and rushed after him, her dress swishing.

'What is the meaning of this?' she asked, banging the door.

'What, what *does* it mean?' she repeated in a shrill voice breaking with indignation. 'So that's the kind of man you are, is it? I hate and despise you, so there! It's all over between us: all over, I tell you!'

Hysterical tears followed, mingled with laughter. Some small object fell off the drawing-room table and broke. Orlov made his way from study to hall through the other door, looked around him in panic, swiftly donned his cloak and top hat, and fled.

Half an hour passed, then an hour, and she was still crying. She had no father, no mother, no relatives, I remembered, and she was living here between a man who hated her and Polya who robbed her. How wretched her life indeed was, thought I. Not knowing why I did so, I went into the drawing-room to see her. Weak, helpless, with her lovely hair—a very paragon of tenderness and elegance in my eyes—she was suffering as if she was ill. She lay on the sofa hiding her face and shuddering all over.

'Would you like me to fetch the doctor, ma'am?' I asked softly.

'No, there's no need, it's nothing,' she said, looking at me with tearful eyes. 'It's only a bit of a headache, thank you very much.'

I went out. In the evening she wrote one letter after another. She sent me to Pekarsky, Kukushkin and Gruzin by turns, and finally anywhere I liked if I would but find Orlov quickly and give him her letter. Every time I returned with that letter she feverishly scolded me, pleaded with me, thrust money into my hand. She did not sleep that night, but sat in the drawing-room talking to herself.

Orlov came back to lunch next day and they were reconciled.

On the following Thursday Orlov complained to his friends that he had reached the end of his tether and that life was not worth living. He smoked a lot.

'It's no life, this isn't, it's sheer torture,' he said irritably. 'Tears, shrieks, intellectual conversation and pleas for forgiveness followed by more tears and shrieks, and the result is I can't call the place my own. I suffer agonies and I make her suffer too. Must I really put up with another couple of months of this? Surely not? But I may have to.'

'Then why not speak to her?' Pekarsky asked.

'I have tried, but I can't. With a rational, self-sufficient person you can say anything you like with complete confidence, but here you are dealing with a creature devoid of will-power, character and reason, aren't you? I can't stand tears, they unnerve me. Whenever she cries I'm ready to swear eternal love, and I want to cry as well.'

Not understanding, Pekarsky scratched his broad forehead thoughtfully.

'You really should take a separate flat for her,' he said. 'It's easy enough, surely.'

'It's me she needs, not a flat,' Orlov sighed. 'But what's the use of talking? All I hear is chatter, chatter, chatter, I see no way out. Talk about innocent victims! *I* didn't make this bed, yet it's me who's got to lie on it! A hero's the last thing I ever wanted to be! I could never stand Turgenev's novels, but now (and this is sheer farce) I suddenly find myself a sort of quintessential Turgenev hero. I swear blind I'm no such thing, I adduce the most irrefutable proofs to that effect, but she won't believe me. Now, why not? There must be something heroic about my countenance.'

'Then you had better go and inspect the provinces,' laughed Kukushkin.

'Yes, that's all I *can* do.'

A week after this conversation Orlov declared that he was being assigned to the Senator again, and he took his suitcases to Pekarsky's that same evening.

XI

On the threshold stood a man of about sixty in a beaver cap. His long fur coat reached the ground.

'Is Mr. Orlov in?' he asked.

I thought it was a money-lender at first, one of Gruzin's creditors who occasionally called on Orlov to collect small sums on account. But when the visitor came into the hall and flung open his coat, I saw the thick eyebrows and characteristic pursing of the lips which I had so thoroughly studied on photographs, and two rows of stars on the coat of a dress uniform. I recognized Orlov's father, the well-known statesman.

Mr. Orlov was out, I told him. The old man pursed his lips firmly and looked thoughtfully to one side, showing me a wasted, toothless profile.

'I'll leave a note,' he said. 'Will you show me in?'

Leaving his galoshes in the hall, he went into the study without taking off his long, heavy fur coat. He sat down in a low chair in front of the desk and pondered for several minutes before picking up a pen, shielding his eyes with his hand as if to keep the sun off: just like his son in a bad mood. He had a sad, thoughtful look, with an air of resignation such as I have only seen on the faces of elderly religious people. I stood behind him, contemplating the bald pate and the hollow at the back of his neck, and it was crystal clear to me that this weak, ailing, elderly man was now at my mercy. Why, there was no one in the flat apart from myself and my enemy. I only needed to employ a little force, then snatch his watch to disguise my motive and leave by the tradesmen's exit—and I should have gained incomparably more than I could ever have banked on when I became a servant. I was never likely to get a better chance than this, I thought. But instead of doing anything about it I looked with complete detachment from his bald pate to his furs and back, quietly brooding on the relations between this man and his only son, and on the probability that persons spoilt by riches and power don't want to die.

'You there—how long have you been working for my son?' he asked, forming large letters on the paper.

'Between two and three months, sir.'

He finished writing and stood up. There was still time. I spurred myself on, clenching my fists, searching my heart for some particle at least of my former loathing. How impassioned, how stubborn, how assiduous an enemy I had so recently been, I remembered. But it is hard to strike a match on crumbling stone. The sad old face, the cold glitter of his medal stars . . . they evoked in me only trivial, cheap, futile thoughts about the transiency of all things terrestrial and the proximity of death.

'Good-bye, my good fellow,' said the old man.

He put on his cap and left.

I had changed, I had become a new man: there could be no more doubt on that score. To test myself I began thinking of the past, but at once felt aghast as if I had chanced to peep into some dark, dank corner. Recalling my comrades and friends, I first thought how I should blush, how put out I should be, when I met any of them. But what kind of man was I now? What should I think about? What should I do? What was my goal in life?

None of it made sense to me, and I realized only one thing clearly: I must pack my things and leave with all speed. Before the old man's visit there had still been some point in my job, but now it was just ludicrous. My tears dropped into my open suitcase. I felt unbearably sad, and yet so tremendously vital. I was ready to span all human potentialities within the compass of my brief existence. I wanted to speak, to read, to wield a mallet in some big factory, to keep watch at sea, to plough the fields. I wanted to go to the Nevsky Prospekt, to the country, out to sea: wherever my imagination reached. When Zinaida returned I rushed to open the door and took off her coat with especial tenderness, for this was the last time.

We had two other visitors that day besides the old man. In the evening, when it was quite dark, Gruzin unexpectedly arrived to fetch some papers for Orlov. He opened the desk, took the papers he wanted, rolled them up and told me to put them by his cap in the hall while he went to see Zinaida. She lay on the drawing-room sofa, hands behind her head. Five or six days had passed since Orlov had left on his 'tour of inspection', and no one knew when he would be back, but she no longer sent telegrams or expected them. She ignored Polya, who was still living with us. She just didn't care . . . that was written all over her impassive, dead pale face. Now it was she who wanted to be miserable out of obstinacy, like Orlov. To spite herself and everything else on earth she lay quite still on the sofa for days on end, wishing herself only harm, expecting only the worst. She was probably picturing how Orlov would return, how they were bound to quarrel, how he would cool towards her and be unfaithful to her, after which they would separate, and these agonizing thoughts may have given her satisfaction. But what would she say if she suddenly discovered the real truth?

'I'm fond of you, my dear,' said Gruzin, greeting her and kissing her hand. 'You're so kind.

'Good old George has gone away,' he lied. 'He's gone away, the wicked man.'

He sat down with a sigh and fondly stroked her hand.

'Let me spend an hour with you, my dear,' he said. 'I don't like going home, and it's too early to go to the Birshovs'. Today's Katya Birshov's birthday. She's a very nice little girl.'

I brought him a glass of tea and a carafe of vodka. He drank the tea slowly, with evident reluctance.

'Have you a bite to, er, eat, my friend?' he asked timidly as he gave me back the glass. 'I haven't had a meal.'

There was nothing in the flat, so I fetched him the ordinary one-rouble dinner from the restaurant.

'Your health, dear!' he said to Zinaida and tossed down a glass of vodka. 'My little girl, your god-daughter, sends her love. She has a touch of scrofula, poor child.

'Ah, children, children!' he sighed. 'But you can say what you like, my dear, it's nice being a father. Good old George can't understand that feeling.'

He downed another glass. Gaunt, pale, wearing a napkin on his chest like an apron, he ate greedily, raising his eyebrows and looking from Zinaida to me like a small boy in disgrace. He looked ready to have burst into tears if I had not given him his grouse or jelly. Having satisfied his hunger, he cheered up and laughed as he started telling a story about the Birshov family, but then grew silent, when he noticed that this was uninteresting, and that Zinaida was not laughing. Then a sort of boredom suddenly descended. After the meal they both sat in the dining-room by the light of a single lamp and said nothing. He was tired of lying, while she wanted to ask him something, but didn't dare. Half an hour passed in this way. Then Gruzin looked at his watch.

'Well, perhaps it's time I went.'

'No, please stay. We must talk.'

There was a further silence. He sat at the piano, touched a key, then played and quietly sang: 'What does the morrow hold in store?' Then, as usual, he suddenly rose to his feet and shook his head.

'Play something, my dear,' Zinaida said.

'But what?' he asked with a shrug. 'I've forgotten it all, I gave it up ages ago.'

Looking at the ceiling as if trying to remember, he played two of Tchaikovsky's pieces with wonderful expression, warmly and intelligently. He looked just as he always did—neither intelligent nor stupid—and I found it utterly miraculous that a man whom I was used to seeing in this mean and squalid environment should be capable of flights of

emotion so pure, so far beyond my ken. Zinaida flushed and paced the drawing-room excitedly.

'Just a moment, my dear, I'll play you something else if I can remember it,' he said. 'It's something I heard on the 'cello.'

Starting timidly, then picking up, and finally with complete confidence, he played Saint-Saëns's *The Swan*. Then he played it again.

'Not bad, eh?' he said.

Greatly moved, Zinaida went and stood beside him.

'My friend,' she said, 'tell me truly as a friend: what do you think of me?'

'What can I say?' he answered, raising his eyebrows. 'I like you, and I think only good of you.

'But if you want my general views on the problem which concerns you,' he went on, rubbing his sleeve near the elbow and frowning, 'then, my dear, you know. . . . Following one's heart's impulses freely . . . it doesn't always bring happiness to decent people. If one wants to be free and happy at the same time, I think one must face the fact that life is cruel, harsh and pitiless in its conservatism, and that one must pay it back in its own currency: be equally harsh, equally pitiless in one's own drive for freedom, in other words. That's my view.'

'But how can I?' Zinaida smiled sadly. 'I'm so tired, my friend. I can't lift a finger to save myself, I'm so tired.'

'Go into a convent, my dear.'

He said it in jest, but after he had spoken tears glistened in Zinaida's eyes, and then in his.

'Ah well,' he said, 'I have sat here long enough, it's time I was off. Good-bye, dear friend. God give you health.'

He kissed both her hands and stroked them affectionately, saying that he would certainly come to see her again in a day or two. As he put on his overcoat—the one that was so like a child's—in the hall, he spent a long time fumbling in his pockets for a tip for me, but found nothing.

'Good-bye, old chap,' he said sadly, and went out.

I shall never forget the atmosphere which the man left behind him. Zinaida continued pacing the drawing-room excitedly. She was walking about instead of lying down, and that in itself was a good sign. I wanted to take advantage of this mood to speak to her frankly and then leave at once, but hardly had I seen Gruzin out when the door-bell rang. It was Kukushkin.

'Is Mr. Orlov in?' he asked. 'Is he back? No, you say? What a pity. In that case I'll go and kiss your mistress's hand and then run along.

'May I come in, Zinaida?' he shouted. 'I want to kiss your hand. I'm sorry I'm so late.'

He was not long in the drawing-room—ten minutes, no more—but I felt as if he had been there for some time and would never leave. I bit my lips in indignation and annoyance, and I already hated Zinaida. I wondered why she didn't throw him out and I felt outraged, though it was obvious that he bored her.

When I held his coat for him he bestowed a special sign of favour by asking how I managed without a wife.

'But you don't let the grass grow under your feet, I'm sure,' he laughed. 'No doubt you have your bit of slap and tickle with Polya, you rascal.'

Despite my experience of life I had little knowledge of people at that time, and I frequently exaggerated trifles, very possibly, and entirely missed things of importance. Kukushkin's sniggers and flattery had a certain point, it struck me. Perhaps he hoped that, being a servant, I should gossip in kitchens and servants' halls all over the place about his visiting us in the evenings when Orlov was out, and sitting with Zinaida until late at night? Then, when my gossip reached his friends' ears he would drop his eyes in confusion, and wag his little finger. At cards that very evening he would pretend, or perhaps accidentally blurt out, that he had won Zinaida away from Orlov—or so I thought, looking at that unctuous little face.

I was now gripped by the very hatred which had failed me during the old man's visit at midday. Kukushkin left at last. Listening to the shuffle of his leather galoshes, I felt a strong urge to pursue him with some coarse parting oath, but restrained myself. Then, when his steps had died away on the stairs, I went back into the hall and, not knowing what I was doing, seized the roll of papers which he had left behind and rushed headlong downstairs. I ran into the street without my coat or cap. It was not cold, but big snow flakes were falling, and there was a wind.

'Sir!' I shouted, catching up Kukushkin. 'I say, sir!'

He stopped by a lamp-post and looked round in bewilderment.

'I say, sir,' I panted. 'Sir!'

Having no idea what to say, I hit him twice on the face with the roll of paper. Quite at a loss, not even surprised—so unawares had I taken him—he leant back against the lamp-post and shielded his face with

his hands. At that moment some army medical officer passed by and saw me hitting the man, but only looked at us in amazement and walked on.

I felt ashamed and rushed back to the house.

XII

My head wet with snow, out of breath, I ran to my room, immediately threw off my tail-coat, put on my jacket and top-coat, and brought my suitcase into the hall. Oh, to escape! But before leaving I quickly sat down and began writing to Orlov.

'I leave you my false passport,' I began. 'Please keep it in memory of me, you humbug, you metropolitan stuffed shirt.

'To insinuate oneself into a household under an alias, to observe domestic intimacies behind a servant's mask, to see all, hear all, and then volunteer denunciations of your mendacity . . . it's all rather underhand, you will say. Very well, but I am not concerned with cultivating integrity at the moment. I have suffered dozens of your suppers and lunches, when you spoke and did as you pleased while I had to listen, watch and hold my peace, and I don't see why you should get away with it. Besides, if there's no one else near you who dares tell you the truth without flattery, let Stephen the footman be the one to knock you off your elevated perch.'

I disliked this beginning, but I was not inclined to change it. What did it matter, anyway?

The large windows with their dark curtains, the bed, the crumpled dress-coat on the floor, my wet footprints . . . they all looked forbidding and gloomy. There was something peculiar about the silence too.

Perhaps because I had dashed into the street without my cap or galoshes, I was running a high fever. My face burnt, my legs ached, my heavy head sagged over the table, and I appeared to be suffering from split personality, each thought in my brain being seemingly haunted by its own shadow.

'Ill, weak and demoralized as I am, I cannot write to you as I should like,' I continued. 'My first wish was to insult and humiliate you, but I no longer feel I have any right to do that. We are both failures, you and I, and neither of us is going to rise again, so however eloquent, forceful and awesome my letter might be, it would still be like beating on a coffin lid: I could bang away for all I was worth without waking anyone up. No exertions can ever warm that damnable cold blood of

yours, as you know better than I do. Is there any point in writing to you, then? But my head and heart are burning and I continue writing, somehow excited, as if this letter could still rescue the two of us. My thoughts are incoherent because I am running a temperature, and my pen somehow scratches meaninglessly on the paper, but the question I want to ask you is plain before my eyes as though written in letters of fire.

'It is not hard to explain why *I* have flagged and fallen prematurely. Like Samson in the Bible, I hoisted the gates of Gaza on my back to carry them to the top of the mountain, but only when I was already exhausted, when my youth and health had faded once and for all, did I realize that those gates were too heavy for me and that I had deceived myself. Moreover, I was in constant, agonizing pain. I have suffered hunger, cold, sickness and loss of liberty. I never knew personal happiness, and I still don't. I have no refuge, my memories weigh me down, and my conscience is often afraid of them. But you, now, you . . . why have *you* fallen? What fatal, hellish causes prevented your life from blossoming forth in full vernal splendour? Before you had even begun to live you hastened to renounce the image and likeness of God, you turned into a cowardly animal which barks to scare others because it is scared itself. Why, though? You fear life, you fear it like the Oriental who sits on a cushion all day smoking his hookah. Oh yes, you read a lot, and your European coat fits you well. Yet with what fond, purely Oriental solicitude, worthy of some eastern potentate, do you shield yourself from hunger, cold, physical effort, pain and worry! How early you began to rest on your oars! What a cowardly attitude you have shown to real life and the natural forces with which every normal, healthy man has to contend! How soft, snug, warm, comfortable you are . . . and oh, how bored! Yes, you experience the shattering, abysmal boredom of a man in solitary confinement, but you try to hide even from that enemy by playing cards for eight hours out of the twenty-four.

'And your irony? Oh, how well I understand it! Vital, free-ranging, confident speculation . . . it's a pretty keen and potent process, that, but not one that a sluggish, idle brain can cope with. So, to stop it encroaching on your peace of mind, you hastened while yet young to confine it within bounds, as did thousands of your contemporaries, by arming yourself with an ironical approach to life or whatever you want to call it. Your inhibited, cowed thoughts do not dare to leap the fence which you have set round them, and when you mock ideals which you claim to know "all about", you're just like the deserter fleeing disgracefully

from the battlefield, and stifling his own shame by deriding war and valour. Cynicism dulls the pain. In some novel of Dostoyevsky's an old man tramples his favourite daughter's portrait underfoot because he has treated her unfairly, just as you mock the ideals of goodness and justice in your nasty, cheap way because you can't live up to them any longer. You dread every honest, direct reference to your own decline, and you deliberately surround yourself with people capable only of flattering your weaknesses. So no wonder you're so scared of tears, no wonder at all.

'And incidentally, there's your attitude to women. We are all shameless—that's something we inherited with our flesh and blood, it's part of our upbringing. But what is one a man for, if not to subdue the beast within one? When you grew up, when you got to know "all about" ideas, the truth was staring you in the face. You knew it, but you didn't pursue it, you took fright at it, and you tried to deceive your conscience by loudly assuring yourself that the fault was not yours, it was women's, and that women were as debased as your relations with them. Those bleak dirty stories, that neighing snigger, all your innumerable theories about the so-called "basic element", about the vagueness of the demands made on marriage, about the ten *sous* which the French labourer pays his woman, your never-ending references to female illogicality, mendaciousness, feebleness and the like . . . doesn't it all rather look as if you want to push woman down in the mud at all costs so as to put her on the same level as your own relations with her? You're a wretched, weak, disagreeable person.'

Zinaida started playing the piano in the drawing-room, trying to remember the Saint-Saëns piece which Gruzin had played. I went and lay on my bed, but then remembered that it was time to go. Forcing myself to stand up, I went back to the desk with a heavy, hot head.

'But why are we so tired? That's the question,' I went on. 'We who start out so passionate, bold, high-minded and confident . . . why are we so totally bankrupt by the age of thirty or thirty-five? Why is it that one person pines away with consumption, another puts a bullet in his brains, and a third seeks oblivion in vodka or cards, while a fourth tries to stifle his anguished terrors by cynically trampling on the image of his fine, unsullied youth? Why do we never try to stand up once we have fallen down? If we lose one thing why don't we look for another? Well may one ask.

'The thief on the Cross managed to recover his zest for living and a bold, realistic hope for his future, though he may have had less than an

hour to live. You have long years ahead of you, and I'm not going to die as soon as you think, probably. What if, by some miracle, the present should turn out to be a dream, a hideous nightmare, what if we awoke renewed, cleansed, strong, proud in our sense of rectitude? Joyous visions fire me, I am breathless with excitement. I have a terrific appetite for life, I want our lives to be sacred, sublime and solemn as the vault of the heavens. And live we shall! The sun rises only once a day, and life isn't given twice, so hold tight to what is left of it and preserve that.'

I wrote not a word more. My head was seething with ideas, but they were all so blurred that I could not get them down on paper. Leaving the letter unfinished, I signed my rank, Christian name and surname, and went into the study. It was dark there. I groped for the desk and put the letter on it. I must have stumbled into the furniture in the dark and made a noise.

'Who's there?' asked a worried voice in the drawing-room.

At that moment the clock on the desk gently struck one o'clock.

XIII

I spent at least half a minute scratching at the door and fumbling with it in the darkness, then slowly opened it and went into the drawing-room. Zinaida was lying on a sofa and raised herself on an elbow to watch me come in. Not daring to speak, I walked slowly past her while she followed me with her eyes. I stood in the hall for a moment, then went past again while she watched me carefully and with amazement—with fear, even. At last I halted.

'He won't be coming back,' I brought out with an effort.

She quickly rose to her feet and looked at me uncomprehendingly.

'He won't be coming back,' I repeated, my heart pounding violently. 'He can't come back because he hasn't left St. Petersburg. He is staying at Pekarsky's.'

She understood and believed me, as I could tell from her sudden pallor, and from the way in which she suddenly crossed her hands over her breast in fear and entreaty. Her recent history flashed through her mind, she put two and two together, she saw the whole truth with pitiless clarity. But she also remembered that I was a servant, a lower form of life. Some bounder, his hair awry and face flushed with fever, very possibly drunk, wearing a vulgar overcoat, had crudely barged in on her private life, and that offended her.

'Nobody asked your opinion,' she told me sternly. 'You may leave the room.'

'But you must believe me,' I said impetuously, stretching out my arms to her. 'I am not a servant, I'm an independent person just as you are.'

I mentioned my name and quickly—very quickly indeed, to stop her interrupting me or going to her room—explained who I was and why I was living there. This new revelation shocked her more than the first. Hitherto she had still hoped that her servant was lying, or was mistaken and had spoken foolishly, but now after my confession there was no longer room for doubt. The expression in her unhappy eyes and face, which suddenly seemed ugly because it looked older and lost its gentleness . . . it told me that she had reached the limit of her endurance, and how ill it boded, this conversation which I had started. But I continued, quite carried away.

'The Senator and his inspection were invented to deceive you. He did the same in January: he didn't go away, he just stayed at Pekarsky's. I saw him every day and helped to deceive you. They were fed up with you, they hated having you around, they mocked you. If you could have heard how he and his friends jeered at you and your love you wouldn't have stayed here a minute longer. So run away, escape!'

'Oh, all right,' she said in quavering tones, passing her hand over her hair. 'All right then. Who cares?'

Her eyes were full of tears, her lips trembled, her whole face was strikingly pale and breathed anger. Orlov's crude, petty lies outraged her, she found them contemptible and ridiculous. She smiled, but I disliked the look of that smile.

'All right then,' she repeated, passing her hand over her hair again. 'Who cares? He thinks I shall die of humiliation, but I just . . . think it's funny.

'There's no point in him hiding, no point at all,' she said, moving away from the piano and shrugging her shoulders. 'It would have been simpler to discuss things openly than to go into hiding and skulk about in other people's flats. I do have eyes in my head, I'd noticed all this myself ages ago, and I was only waiting for him to come back to have things out once and for all.'

Then she sat in the arm-chair near the table, leant her head on the sofa arm and wept bitterly. There was only one candle burning in the drawing-room candle-holder and the chair she sat in was in darkness, but I could see her head and shoulders quivering, while her hair fell

loose and covered her neck, face and hands. In her quiet, even, unhysterical, normal, womanly weeping could be heard wounded pride, humiliation, resentment and the absolute hopelessness of a situation utterly irreparable and unacceptable. Her weeping found its echo in my agitated, suffering heart. I had forgotten my illness and everything else on earth as I paced the drawing-room, muttering distractedly.

'Oh, what a life! One really can't go on like this, indeed one can't. It's sheer criminal lunacy, this life is.'

'How humiliating!' she said through her tears. 'To live with me and smile at me when he found me such a drag, so ridiculous. What terrible humiliation!'

Raising her head, she gazed at me with tearful eyes through hair wet with tears as she tidied this hair which blocked her view of me.

'Did they laugh at me?' she asked.

'You, your love, Turgenev in whom you were allegedly too well versed . . . these men found it all funny. And should we both die of despair this instant they would find that funny too. They would make up a comic story and tell it at your funeral service.

'But why talk about them?' I asked impatiently. 'We must escape. I can't stay here a minute longer.'

She began crying again, and I went over to the piano and sat down.

'Well, what are we waiting for?' I asked despondently. 'It's past two o'clock already.'

'I'm not waiting for anything,' she said. 'My life is ruined.'

'Don't say such things. Come on, let us pool forces and decide what to do. Neither of us can stay here. Where do you intend going?'

Suddenly the bell rang in the hall and my heart missed a beat. Could Orlov have come back after receiving a complaint about me from Kukushkin? How should we greet him? I went to open the door, and there was Polya. She came in, shook the snow from her cloak in the hall and went to her room without a word to me. When I returned to the drawing-room Zinaida was pale as death and stood in the middle of the room, fixing huge eyes on me.

'Who was that?' she asked softly.

'Polya,' I told her.

She ran her hand over her hair and closed her eyes wearily.

'I'll leave this instant,' she said. 'Would you be very kind and take me to the Old Town? What time is it!'

'A quarter to three.'

XIV

The street was dark and deserted when we left the house a little later. Sleet was falling and a damp wind lashed us in the face. It was the beginning of March, I remember, there was a thaw, and it was some days since the cabmen had started driving on wheels in place of sledges. The back stairs, the cold, the darkness of night, the porter in his sheepskin questioning us before he let us out of the gate . . . these things utterly fatigued and depressed Zinaida. When we had got into a fly and put the hood up, she shook all over and quickly said how grateful she was.

'I don't doubt your good will,' she muttered, 'but I am ashamed to put you to this trouble. Oh, I understand, I understand. When Gruzin was here this evening I could tell he was lying and hiding something. Very well then, I don't care. Still, I'm ashamed to have you go to so much trouble.'

She still had some doubts. To dispel them once and for all I told our cabman to drive down Sergiyevsky Street. Halting him at Pekarsky's door, I got out of the cab and rang. When the porter came I asked if Mr. Orlov was at home, speaking in a loud voice so that Zinaida could hear.

'Yes, he came back about half an hour ago,' was the answer. 'He must be in bed now. What do you want?'

Zinaida could not resist leaning out of the carriage.

'Has Mr. Orlov been staying here long?' she asked.

'Going on three weeks.'

'And he hasn't been away?'

'No,' answered the porter, looking at me with surprise.

'Tell him tomorrow morning that his sister is here from Warsaw,' I said. 'Good night.'

Then we drove on. The cab had no apron, and snowflakes fell on us, while the wind pierced us to the bone, especially when we were crossing the Neva. I began to feel as if we had been travelling like this for some time, as if we had long been suffering, and as if I had been listening to Zinaida's shuddering breath for ages. In a state bordering on hallucination, as if I was dozing off, I cast a casual backward glance at my strange, feckless life. Somehow a melodrama, *Parisian Beggars*, which I had seen once or twice as a child, came to mind. Then I tried to shake off this semi-trance by looking out from the hood of my cab to see the dawn, and somehow all the images of the past, all my blurred

thoughts, suddenly fused into a single clear and cogent idea: both Zinaida and I were now utterly lost. The idea carried conviction, deriving apparently from an air of impending doom in the cold, blue sky, but a second later my thoughts and beliefs were elsewhere engaged.

'Oh, what *can* I do now?' Zinaida asked, her voice rough in the cold, damp air. 'Where am I to go, what can I do? Gruzin said I should enter a convent, and I would, oh, I would! I would change my dress, my face, my name, my thoughts, everything about me, and I'd hide away for ever. But they won't have me as a nun, I'm pregnant.'

'We'll go abroad together tomorrow,' I told her.

'We can't, my husband won't give me a passport.'

'Then I'll take you without one.'

The cab stopped near a two-storey wooden house painted a dark colour. I rang. Taking from me her light little basket—the only luggage we had brought—Zinaida smiled a wry smile.

'My jewels,' she said.

But so weak was she that she could not hold those jewels.

It was a long time before the door opened. After the third or fourth ring a light glinted in the windows. Footsteps, coughing and whispering were heard. Then the key turned in the lock at last and a stout peasant woman with a scared red face appeared at the door. Some way behind her stood a thin little old woman with bobbed grey hair, in a white blouse, carrying a candle. Zinaida ran into the lobby and flung herself on the old woman's neck.

'I've been so badly let down, Nina,' she sobbed loudly. 'Oh, Nina, it's such a dirty, rotten business.'

I gave the peasant woman the basket. They locked the door, but sobs and shouts of 'Nina' were still audible. I got in the fly and told the man to drive slowly towards the Nevsky Prospekt. I had to think where I could find my night's lodging.

I called on Zinaida late in the following afternoon. She was greatly changed. There were no traces of tears on her pale, very thin face, and her expression was altered. Whether it was because I now saw her in different and far from luxurious surroundings, or because our relations had changed, or perhaps because great sorrow had left its mark on her, she no longer seemed as elegant and well-dressed as formerly. Her figure had shrunk, rather. In her movements, her walk and her expression I noticed a jerkiness, an excess of nervousness and a quality of urgency, while even her smile lacked its former sweetness. I was now wearing an expensive suit which I had bought during the day. She first cast an eye

over this suit and the hat in my hand, then fixed an impatient, quizzical glance on my face as if studying it.

'Your transformation still seems pretty miraculous to me,' she said. 'Forgive me looking at you so inquisitively. You're a most unusual man, aren't you?'

I told her again who I was and why I had lived at Orlov's, speaking at greater length and in more detail than on the previous day. She listened with great attention.

'I am finished with all that,' she interrupted me. 'Do you know, I couldn't resist writing him a note? Here is the answer.'

On the sheet which she gave me I saw Orlov's handwriting.

'I'm not looking for excuses, but you must admit it was your mistake, not mine.

'Wishing you happiness and begging you to forget with all speed

'Your faithful servant

'G. O.

'PS. Am sending on your things.'

There in the drawing-room stood the trunks and baskets sent on by Orlov, among them being my own pathetic suitcase.

'So he must . . .' said Zinaida, but did not finish her sentence.

We were silent for a time. She took the note and held it before her eyes for a couple of minutes while her face assumed the haughty, contemptuous, proud, harsh expression which she had worn at the beginning of our discussion on the previous evening. Tears came to her eyes: proud, angry tears, with nothing timid or bitter about them.

'Listen,' she said, standing up abruptly and going over to the window to prevent my seeing her face. 'I have decided to go abroad with you tomorrow.'

'Very well. We can start today so far as I'm concerned.'

'Recruit me into your organization,' she said, then suddenly turned round and asked if I had read Balzac. 'Have you read him? *Père Goriot* ends with the hero looking down at Paris from a hill-top and threatening the city. "I shall be even with you yet," says he, after which he begins a new life. And when I look at St. Petersburg from the train window for the last time, I'll say the same: "I shall be even with you yet." '

Having spoken, she smiled at her own joke and for some reason shuddered all over.

XV

In Venice I began to suffer attacks of pleurisy, having probably caught cold on the evening when we took the boat from the station to the Hotel Bauer. I had to go to bed on the first day and stay there for a fortnight. During my illness Zinaida came from her room to drink coffee with me every morning, and then read me aloud the French and Russian books of which we had bought a great many in Vienna. These were books which I had known for years, or which did not interest me, but with her delightful, amiable voice sounding so near to me the contents of the whole lot of them boiled down, so far as I was concerned, to the single fact that I was not alone. She would go out for a stroll and come back in her light grey dress and dainty straw hat, cheerful and warmed by the spring sunshine. Sitting by my bed, stooping over my face, she would tell me something about Venice or read these books, and I felt splendid.

At night I was cold, I had pains, I was bored, but during the day I exulted in life: there is no better way of putting it. The hot, brilliant sunshine beating through open windows and balcony door, the shouts below, the plash of oars, the tolling of bells, the thunder-peals of the noon-tide cannon, the sensation of complete and utter freedom . . . these things did wonders for me. I felt as if I were growing mighty, broad wings to bear me off God knows where. And how enchanting it was, what pleasure there was sometimes in the thought that another life was now marching step by step with mine, that I was the servant, protector, friend and indispensable travelling companion of a young woman who besides being beautiful and rich was also weak, insulted and lonely. Even illness can be pleasant when you know that others are eagerly looking forward to your recovery. I once heard her whispering with my doctor behind the door, and when she came into my room afterwards her eyes were filled with tears. It was a bad sign, but I was greatly moved, and it gave me a wonderful feeling of relief.

Then I was allowed out on the balcony. The sunshine and sea breeze lulled and caressed my sick body. I looked down at the familiar gondolas gliding along with feminine grace, smoothly and majestically, like living creatures attuned to the voluptuousness of a civilization so exotic and bewitching. There was a smell of the sea. Somewhere people were playing stringed instruments and singing a two-part song. It was so marvellous, so unlike that night in St. Petersburg with sleet falling and lashing me roughly in the face. Looking straight across the canal

now, I could see the open sea, while the sunlight on the far skyline's expanse dazzled till it hurt your eyes. It made me long to go down to the dear old sea to which I had given my youth. I wanted a bit of excitement: a bit of life, that was all.

A fortnight later I was up and about, and could go where I pleased. I liked sitting in the sun, listening to a gondolier whom I could not understand and spending hours on end gazing at the villa where Desdemona was said to have lived: an unsophisticated, sad, demure little place as light as lace, it looked as if you could pick it up in one hand. I stood for some time by the Canova monument, my eyes fixed on the sad lion. In the Palace of the Doges I was attracted by the corner where the wretched Marino Faliero had been daubed with black paint. I should like to be an artist, poet or playwright, I thought, but if that is beyond me a dose of mysticism might not come amiss. Oh, if only I had some scrap of faith to add to the unruffled calm and serenity which filled my heart!

In the evenings we ate oysters, drank wine and went boating. I remember our black gondola quietly bobbing about in one place while the water gurgled beneath it, scarcely audible. The reflections of stars and shore lights quivered and trembled in places. Not far away people were singing in a gondola festooned with coloured lamps which were reflected in the water. Guitars, violins, mandolins, men's and women's voices rang out in the darkness, while Zinaida, looking pale and serious—stern, almost—sat by my side, pursing her lips and clasping her hands. Musing on something, she did not so much as move an eyebrow, and did not hear me. Her face, her pose, her fixed, expressionless glance, those incredibly bleak, unnerving ice-cold memories . . . and around us the gondolas, the lights, the music, the song with its dynamic, ardent cry of "*Jam-mo! Jam-mo!*" . . . what a fantastic contrast! When she sat like this, her hands tightly clasped, petrified, disconsolate, I felt as if we were both characters in an old-fashioned novel with some title like *A Maid Forlorn* or *The Forsaken Damozel*. Yes, both of us fitted: she forlorn and forsaken, and I, the loyal, faithful friend, the introvert, the odd-man-out if you like, the failure no longer capable of anything but coughing and brooding, and perhaps also of sacrificing himself. But what use were my sacrifices to anyone? And what had I to sacrifice, one might ask?

After our evening's outing we always had tea in her room and talked. We were not afraid of touching old wounds which were still unhealed: far from it, for it actually gave me pleasure, somehow, to tell

her of my life with Orlov, or make frank allusions to those relations of which I was aware and which could not have been hidden from me.

'There were times when I hated you,' I said. 'When Orlov was behaving like a spoilt child, when he was condescending or lying to you, I was struck by your failure to see and grasp what was going on under your nose. You kissed his hands, you went down on your knees, you flattered him——'

She blushed. 'When I kissed his hands and knelt down I loved him.'

'Was he so very hard to see through? Was he really such a sphinx? A sphinx-cum-bureaucrat—oh really!

'God forbid that I should reproach you with anything,' I went on, feeling a little clumsy and lacking in the urbanity and finesse so essential when dealing with another's inner life, though I had never been aware of suffering from that defect before meeting her.

'But why couldn't you see through him?' I repeated, now more quietly and diffidently.

'You despise my past, you mean, and you are quite right,' she said, greatly upset. 'You are one of those special people who can't be judged conventionally, your moral imperatives are extremely stringent and you are incapable of forgiveness, I can see that. I understand you, and if I sometimes contradict you it doesn't mean I don't see eye to eye with you. I am only talking this antiquated rubbish because I haven't yet had time to wear out my old dresses and prejudices. Myself, I hate and despise my past, I despise Orlov and my love. A fine sort of love that was!

'It all seems so comic now, actually,' she said, going to the window and looking down at the canal. 'These love affairs only dull one's conscience and confuse one. Our struggle is the only thing with any meaning in life. Bring down your heel on the vile serpent's head and crush it. That is where you'll find your purpose, it's either there or there isn't any such thing.'

I told her long stories from my past, describing my exploits—and astounding they had indeed been. But not one syllable did I breathe about the change which had occurred inside me. She always listened with close attention, rubbing her hands at the interesting parts as if irked that such adventures, fears and delights had not yet come her way, but then she would suddenly grow pensive, retreating into herself, and I could tell from her expression that she was heeding me no longer.

I would close the windows on to the canal and ask whether we should have the fire lit.

'Oh, never mind that, I'm not cold,' she would say with a wan smile. 'I just feel weak all over. I think my wits have grown sharper of late, you know. I now have most unusual and original ideas. When I think about my past, say, about my old life—yes, and about people in general —the whole thing merges into a single picture and I see my stepmother. That rude, impudent, heartless, false slut of a woman! And she was a drug addict too! My father was a weak, spineless character who married my mother for her money and drove her into a decline, but his second wife, my stepmother . . . he loved her passionately, he was crazy about her. I had a lot to put up with, I can tell you. Anyway, why go on about it? So, as I say, everything somehow merges into this one image. And I feel annoyed that my stepmother's dead, I would dearly love to meet her now!'

'Why?'

'Oh, I don't know,' she answered with a laugh and a pretty toss of her head. 'Good night. Hurry up and get better. As soon as you do we shall start working for the cause, it's high time we did.'

I had said good night and had my hand on the door handle when she asked: 'What do you think? Does Polya still live there?'

'Probably.'

I went to my room. We lived like this for a whole month. Then, one dull day we were both standing by my window at noon, silently watching the storm-clouds rolling in from the sea and the canal which had turned dark blue. We were expecting a downpour at any moment, and when a narrow, dense belt of rain shrouded the open sea like a muslin veil we both suddenly felt bored. We left for Florence the same day.

XVI

It was autumn, we were in Nice. One morning when I went into her room she was sitting in an arm-chair: legs crossed, hunched, gaunt, face in hands, weeping torrents of bitter tears, with her long, unkempt hair trailing over her knees. The impression of the superb, magnificent sea which I had just been looking at and wanted to tell her about . . . it suddenly vanished and my heart ached.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

She took one hand from her face and motioned for me to go out.

'Now, what *is* the matter?' I repeated, and for the first time since we had first met I kissed her hand.

'It's nothing really,' she said quickly. 'Oh, it's nothing, nothing. Go away. Can't you see I'm not dressed?'

I went out in appalling distress. The serenity and peace of mind which I had so long enjoyed . . . now they were poisoned by compassion. I desperately longed to fall at her feet, to beg her not to bottle up her tears, but to share her grief with me, while the sea's steady rumble growled in my ears like the voice of doom and I foresaw new tears, new griefs, new losses. What, oh what was she crying about, I wondered, remembering her face and martyred look. She was pregnant, I remembered. She tried to hide her condition both from others and from herself. At home she wore a loose blouse or a bodice with voluminous folds in front, and when she went out she laced herself in so tightly that she twice fainted during our outings. She never mentioned her pregnancy to me, and when I once intimated that she might see a doctor she blushed deeply and said not a word.

When I went to her room later she was already dressed and had done her hair.

'Now, that's enough of that,' I said, seeing her once more on the brink of tears. 'Let's go down on the beach and have a talk.'

'I can't talk. I'm sorry, but I'm in the mood to be alone. And when you want to come into my room again, Vladimir, you might be good enough to knock first.'

That 'be good enough' sounded rather peculiar and unfeminine. I went out. My damned St. Petersburg mood came back, and my dreams all curled up and shrivelled like leaves in a heatwave. I felt that I was alone again, that there was no intimacy between us. I meant no more to her than yonder cobweb meant to the palm-tree on which it had chanced to cling until the wind should whip it off and whisk it away. I strolled about the square where the band was playing and went into the Casino. Here I looked at the overdressed, heavily perfumed women, and each of them glanced at me.

'You're an unattached male,' they seemed to say. 'Good!'

Then I went on the terrace and spent a long time looking at the sea. There was not one sail on the horizon. On the coast to my left were hills, gardens, towers and houses with sunlight playing on them in the mauve haze, but it was all so alien, so impassive—it was all such a clutter, somehow.

XVII

She still came and drank her coffee with me in the mornings, but we no longer had our meals together. She didn't feel hungry, she said, and she lived entirely on coffee, tea and oddments like oranges and caramels.

We no longer had our evening chats either, I don't know why. Ever since the day when I had found her in tears she had adopted a rather casual manner towards me, sometimes off-hand—or ironical, even. For some reason she was calling me 'my dear sir'. Whatever had once impressed her as awesome, admirable and heroic, arousing her envy and enthusiasm . . . it left her quite cold now. After hearing me out she would usually stretch herself slightly.

'Yes, yes, yes, but I seem to have heard all that before, my dear sir.'

There were even times when I did not see her for days on end. Sometimes I would knock timidly and quietly on her door, and there would be no answer. Then I would knock again: still silence. I would stand by the door listening, but then the chambermaid would walk past and bleakly declare that '*Madame est partie*.' Then I would pace up and down the hotel corridor. I would see English people, full-bosomed ladies, waiters in evening dress. Then, after I have been gazing for some time at the long, striped carpet which runs down the whole corridor, it occurs to me that I am playing a strange and probably false part in this woman's life, and that I am no longer able to change that role. I run to my room, I fall on the bed, I rack my brains, but no ideas come to me. All I can see is that I have a great zest for life, and that the uglier, the more wasted, the rougher her face looks, the closer does she seem to me, and the more intensely and painfully do I sense our kinship. Call me 'my dear sir', adopt that casual, contemptuous tone, do what you like, my darling, only don't leave me. I am afraid of being alone.

Then I go into the corridor again and listen anxiously. I miss my dinner, I don't notice evening coming on. At last, at about half past ten, familiar footsteps are heard and Zinaida appears at the bend near the staircase.

'Are you taking a stroll?' she asks as she passes by. 'Then you'd better go outside. Good night.'

'Shan't we meet today then?'

'I think it's too late. Oh, all right, have it your own way.'

'Tell me where you've been?' I say, following her into her room.

'Oh, to Monte Carlo.' She takes a dozen gold coins from her pocket.

'There, my dear sir,' says she. 'My roulette winnings.'

'Oh, I can't see you gambling.'

'Why ever not? I'm going back tomorrow.'

I could picture her with that ugly, ill expression on her face, pregnant, tightly laced, as she stood near the gaming table in a crowd of demimondaines and old women in their dotage swarming round the gold like flies round honey, and I remembered that for some reason she had gone to Monte Carlo without telling me.

'I don't believe you,' I said once. 'You wouldn't go there.'

'Don't worry, I can't lose much.'

'It's not a question of what you lose,' I said irritably. 'When you were gambling there, did it never occur to you that the glint of gold, all these women, old and young, the croupiers, the whole complex . . . it's all a filthy rotten mockery of the worker's toil, blood and sweat?'

'But what else is there to do here except gamble?' she asked. 'The worker's toil, blood and sweat . . . you keep those fine phrases till some other time. But now, since you started it, permit me to go on. Let me ask you outright: what is there for me to do here? What am I to do?'

'What indeed?' I shrugged. 'One can't answer that question straight out.'

'I want an honest answer, Vladimir,' she said, her expression growing angry. 'I didn't venture to pose the question in order to be fobbed off with commonplaces.

'I repeat,' she went on, banging her palm on the table as if marking time. 'What am I supposed to do here? And not only here in Nice, but anywhere else.'

I said nothing and looked through the window at the sea. My heart was pounding fearfully.

'Vladimir,' she said, breathing quietly and unevenly, and finding it hard to speak. 'If you don't believe in the cause yourself, Vladimir, if you no longer mean to go back to it, then why, oh why, did you drag me out of St. Petersburg? Why make promises, why raise mad hopes? Your convictions have altered, you have changed, and no blame attaches to you because we can't always control what we believe, but——

'Vladimir, why are you so insincere, in heaven's name?' she continued quietly, coming close to me. 'While I was dreaming aloud all these months—raving, exulting in my plans, remodelling my life—why didn't you tell me the truth? Why did you say nothing? Or why did you encourage me with your stories and behave as though you were in complete sympathy with me? Why? What was the point of it?'

'It is hard to confess one's own bankruptcy,' I brought out, turning round but not looking at her. 'All right, I have lost my faith, I'm worn out, I'm feeling pretty low. It is hard to be truthful, terribly hard, so I said nothing. God forbid that anyone else should suffer as I have.'

I felt like bursting into tears and said no more.

'Vladimir,' she said, taking me by both hands. 'You have suffered and experienced so much, you know more than I do. Think seriously and tell me what I am to do. Teach me. If you yourself are unable to take the lead any longer, then at least show me the way. Look here, I am a living, feeling, reasoning creature, aren't I? To get into a false position, play some fatuous role . . . that I can't stand. I am not reproaching you, I am not blaming you, I'm only asking you.'

Tea was served.

'Well?' asked Zinaida, handing me a glass. 'What's your answer?'

'There is more light in the world than shines through yonder window,' I replied. 'And there are other people about besides me, Zinaida.'

'Then show me where they are,' she said briskly. 'That is all I ask of you.'

'And another thing,' I went on. 'One can serve an idea in more than one field. If you have gone wrong and lost your faith in one cause, then find yourself another. The world of ideas is broad and inexhaustible.'

'The world of ideas!' she said, looking me in the face sardonically. 'Oh, we had really better stop. Why go on?'

She blushed.

'The world of ideas!' she repeated, hurling her napkin to one side, and her face took on an indignant, contemptuous expression. 'All your fine ideas, I note, boil down to one single essential, vital step: I am to become your mistress. That is what you're after. To run round with a load of ideals while not being the mistress of the most upright and idealistic of men . . . that means failing to comprehend ideas. The mistress business is the starting point, the rest follows automatically!'

'You're in an irritable mood,' I told her.

'No, I mean it!' she shouted, breathing hard. 'I'm perfectly sincere.'

'Sincere you may be, but you're mistaken and I'm wounded by what you say.'

'Mistaken, am I?' she laughed. 'You are the last person in the world to say that, my dear sir. Now, I shall sound tactless and cruel, perhaps, but never mind. Do you love me? You do love me, don't you?'

I shrugged my shoulders.

'Oh yes, you can shrug your shoulders,' she continued sarcastically. 'When you were ill I heard your delirious ravings, and then we had all these adoring eyes and sighs, these well-meant discussions on intimacy and spiritual kinship. But the main thing is, why have you never been sincere with me? Why have you hidden the truth and told lies? Had you told me at the start just what ideas obliged you to drag me away from St. Petersburg I should have known where I stood. I should have poisoned myself then, as I meant to, and we should have been spared this dismal farce. Oh, what's the point of going on?'

She waved a hand and sat down.

'You speak as if you suspected me of dishonourable intentions,' I said, hurt.

'All right, have it your own way. Why go on? It isn't your intentions I suspect, it's your lack of intentions. If you had had any I should know what they were. All you had was your ideas and your love. And now it's ideas and love with me as your prospective mistress. Such is the way of life and novels.

'You used to blame Orlov,' she said, and struck her palm on the table. 'But you can't help agreeing with him. No wonder he despises all those ideas.'

'He doesn't despise ideas, he fears them,' I shouted. 'He's a coward and a liar.'

'All right, have it your own way. He's a coward, he's a liar, he betrayed me. But what about you? Excuse me being so frank, but what about you? He betrayed me and abandoned me to my fate in St. Petersburg, while you have betrayed and abandoned me here. But he at least didn't tag any ideas to his betrayal, while you——'

'Why say all this, for heaven's sake?' I asked in horror, wringing my hands and going quickly up to her. 'Look here, Zinaida, this is sheer cynicism, it's not right to give way to despair like this.

'Now, you listen to me,' I went on, clutching at a vague thought which had suddenly flashed through my mind and which, it seemed, might still save both of us. 'Listen to me. I have been through a lot in my time—so much that my head spins at the thought of it all—and I have now really grasped, both with my mind and in my tortured heart, that man either hasn't got a destiny, or else it lies exclusively in self-sacrificing love for his neighbour. That's the way we should be going, that's our purpose in life. And that is my faith.'

I wanted to go on talking about mercy and forgiveness, but my voice suddenly rang false and I felt confused.

'I feel such zest for life!' I said sincerely. 'Oh, to live, to live! I want peace and quiet, I want warmth, I want this sea, I want you near me. Oh, if only I could instil this passionate craving for life in you! You spoke of love just now, but I would be content just to have you near me, to hear your voice and see the look on your face——'

She blushed.

'You love life and I hate it,' she said quickly, to stop me going on. 'So our ways lie apart.'

She poured herself some tea, but left it untouched, went into her bedroom and lay down.

'I think we had better end this conversation,' she told me from there. 'Everything is finished so far as I'm concerned, and I don't need anything. So why go on talking?'

'No, everything is not finished.'

'Oh, have it your own way. I know all about that and I'm bored, so give over.'

I stood for a moment, walked up and down the room, and then went into the corridor. Approaching her door late that night and listening, I distinctly heard her crying.

When the servant brought me my clothes next morning he informed me with a smile that the lady in Number Thirteen was in labour. I pulled my clothes on somehow and rushed to Zinaida, terrified out of my wits. In her suite were the doctor, a midwife and an elderly Russian lady from Kharkov called Darya Mikhaylovna. There was a smell of ether drops. Barely had I crossed the threshold when a quiet, piteous groan came from the room where she lay, as if borne on the winds from Russia. I remembered Orlov and his irony, Polya, the Neva, the snowflakes, then the cab without an apron, the portents which I had read in the bleak morning sky and the desperate shout of 'Nina, Nina!'

'Go into her room,' the lady said.

I went into Zinaida's room feeling as if I was the child's father. She was lying with her eyes closed: thin, pale, in a white lace nightcap. There were two expressions on her face, I remember. One was impassive, cold and listless, while the other, childlike and helpless, was imparted by the white cap. She did not hear me come in, or perhaps she did hear, but paid me no attention. I stood, looked at her, waited.

Then her face twisted with pain. She opened her eyes and gazed at the ceiling as though puzzling out what was happening to her. Revulsion was written on her face.

'How sickening,' she whispered.

'Zinaida,' I called weakly.

She looked at me impassively and wanly, and closed her eyes. I stood there for a while, then went out.

That night Darya Mikhaylovna told me that the baby was a little girl, but that the mother's condition was serious. Then there was noise and bustle in the corridor. Darya Mikhaylovna came to see me again.

'This is absolutely awful,' she said, looking frantic and wringing her hands. 'The doctor suspects her of taking poison. Russians do behave so badly here, I must say!'

Zinaida died at noon next day.

XVIII

Two years passed. Conditions changed, I returned to St. Petersburg and could now live there openly. I no longer feared being or seeming sentimental, and I surrendered entirely to the fatherly—or rather idolatrous—feelings aroused in me by Zinaida's daughter Sonya. I fed her myself, I bathed her, I put her to bed, I did not take my eyes off her for nights on end, I shrieked when I thought the nanny was about to drop her. My craving for ordinary commonplace life became more and more powerful and insistent in course of time, but my sweeping fantasies stopped short at Sonya as if in her they had at last found just what I needed. I loved this little girl insanely. In her I saw the continuation of my own life. This was more than just an impression, it was something I felt, something I had faith in, almost: that when I should at last cast off this long, bony, bearded body, I should live on in those little light blue eyes, those fair, silky little hairs, those chubby little pink hands which so lovingly stroked my face and clasped my neck.

I feared for Sonya's future. Orlov was her father, she was a Krasnovsky on her birth certificate and the only person who knew of her existence or took any interest in it—myself, that is—was now at death's door. I must think about her seriously.

On the day after my arrival in St. Petersburg I went to see Orlov. A fat old man with ginger side-whiskers and no moustache—a German, obviously—opened the door. Polya was tidying the drawing-room and failed to recognize me, but Orlov knew me at once.

'Aha, our seditious friend,' he said, looking me over with curiosity and laughing. 'And how are you faring?'

He had not changed at all. There was still that same well-groomed, disagreeable face, that same irony. On the table, as of old, lay a new

book with an ivory paper-knife stuck in it. He had obviously been reading before I arrived. He sat me down, offered me a cigar. With the tact peculiar to the well-bred he concealed the distaste which my face and wasted figure aroused in him, and remarked in passing that I hadn't changed a bit—that he would have known me anywhere in spite of my having grown a beard. We spoke of the weather and Paris.

'Zinaida Krasnovsky died, didn't she?' he asked, hastening to dispose of the tiresome and unavoidable problem which weighed on both of us.

'Yes, she did,' I answered.

'In childbirth?'

'That is so. The doctor suspected another cause of death, but it's more comforting for both of us to take it that she died in childbirth.'

He sighed for reasons of propriety and said nothing. There was a short silence.

'Quite so. Well, things are just the same as ever here, there haven't been any real changes,' he said briskly, noticing me looking round the study. 'My father has retired, as you know, he's taking it easy now, and I'm still where I was. Remember Pekarsky? He hasn't changed either. Gruzin died of diphtheria last year. Well now, Kukushkin's alive, and he mentions you quite often.

'By the way,' Orlov went on, lowering his eyes diffidently, 'when Kukushkin learnt who you were, he told everyone you had attacked him and tried to assassinate him, and that he had barely escaped with his life.'

I said nothing.

'Old servants don't forget their masters. This is very decent of you,' Orlov joked. 'Now, would you care for wine—or coffee? I'll have some made.'

'No, thank you. I came to see you on a most important matter, Orlov.'

'I'm not all that keen on important matters, but I am happy to be of service. What can I do for you?'

'Well, you see,' I began excitedly, 'I have poor Zinaida's daughter with me at the moment. I have been looking after her so far, but I'm not long for this world, as you see. I should like to die knowing that she was provided for.'

Orlov coloured slightly, frowned and flashed a stern glance at me. It wasn't so much the 'important matter' which had riled him as what I had said about my not being long for this world—my reference to death.

'Yes, I must think about that,' he said, shielding his eyes as if from the sun. 'Most grateful to you. A little girl, you say?'

'Yes, a girl. A splendid child.'

'Quite so. Not a pet dog, of course, a human being—I must give it serious thought, I can see that. I am prepared to do my bit and, er, I'm most grateful to you.'

He stood up, paced about biting his nails, and stopped before a picture.

'This requires some thought,' he said in a hollow voice, standing with his back to me. 'I shall be at Pekarsky's today and I'll ask him to call on Krasnovsky. I doubt if Krasnovsky will make any great difficulties, he'll consent to take the girl.'

'I'm sorry, but I can't see what this has to do with Krasnovsky,' I said, also standing up and going over to a picture at the other end of the study.

'Well, she does bear his name I should hope.'

'Yes, he may be legally obliged to take the child, I don't know, but I didn't come here for a legal consultation, Orlov.'

'Yes, yes, you're right,' he agreed briskly. 'I seem to be talking nonsense. But don't excite yourself. We shall settle all this to our mutual satisfaction. If one solution doesn't fit we'll try a second. If that won't do then something else will, and this ticklish problem will be solved one way or another. Pekarsky will fix it all up. Now, will you be good enough to leave me your address, and I shall let you know at once what we decide. Where are you staying?'

Orlov noted my address and sighed.

' "My fate, ye gods, is just too bad:
To be a tiny daughter's dad!" '

he said with a smile. 'But Pekarsky will fix everything, he has his head screwed on. Did you stay long in Paris?'

'Two months.'

We were silent. Orlov was obviously afraid of my mentioning the little girl again.

'You have probably forgotten your letter,' he said, trying to divert my attention elsewhere. 'But I have kept it. I understand your mood of the time and, frankly, I respect that letter.

'The damnable cold blood, the Oriental, the neighing snigger . . . that is charming and much to the point,' he went on with an ironical smile. 'And the basic idea may be close to the truth, though one might

go on disputing for ever. That is,'—he fumbled for words—'not dispute the idea itself, but your attitude to the question: your temperament, so to speak. Yes, my life is abnormal, corrupt and useless, and what prevents me from starting a new one is cowardice, there you are quite right. But your taking it so much to heart, and getting so excited and frantic about it . . . now, that isn't rational, there you are quite wrong.'

'A live man can't help being excited and frantic when he sees himself and other people near him heading for disaster.'

'No one disputes that. I am not in the least preaching callousness, all I'm asking for is an objective attitude. The more objective one is the less the risk of error. One must look at the roots, one must seek the ultimate cause of every phenomenon. We have weakened, we've let ourselves go, we've fallen by the wayside in fact, and our generation consists entirely of whimpering neurotics. All we do is talk about fatigue and exhaustion, but that's not our fault, yours and mine. We are too insignificant for a whole generation's fate to hang on our idiosyncrasies. There must be substantial general causes behind all this, causes with a solid biological basis. Snivelling neurotics and backsliders we are, but perhaps that's necessary and useful for future generations. Not one hair falls from a man's head without the will of the Heavenly Father. Nothing in nature or human society happens in isolation, in other words. Everything is based on something, it's all determined. Now, if so, why should we worry so particularly? Why write frantic letters?'

'Yes, yes, all right,' I said after a little thought. 'I believe that future generations will find things easier and see their way more clearly. They will have our experience to help them. But we do want to be independent of future generations, don't we, we don't want to live just for them? We only have one life, and we should like to live it confidently, rationally and elegantly. We should like to play a prominent, independent, honourable role, we should like to make history so that these same future generations won't have the right to call each one of us a nonentity or worse. I believe that what is going on around us is functional and inevitable. But why should that inevitability involve me? Why should my ego come to grief?'

'Well, it can't be helped,' sighed Orlov, standing up as if to let me see that our conversation was over.

I picked up my hat.

'We have only sat here half an hour, and just think how many problems we've resolved,' said Orlov, seeing me into the hall. 'All right, I shall think about that matter. I'll see Pekarsky today, my word upon it.'

He stood waiting for me to put my coat on, obviously glad that I was leaving. I asked whether he would mind giving me back my letter.

'Very well.'

He went into his study and came back with the letter a minute later. I thanked him and left.

On the following day I received a note from him congratulating me on a satisfactory solution to the problem. He wrote that Pekarsky knew a lady who kept a boarding home: a kind of kindergarten where she took quite small children. The woman was completely reliable, but before settling things with her it might be as well to talk to Krasnovsky, as the formalities required. He advised me to see Pekarsky at once, taking the birth certificate if there was such a thing,

'With assurances of my sincere respect and devotion,
'Your humble servant——'

While I read the letter Sonya sat on the table looking at me most attentively, without blinking, as if she knew that her fate was being decided.

DOCTOR STARTSEV

I

To visitors' complaints that the county town of S—— was boring and humdrum local people would answer defensively that life there was, on the contrary, very good indeed. The town had its library, its theatre, its club. There was the occasional ball. And, in conclusion, it contained intelligent, interesting and charming families with whom one might make friends. Among these families the Turkins were pointed out as the most cultivated and accomplished.

These Turkins lived in their own house on the main street near the Governor's. Mr. Turkin—a stout, handsome, dark man with dundreary whiskers—used to stage amateur dramatic performances for charity, himself playing elderly generals and coughing most amusingly while doing so. He knew endless funny stories, riddles, proverbs. He rather liked his fun—he was a bit of a wag—and you could never tell from his face whether he was joking or not. His wife Vera—a slim, pretty woman in a *pince-nez*—wrote short stories and novels which she liked reading to her guests. Their young daughter Catherine played the piano. Each Turkin had, in short, some accomplishment. They liked entertaining, and gladly displayed their talents to their guests in a jolly, hearty sort of a way. Their large, stone-built house was roomy and cool in hot weather, with half its windows opening on to a shady old garden where nightingales sang in springtime. When they were entertaining there would be a clatter of knives in the kitchen and a smell of fried onions in the yard—the sign that an ample, appetizing supper was on the way.

No sooner had Dr. Dmitry Startsev been appointed to a local medical post and moved in at Dyalizh, six miles away, than he too was told that he simply must meet the Turkins, seeing that he was an intellectual. One winter's day, then, he was introduced to Mr. Turkin in the street. They chatted about the weather, the theatre, the cholera. He was invited to call. On a public holiday in spring—Ascension Day, to be precise—Startsev set out for town after surgery in search of recreation, meaning to do some shopping while he was about it. He made the journey unhurriedly on foot—he had not yet set up his

carriage—humming 'Ere from the Cup of Life I yet had Drunk the Tears'.

He had dinner in town, he strolled in the park. Then Mr. Turkin's invitation suddenly crossed his mind, and he decided to call and see what the family was like.

Mr. Turkin welcomed him in the porch. 'Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. Delighted indeed to see so charming a guest. Come along, I'll introduce you to the wife.

'I was telling him, Vera dear—' he went on, presenting the doctor to his wife. 'He ain't got no statutory right, I was telling him, to coop himself up in that hospital. He should devote his leisure to society, shouldn't he, love?'

'Do sit here,' said Mrs. Turkin, placing the guest next to her. 'You can be my new boy-friend. My husband is jealous—oh, he's quite the Othello!—but we'll try to behave so he won't notice anything.'

'Now, now, ducky!' Mr. Turkin muttered tenderly, kissing her forehead. 'Oh, you are naughty!'

'You're in luck,' he added, turning to the doctor again. 'Mrs. T. has written a whacking great Novel, and today she's going to read it to us.'

Mrs. Turkin turned to her husband. '*Dites que l'on nous donne du thé*, dear.'

Startsev was introduced to Catherine: a girl of eighteen, very much like her mother. Also slim and pretty, she still had a rather childlike expression. Her waist was soft and slender. So beautiful, healthy and well-developed were her youthful breasts that she seemed like the very breath of springtime.

They had tea with jam and honey, sweets and delicious cakes which melted in the mouth. As evening drew on other guests gradually arrived. Mr. Turkin fixed each of them with his grin.

'Pleased to meet you, I'm sure.'

Then they all sat in the drawing-room, looking very earnest, while Mrs. Turkin read her Novel, which began: 'The frost had set in.' The windows were wide open, a clatter of knives was heard from the kitchen, there was a smell of fried onions. It was relaxing to sit in the deep, soft arm-chairs. The lights had such a friendly twinkle in the twilight of the drawing-room that, on this late spring evening—with voices and laughter borne from the street, with the scent of lilac wafting from outside—it was hard to grasp this stuff about the frost setting in and the dying sun illuminating with its chill rays a traveller on his lonely journey over some snow-covered plain. Mrs. Turkin

was reading about a beautiful young countess who ran schools, hospitals and libraries in her village, and who fell in love with a wandering artist. These were not things which happen in real life, but they made you feel nice and cosy, they evoked peaceful, serene thoughts—and so no one wanted to get up.

'Not so dusty,' said Mr. Turkin softly.

One of the audience had been carried away by a long, long train of thought.

'No indeed,' he said in a voice barely audible.

An hour passed, then another. In the municipal park near by a band was playing, a choir sang. No one spoke for five minutes or so after Mrs. Turkin had closed her manuscript. They were listening to the choir singing 'Rushlight': a song which conveyed the real-life atmosphere which the Novel lacked.

'Do you publish your stories in the magazines?' Startsev asked Mrs. Turkin.

'No, never,' she answered. 'I keep my writings in a cupboard. Why publish!' she explained. 'It's not as though we were badly off.'

For some reason everyone sighed.

'Now, Pussy, you play us something,' Mr. Turkin told his daughter.

They put the lid of the grand piano up, they opened some music which was lying ready. Catherine sat down. She struck the keys with both hands. Then she immediately struck them again as hard as she could, and then again and again. Her shoulders and bosom quivered, and she kept hitting the same place as if she did not mean to stop until she had driven those keys right inside the instrument. The drawing-room resounded with the din as everything—floor, ceiling, furniture—reverberated.

Catherine was playing a difficult passage—its interest lay in its very difficulty. It was long and tedious. Startsev, as he listened, pictured a fall of rocks down a high mountain: on, on they tumbled while he very much wished they wouldn't. Yet Catherine—pink from her exertions, strong and vigorous, with a lock of hair falling over her forehead—greatly attracted him.

What a pleasant new sensation it was, after a winter in Dyalizh among patients and peasants: to sit in a drawing-room watching this young, exquisite and probably innocent creature, and hearing this noisy, tiresome—yet cultured—racket.

'Well, Pussy, you played better than ever today,' said Mr. Turkin

with tears in his eyes after his daughter had finished and stood up. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'

They all crowded round with their congratulations and admiration, declaring that they hadn't heard such a performance for ages. She listened in silence with a faint smile, her whole figure radiating triumph.

'Marvellous! Splendid!'

Infected by the general enthusiasm, Startsev too said how marvellous it had been. 'Where did you study?' he asked Catherine. 'At the Conservatory?'

'No, I'm still at the pre-Conservatory stage. Meanwhile I've been taking lessons here, with Madame Zavlovsky.'

'Did you go to the local high school?'

'No indeed, we engaged private tutors,' Mrs. Turkin answered for her. 'There might be bad influences in a high school or a boarding school, you know. A growing girl should be under no influence but that of her mother.'

'All the same, I *am* going to the Conservatory,' Catherine said.

'No. Pussy loves Mummy, Pussy won't upset Mummy and Daddy.'

'I *will* go there, I *will*,' joked Catherine, playing up like a naughty child and stamping her foot.

At supper it was Mr. Turkin's turn to display his talents. Laughing with his eyes alone, he told funny stories, he joked, he propounded absurd riddles, he answered them himself—talking all the time in an extraordinary lingo evolved by long practice in the exercise of wit . . . by now it was obviously second nature to him.

'Whacking great,' 'Not so dusty,' 'Thanking you most unkindly——'

Nor was this all. When the guests, contented and replete, were jammed in the hall looking for coats and sticks, the footman Paul—nicknamed Peacock, a boy of about fourteen with cropped hair and full cheeks—bustled around them.

'Come on then, Peacock, perform!' Mr. Turkin said.

Peacock struck an attitude, threw up an arm.

'Unhappy woman, die!' he uttered in a tragic voice. And everyone roared with laughter.

'Great fun,' thought Startsev, going out in the street.

He called at a restaurant and had a beer before setting off home for Dyalizh. During the walk he hummed 'Your Voice to me both Languorous and Tender.'

Going to bed, he did not feel at all tired after his six-mile walk—far from it, he felt he could have walked another fifteen with pleasure.

'Not so dusty,' he remembered as he was falling asleep. And laughed.

II

Startsev kept meaning to visit the Turkins again, but just couldn't find a free hour, being so very busy at his hospital. Then, after more than a year of such solitary toil, a letter in a light blue envelope arrived from town.

Mrs. Turkin had had migraine for years, but recently—what with Pussy now scaring her daily with talk of going to the Conservatory—these attacks had increased. The town doctors had all attended the Turkins, now it was the country doctor's turn. Mrs. Turkin wrote him a touching letter, asking him to come and relieve her sufferings. Startsev went, and then became a frequent—a *very* frequent—visitor at the Turkins'.

He really did help Mrs. Turkin a bit, and she was now telling all her guests what an extraordinary, what an admirable doctor he was. But it was no migraine that brought him to the Turkins' now!

On one of his free days, after Catherine had completed her lengthy, exhausting piano exercises, they had sat for a long time over tea in the dining-room while Mr. Turkin told a funny story. Suddenly the door-bell rang. He had to go into the hall to greet a visitor, and Startsev took advantage of the brief confusion.

'For God's sake, I beg you, don't torment me,' he whispered, much agitated, to Catherine. 'Let's go in the garden.'

She shrugged her shoulders as if puzzled to know what he wanted of her, but she did get up and go.

'You play the piano for three or four hours on end,' he said as he followed her. 'Then you sit with your mother, and one can never have a word with you. Give me a quarter of an hour, I beg you.'

Autumn was approaching. The old garden was quiet and sad, dark leaves lay on the paths and the evenings were drawing in.

'I haven't seen you for a week,' Startsev went on. 'If only you knew how I suffer. Come and sit down, and hear what I have to say.'

They had their favourite place in the garden: a bench under a broad old maple, which was where they now sat.

'What do you require?' asked Catherine in a dry, matter-of-fact voice.

'I haven't seen you for a week, or heard your voice all that time. I long, I yearn to hear you speak. Say something.'

He was fascinated by her freshness, by the innocent expression of her eyes and cheeks. Even in the cut of her dress he saw something unusually lovely, touching in its simplicity and naïve gracefulness. And yet, despite this innocence, he found her very intelligent, very mature for her age. He could talk to her about literature, art or anything else. He could complain about life or people to her, though she was liable to laugh suddenly in the wrong place during a serious conversation. Or she would run off into the house. Like almost all the local girls, she was a great reader. (Few people in the town read much. 'If it wasn't for the girls and the young Jews we might just as well shut up shop,' they used to say in the town library.) Her reading pleased Startsev no end. He always made a great fuss of asking what she had read in the last few days, and he would listen, fascinated, as she told him.

'What,' he asked her, 'have you read since we met last week? Please tell me.'

'Pisemsky.'

'Which book?'

'*A Thousand Souls*,' answered Pussy. 'What a funny name Pisemsky had: Alexis Feofilaktovich.'

'Hey, where are you off to?' Startsev was aghast when she suddenly stood up and made for the house. 'I must talk to you, I've some explaining to do. Stay with me just five minutes, I implore you.'

She stopped as if meaning to say something, then awkwardly thrust a note into his hand and ran to the house, where she sat down at the piano again.

'Be in the cemetery near Demetti's tomb at eleven o'clock tonight,' Startsev read.

'This is really rather silly,' he thought, collecting his wits. 'Why the cemetery? What's the point?'

It was one of Pussy's little games, obviously. But really, who would seriously think of an assignation in a cemetery far outside town at night-time, when it could so easily be arranged in the street or municipal park? And was it not beneath him—a country doctor, an intelligent, respectable man—to be sighing, receiving *billets-doux*, hanging round cemeteries and doing things so silly that even schoolboys laugh at them these days? Where would this affair end? What would his

colleagues say when they found out? Such were Startsev's thoughts as he wandered among the tables at his club. But at half-past ten he suddenly got up and drove off to the cemetery.

By now he had his own pair of horses and a coachman, Panteleymon, complete with velvet waistcoat. The moon was shining. It was quiet and warm, but with a touch of autumn in the air. Dogs were howling near a suburban slaughterhouse. Leaving his carriage in a lane on the edge of town, Startsev walked on to the cemetery alone.

'We all have our quirks, Pussy included,' thought he. 'Perhaps—who knows—perhaps she wasn't joking. Perhaps she will come.' Yielding to this feeble, insubstantial hope, he felt intoxicated by it.

He walked through fields for a quarter of a mile. The cemetery showed up: a dark strip in the distance resembling a wood or large garden. The white stone wall came into view and the gate. The words on the gate were legible in the moonlight: 'The hour cometh when——' Startsev went through the side-gate and the first things to catch his eye were white crosses and tombstones on both sides of a broad avenue, and black shadows cast by them and by the poplars. There was an extensive panorama in black and white, with sleepy trees drooping their branches over the whiteness below. It seemed lighter here than in the fields. Maple leaves like paws stood out sharply against the yellow sand of paths and against gravestones, and the inscriptions on the monuments were clearly visible. Startsev was struck at once by what he was now seeing for the first time in his life and would probably never see again: a world unlike any other . . . where moonlight was as lovely and soft as if this were its cradle, where there was no living thing, but where each dark poplar and tomb seemed to hold the secret promise of a life tranquil, splendid, everlasting. Mingled with the autumnal smell of leaves, the gravestones and faded flowers breathed forgiveness, melancholy and peace.

It was silent all around. The stars looked down from the sky in utter quiescence, while Startsev's footsteps sounded harsh and out of place. Only when the church clock began to strike, and he fancied himself dead and buried here for ever, did he feel as if someone was watching him. This was not peace and quiet, it seemed for a moment, but the dull misery of nothingness: a kind of choked despair.

Demetti's tomb was in the form of a shrine with an angel on top. An Italian opera company had once passed through town, one of the singers had died, they had buried her here, and they had put up this

monument. She was no longer remembered in town, but the lamp over the entrance reflected the moon and seemed alight.

There was no one about—as if anyone would come here at midnight! Yet Startsev waited, waited passionately, as if the moonlight were inflaming his desires. He imagined kisses and embraces. He sat near the tomb for about half an hour, then strolled up and down the side-paths with his hat in his hand, waiting. He reflected that in these graves lay buried many women and girls who had been beautiful and entrancing, who had loved and burned with passion in the night, yielding to caresses. Really, what a rotten joke Nature does play on man! And how painful to be conscious of it! So Startsev thought, while wishing to shout aloud that he wanted love, that he expected it—at whatever cost. The white shapes before his eyes were no longer slabs of marble, but beautiful bodies. He saw shapely forms modestly hiding in the shadows of the trees, and he sensed their warmth until desire grew hard to bear.

Then, like the drop of a curtain, the moon vanished behind clouds and everything was suddenly dark. Startsev had trouble finding the gate, for the darkness was now truly autumnal. Then he wandered about for an hour and a half looking for the lane where he had left his horses.

'I'm dead on my feet,' he told Panteleymon.

'Dear me, one really should watch one's weight,' he reflected as he settled down luxuriously in his carriage.

III

Next evening he set off for the Turkins' to propose to Catherine. But it turned out inconveniently because she was in her room with her hairdresser in attendance, and was going to a dance at the club.

He found himself let in for another of those long tea-drinking sessions in the dining-room. Seeing his guest bored and preoccupied, Mr. Turkin took some jottings from his waistcoat pocket and read out a funny letter from a German estate-manager about how all the 'racks' on the property had 'gone to lock and ruin', and how the old place had been so knocked about that it had become 'thoroughly bashful'.

'They're bound to put up a decent dowry', thought Startsev, listening absent-mindedly.

After his sleepless night he felt stupefied, felt as if he had been

drugged with some sweet sleeping potion. His sensations were confused, but warm and happy. And yet——

'Stop before it is too late!' a stolid, cold part of his brain argued. 'Is she the wife for you? She's spoilt and capricious, she sleeps till two in the afternoon, while you're a sexton's son, a country doctor——'

'Never mind, I don't care,' he answered himself.

'What's more,' went on the voice, 'if you do get married, her family will stop you working in the country and make you move to town.'

'What of it? Then town it shall be,' he thought. 'They'll give a dowry, we'll set up house——'

Catherine came in at last, wearing a *décolleté* evening dress. She looked so pretty and fresh that Startsev goggled at her, and was so transported that he could not get a word out, but just stared at her and laughed.

She began to say good-bye. Having no reason to stay on, he stood up and remarked that it was time to go home as some patients were expecting him.

'You go, then,' said Mr. Turkin. 'It can't be helped. And you might give Puss a lift to the club.'

It was very dark outside and drizzling, with only Panteleymon's raucous cough to guide them to the carriage. They put the hood up.

'Why did the cowslip?' Mr. Turkin said, helping his daughter into the carriage. 'Because she saw the bullrush, of course. Off with you! Cheerio, chin chin!'

And off they went.

'I went to the cemetery yesterday,' Startsev began. 'How mean and heartless of you to——'

'You actually *went*?'

'Yes. *And* waited till nearly two o'clock. I suffered——'

'Serves you right if you can't take a joke.'

Delighted to have played such a mean trick on a man who loved her—delighted, too, to be the object of such a passion—Catherine laughed, then suddenly screamed with fright because the horses were turning sharply in through the club gates at that moment, and the carriage lurched to one side. Startsev put his arm round her waist while she clung to him in terror. He could not resist kissing her passionately on lips and chin, gripping her more tightly.

'That will do,' she said curtly.

A second later she was out of the carriage. A policeman stood near the lighted entrance of the club.

'Don't hang around here, you oaf!' he yelled at Panteleymon in a nasty voice. 'Move on!'

Startsev drove home, but was soon back again. Wearing borrowed tails and a stiff white cravat, which somehow kept slipping up and trying to ride off his collar, he sat in the club lounge at midnight ardently haranguing Catherine.

'Those who've never been in love . . . how little they know! I don't think anyone has ever described love properly. Does it, indeed, lend itself to description: this tender, joyous, tormented feeling? No one who has ever experienced it would try to put it into words. But what's the use of preambles and explanations? Or of superfluous eloquence? I love you infinitely. I ask you, I implore you——'

Startsev got it out at last. 'Be my wife.'

'Dmitry Startsev—' said Catherine with a very earnest expression, after some thought. 'I am most grateful to you for the honour, Dmitry, and I respect you, but——'

She stood up and continued, standing. 'I'm sorry, though, I can't be your wife. Let us talk seriously. As you know, Dmitry, I love Art more than anything in the world—I'm mad about music, I adore it, I have dedicated my whole life to it. I want to be a concert pianist. I want fame, success, freedom—whereas you want me to go on living in this town, pursuing an empty, futile existence which I can't stand. To be a wife . . . no, no, I'm sorry. One must aim at some lofty, brilliant goal, and family life would tie me down for ever. Dmitry Startsev—.' She gave a slight smile because, while saying his name, she remembered 'Alexis Feofilaktovich'. 'You're a kind, honourable, intelligent man, Dmitry, you're the nicest one of all——'

Tears came into her eyes. 'I feel for you with all my heart, but, er, you must understand——'

To avoid bursting into tears she turned away and left the lounge.

Startsev's heart ceased to throb. Going out of the club into the street, he first tore off the stiff cravat and heaved a deep sigh. He felt a little ashamed and his pride was hurt—for he had not expected a refusal. Nor could he believe that his dreams, his yearnings, his hopes had led to so foolish a conclusion, like something in a little play acted by amateurs. And he was sorry for his own feelings, for that love of his—so sorry that he felt ready to break into sobs, or to land a really good clout on Panteleymon's broad back with his umbrella.

For a couple of days he let things slide—couldn't eat or sleep. But when rumour reached him that Catherine had gone to Moscow to enrol at the Conservatory, he calmed down and resumed his former routine.

Recalling, later, how he had wandered round the cemetery and driven all over town in search of a tail-coat, he would stretch himself lazily, saying that it had all been 'oh, such a lot of fuss'.

IV

Four years passed, and Startsev now had a large practice in town. He hastily took surgery at his home in Dyalizh each morning, after which he left to visit his town patients. From a two-horse outfit he had graduated to a troika with bells. He would return home late at night. He had grown broad and stout, and he disliked walking because he was always short of breath. Panteleymon had filled out too, and the broader he grew the more dolefully he would sigh and lament his bitter fate. 'The driving's got me down!'

Startsev was received in various houses and met many people, but was intimate with none. The conversations, the attitudes—the appearance, even—of the townsfolk irritated him. Experience had gradually taught him that your average provincial is a peaceable, easy-going and even quite intelligent human being when you play cards or have a meal with him, but that you only have to talk about something which can't be eaten—politics, say, or learning—for him to be put right off his stroke . . . or else to launch on generalizations so trite and malicious that there's nothing for it but to write him off and leave. Take the typical local liberal, even—just suppose Startsev should try to tell him that humanity was progressing, thank God, and would manage without passports and capital punishment in time. 'You mean it will be possible to murder people in the street?' the man would ask with a mistrustful sidelong glance. Whenever Startsev spoke in company, at tea or supper, of the need to work—of the impossibility of living without work—everyone took it as a reproach, becoming angry and tiresomely argumentative. What's more, your average provincial never did a single blessed thing. He had no interests—indeed, you just couldn't think what to talk to him about. So Startsev avoided conversation, and just ate or played bridge. When he chanced on some family celebration and was asked in for a bite, he would sit and eat silently, staring at his plate. Their talk was all dull, prejudiced and stupid, which irritated and upset him. But he would still say nothing.

This austere silence and habit of staring at his plate earned him a nickname—'the pompous Pole'—in town, though he was not of Polish origin.

He avoided such entertainments as concerts and the theatre, but enjoyed three hours of bridge every evening. He had another recreation too, which he had slipped into by stages. This was to take from his pockets at night the bank-notes earned on his medical rounds. There were sometimes seventy roubles' worth stuffed in his pockets—yellow and green notes smelling of scent, vinegar, incense and fish oil. When they added up to a few hundreds he would take them to the Mutual Credit Bank and put them in his current account.

In the four years since Catherine's departure he had visited the Turkins only twice—at the behest of Mrs. Turkin, who was still under treatment for migraine. Catherine came and stayed with her parents each summer, but he had not seen her once. It somehow never happened.

But now four years had passed, and on a quiet, warm morning a letter was delivered at the hospital. Mrs. Turkin informed Dr. Startsev that she greatly missed his company, and asked him to visit her without fail to relieve her sufferings. And by the way today was her birthday.

Below was a postscript:

'I join in Mummy's request.
'C.'

After some thought Startsev drove off to the Turkins' that evening.

'Ah! Pleased to meet you, I'm sure,' Mr. Turkin greeted him, smiling only with his eyes. 'And a very *bon jour* to you.'

White-haired, looking much older, Mrs. Turkin shook hands with Startsev and sighed affectedly.

'You refuse to be my boy-friend, Doctor,' she said. 'And you never come and see us. I'm too old for you, but there's someone younger here. Perhaps she'll have better luck.'

And what of Pussy? She was slimmer, paler, more handsome, more graceful. Now she was Pussy no longer, but Miss Catherine Turkin—her former freshness and childlike innocent look were gone. In her glance and manner, too, there was a new quality of hesitation or guilt, as if she no longer felt at home here in the family house.

'It seems ages since we met,' she said, giving Startsev her hand, and one could tell that her heart was beating apprehensively. 'How you *have* filled out,' she went on, staring inquisitively at his face. 'You're

sunburnt, you're more mature, but you haven't changed much on the whole.'

She still attracted him, very much so, but now there was something missing . . . or added. Just what it was he couldn't have said, but something prevented him from feeling as before. He disliked her pallor, her new expression, her faint smile and voice. Before long he was disliking her dress and the arm-chair in which she sat—disliking, too, something about the past when he had come near to marrying her. He remembered his love, remembered the dreams and hopes which had disturbed him four years ago. And felt uncomfortable.

They had tea and cake. Then Mrs. Turkin read them a Novel, all about things which never happen in real life—while Startsev listened, looked at her handsome, white head, and waited for her to finish.

'A mediocrity is not someone who can't write novels,' he reflected. 'It's someone who writes them and can't keep quiet about it.'

'Not so dusty,' said Mr. Turkin.

Then Catherine played long and noisily on the piano, and when she stopped there were lengthy expressions of delighted appreciation.

'Lucky I didn't marry her,' thought Startsev.

She looked at him, evidently expecting him to suggest going into the garden, but he did not speak.

'Well, let's talk,' she said, going up to him. 'How are you? What's your news, eh?

'I've been thinking about you a lot lately,' she went on nervously. 'I wanted to write to you, wanted to go to Dyalizh myself and see you. I did decide to go, actually, then changed my mind—heaven knows how you feel about me now. I was so excited today, waiting for you to come. For God's sake let's go into the garden.'

They went into the garden and sat down on the bench under the old maple, as they had four years earlier. It was dark.

'How are you then?' Catherine said.

'Not so bad,' Startsev answered. 'I manage.'

That was all he could think of saying. There was a pause.

'I'm so excited,' Catherine said, covering her face with her hands. 'But don't let that worry you. I'm happy to be home, so glad to see everyone. I just can't get used to it. What a lot of memories! I thought we should go on talking and talking till morning.'

Now he could see her face, her shining eyes near by. Out here in the darkness she looked younger than indoors, and even her old childlike expression seemed to have returned. She was, indeed, gazing at him

with naïve curiosity, as if seeking a closer view and understanding of a man who had once loved her so ardently, so tenderly, so unhappily. Her eyes thanked him for that love. He remembered what had happened, all the little details—how he had strolled round the cemetery and then gone home exhausted in the small hours. Suddenly he felt sadness and regret for the past, and a spark seemed to come alight inside him.

'Remember how I took you to the club dance?' he said. 'It was dark and rainy——'

The spark inside him was flaring up, and now he felt the urge to speak, to complain about life.

'Ah me,' he sighed. 'Here are you asking about my life. But how *do* we live here? The answer is, we don't. We grow old and stout, we run to seed. One day follows another, and life passes drearily without impressions or ideas. There's earning your living by day, there's the club of an evening in the company of card-players, alcoholics and loud-mouthed fellows I can't stand. What's good about that?'

'But you have your work, an honourable ambition. You used to like talking about your hospital so much. I was an odd girl in those days, thinking myself a great pianist. Young ladies all play the piano nowadays, and I was just one more of them—nothing remarkable about me. I'm about as much of a pianist as Mother is a writer. I didn't understand you at the time, of course. But in Moscow, later, I often thought of you—in fact I thought of nothing *but* you. What happiness to be a country doctor, to help the suffering, to serve ordinary people.

'What happiness!' Catherine repeated eagerly. 'When I thought of you in Moscow you seemed so admirable, so superior.'

Startsev remembered the bank-notes which he so much enjoyed taking out of his pockets in the evenings, and the spark died inside him.

He got up to go into the house, and she took him by the arm.

'You're the best person I've ever known,' she went on. 'We *shall* meet and talk, shan't we? Do promise. I'm no pianist. I've no illusions left, and I won't play music or talk about it when you're there.'

When they were in the house and Startsev saw her face in the lamplight and her sad, grateful, inquiring eyes fixed on him, he felt uneasy.

'Lucky I never married her,' he thought again.

He began to take his leave.

'You ain't got no statutory right to leave without supper,' Mr. Turkin said as he saw him off. 'Highly perpendicular of you in fact. Well, go on—perform!' he added, addressing Peacock in the hall.

Peacock—now no longer a boy, but a young man with a moustache—struck an attitude, threw up an arm.

'Unhappy woman, die!' he declaimed tragically.

All this irritated Startsev. Climbing into his carriage, he looked at the dark house and garden once so dear and precious to him. It all came back to him at once: Mrs. Turkin's 'novels', Pussy's noisy piano-playing, Mr. Turkin's wit, Peacock's tragic posturings. What, he asked himself, could be said of a town in which the most brilliant people were so dim?

Three days later Peacock brought a letter from Catherine.

'Why don't you come and see us?' she wrote. 'I'm afraid your feelings for us have changed. I'm afraid—the very idea terrifies me. Do set my mind at rest. Do come and tell me that all is well.

'I simply must talk to you.

'Your
'C. T.'

He read the letter.

'Tell them I can't manage it today, my good fellow, I'm very busy,' he told Peacock after some thought. 'Tell them I'll come over—oh, in a couple of days.'

But three days passed, and then a week—and still he did not go. Once, when driving past the Turkins' house, he remembered that he should at least pay a brief call. But then he thought again. And did not.

Never again did he visit the Turkins.

V

A few more years have passed. Startsev has put on yet more weight—grown really fat. He breathes heavily and goes about with his head thrown back. Plump, red-faced, he drives in his troika with the bells, while Panteleymon—also plump, also red-faced, with a thick, fleshy neck—sits on the box holding his arms straight ahead as if they were wooden.

'Keep to the r-i-ight!' he bellows at oncoming traffic.

It is an impressive scene, suggesting that the passenger is not a man, but a pagan god.

He has a vast practice in the town and scarcely time to draw breath. Already he owns an estate and two town houses, and he is looking for a third—a better bargain. When, in the Mutual Credit Bank, he hears of a house for sale, he marches straight in without ceremony, goes

through all the rooms—paying no attention to the half-dressed women and children who stare at him in fascinated horror—prods all the doors with his stick.

'This the study?' he asks. 'That a bedroom? What have we here?'

He breathes heavily all the time, wiping sweat from his brow.

He has a lot to do, but still does not give up his council post, being too greedy and wanting a finger in every pie. At Dyalizh and in town he is now known simply as 'the Doc'.

'Where's the Doc off to?' people ask. Or 'Shouldn't we call in the Doc?'

His voice has changed, probably because his throat is so congested with fat, and has become thin and harsh. His character has changed too —he has grown ill-humoured and irritable. When taking surgery he usually loses his temper and bangs his stick impatiently on the floor.

'Pray confine yourself to answering my questions!' he shouts unpleasantly. 'Less talk!'

He lives alone. It is a dreary life, he has no interests.

During his entire time at Dyalizh his love for Pussy has been his only joy, and will probably be his last. He plays bridge in the club of an evening, then dines alone at a large table. He is waited on by Ivan, the oldest and most venerable of the club servants, is served with Château-Lafite No. 17, and everyone—the club officials, the cook, the waiter—knows his likes and dislikes, they all humour him in every way. Otherwise he's liable to fly into a rage and bang his stick on the floor.

While dining he occasionally turns round and breaks into a conversation.

'What are you on about? Eh? Who?'

When, occasionally, talk at a near-by table turns to the Turkins, he asks what Turkins. 'You mean those people whose daughter plays the piannyforty?'

There is no more to be said about him.

What of the Turkins? Mr. Turkin looks no older—hasn't changed a bit, but still keeps joking and telling his funny stories. Mrs. Turkin still enjoys reading those Novels to guests in a jolly, hearty sort of a way. And Pussy plays the piano for four hours a day. She looks much older, she is often unwell, and she goes to the Crimea with her mother every autumn. Mr. Turkin sees them off at the station, and when the train starts he wipes away his tears.

'Cheerio, chin chin!' he shouts.

And waves a handkerchief.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

THE BUTTERFLY

1 *was a rather junior doctor*: literally, 'was a doctor and held the grade of titular councillor'—class nine in the Table of Ranks introduced by Peter the Great in 1722.

9 *Kineshma*: town on the Volga about 200 miles north-east of Moscow.

11 *Masini*: Angelo Masini (1844–1926), Italian operatic tenor.

14 *Do you know any place in all Russia . . .*: the couplet is a paraphrase of a quatrain from the poem *Razmyshleniya u paradnogo podyezda* (*Reflections by a Main Entrance*; 1858) by N. A. Nekrasov (1821–78).
Polenov: V. D. Polenov (1844–1927), Russian painter.

17 *Barnay*: Ludwig Barnay (1842–1924), German actor.

18 *Gogol's Osip*: the comic servant of Khlestakov, hero of the farce *The Inspector General* (1836) by N. V. Gogol (1809–52).
old fellow called Osip, who 'grew hoarse from a surfeit of gossip': the original tongue-twister reads *Osip okhrip, a Arkhip osip,* literally: 'Osip grew hoarse and Arkhip grew husky.'

WARD NUMBER SIX

24 *official of the twelfth grade*: literally 'a provincial secretary' (*gubernsky sekretar*), twelfth grade in the Table of Ranks.

28 *gendarmes*: founded under Nicholas I in 1826, the Corps of Gendarmes constituted the uniformed branch of the Imperial political police force from then until 1917.

30 *the Order of St. Stanislaus*: one of the numerous orders, or decorations for distinction in peace and war, instituted by Peter the Great and added to as the years went by.

31 *the paralytic*: this refers to the 'tall, lean working-class fellow' mentioned first among the five inmates of the Ward (see p. 24, above).

34 *Pushkin*: Russia's greatest poet Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) was fatally wounded in the stomach in the course of his duel with a Frenchman, Georges d'Anthès, and suffered for two days before dying.

Heine: Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), the German poet, suffered from spinal disease during the last eight years of his life.

35 *a senator*: founded in 1711 by Peter the Great, the Senate functioned as a supreme court of appeal from 1864 onwards and was also empowered to interpret the laws. The Emperor appointed Senators from among holders of the first three grades in the Table of Ranks.

white tie: a white tie was customary wear for Russian doctors in this period.

Svyatogorsk Monastery: founded in 1566 and situated in Pskov Province, the Monastery was the site of Pushkin's tomb.

35–6 *The Physician*: *Vrach*; a weekly medical newspaper published in St. Petersburg from 1880 onwards.

38 *the ideas of the Sixties*: during the 1860s, the age of Russian Nihilism, an obsession with utilitarianism, materialism and scientific progress was very much in vogue.

40 *Pirogov*: N. I. Pirogov (1810–81), the Russian surgeon and educationist.

Pasteur: Louis Pasteur (1822–95), the French chemist and bacteriologist.

Koch: Robert Koch (1843–1910), the German bacteriologist.

44 *Dostoyevsky*: F. M. Dostoyevsky, the Russian novelist.

Voltaire: Jean François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778), the French dramatist and historian, and author of the remark '*si Die n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer*,' See Voltaire, *Epîtres*, 96, *A l'Auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs*.

46 *as an exile—or as a convict*: reference is to the two headings under which a condemned person might be sent to Siberia, the milder status being that of 'exile' (*poselenets*), the more severe that of 'convict' (*katorzhnik*).

47 *Marcus Aurelius*: Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121–80), the Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher, author of the celebrated *Meditations*.

49 *Garden of Gethsemane*: reference is to the New Testament, Matthew 26: 36–42; Mark 14: 32–6.

55 *Pripet Marshes*: the Pripet is a tributary of the River Dnieper and flows through marshlands in southern Belorussia.

56 *the Iverian Madonna*: situated near the Red Square in Moscow, the Iverian chapel (*Iverskaya chasovnya*) housed the most celebrated icon in the city, that of the 'Iverian Madonna'. This was an exact copy of an early eighth-century icon preserved in the Iverian Monastery on Mount Athos. The copy was brought to Russia in 1648 and became famous as a 'miracle-working

icon', in which capacity it could be hired out by private individuals.
'Tsar Cannon' and . . . 'Tsar Bell': two well-known sights in the Moscow Kremlin. The Bell was cast in 1733–5, the Cannon in the sixteenth century.
St. Saviour's Temple: this church (in Russian, *Khram Khrista Spasitelya*) was built between 1837 and 1883 on the left bank of the Moscow River, south-west of the Kremlin, as a memorial to the Napoleonic wars of 1812–14.
Rumyantsev Museum: situated in Mokhovoy Street in the centre of Moscow, the Museum was built in 1787, and the core of the exhibits consisted of collections given to the State by Count Nicholas Rumyantsev (died 1826).
Testov's: a well-known Moscow restaurant.

ARIADNE

70 *Volochisk*: name of the actual Russian frontier station in Volhynia Province.
Max Nordau: Max Simon Nordau (1848–1923), Hungarian author of the philosophical work *Entartung* (*Degeneration*; English translation, 1895) and other works.
71 *Weltmann*: A. F. Weltmann [Veltman] (1800–70), minor Russian novelist and poet.
75 *Devichy*: part of south Moscow, the area of the Novodevichy Convent.
the Slav Fair Hotel. a large hotel in central Moscow at which Chekhov sometimes stayed.
the Hermitage Restaurant: in Moscow in Trubny Square, not to be confused with the Hermitage Variety Theatre in Moscow or the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.
79 *Abbazia*: [Opatija]: a seaside resort on the west shore of the Bay of Fiume. It was Austrian before 1914 and is now part of Yugoslavia.
80 *Fiume*: [Rijeka]: North Adriatic port, now part of Yugoslavia. It belonged to Hungary before 1914.
81 *Merano*: health resort in the southern Tyrol in the Italian province of Bolzano.
88 *Boleslav Markevich*: B. M. Markevich (1822–84), a minor novelist who held ultra-conservative political views.
Turgenev: I. S. Turgenev (1818–83), the well-known Russian novelist.

A DREARY STORY

92 *Kavelin*: K. D. Kavelin (1815–85), the Russian philosopher.
Nekrasov: N. A. Nekrasov (1821–78), the Russian poet.

98 *Gruber*: V. L. Gruber (1814–90), anatomist and professor at the St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy from 1858.
Babukhin: A. I. Babukhin (1835–91), Russian histologist and physiologist, founder of the Moscow school of histology.
Skobelev: M. D. Skobelev (1843–82), the famous Russian general who led a punitive expedition against Kokand in central Asia (1875–6) and distinguished himself in the Russo–Turkish War of 1877–8.

99 *Perov*: V. G. Perov (1833–82), the Russian painter.
Patti: Adelina Patti (1843–1919), the operatic singer.

107 *Chatsky . . . Woe from Wit*: Chatsky is the hero of the verse play *Woe from Wit* (1822–4) by A. S. Griboyedov (1795–1829).

108 *Ufa*: city near the Urals, now capital of the Bashkir Autonomous Republic.

110 *Yalta*: town and health resort on the southern coast of the Crimea.

113 *kasha*: the word describes various forms of gruel and porridge.

115 *Kharkov*: large city in the Ukraine.

122 *How sadly I regard . . .*: the first line of the lyric *Thought* (1838) by the Russian poet M. Yu. Lermontov (1814–41).

123 *Dobrolyubov*: N. A. Dobrolyubov (1836–61), leading Russian radical literary and social critic.

125 *Arakcheyev*: General Count A. A. Arakcheyev (1769–1834), favourite of Alexander I of Russia, who became a symbol of extreme tyranny.

128 *Go, up, thou bald head*: a biblical quotation, 2 Kings 2: 23.

129 *Nikita Krylov*: N. I. Krylov (1807–79), Professor of Roman Law at the University of Moscow.
Revel: German name of present Tallinn, capital of the Estonian Republic.
An eagle on occasion . . .: the lines come from the fable *The Eagle and the Hens* (1808) by the Russian fabulist I. A. Krylov (*c.* 1769–1844).

137 *Berdichev*: Ukrainian town about a hundred miles south-west of Kiev.

138 *World Illustrated*: *Vsemirnaya illyustratsiya*, a St. Petersburg weekly, founded 1869.

The Meadow: *Niva*, a weekly illustrated magazine for family reading, St. Petersburg (1870–1918).

passport system: a Russian citizen was required to possess a passport for purposes of internal as well as external travel.

NEIGHBOURS

143 *Her Excell.*: the honorific 'Your Excellency' (*vashe prevoskhoditelstvo*) was reserved to holders of ranks three, four and five in the official Table of Ranks (see note to p. 1), and to the wives and widows of these high officials.

148 *If you should ever need my life, then come and take it*: Chekhov later used this sentence in his play *The Seagull* (1896). See further *The Oxford Chekhov*, vol. ii, pp. 264, 338 and 356.

152 *Pisarev . . .*: D. I. Pisarev (1840–68), the Russian politico-literary thinker and critic.

Darwin: Charles Darwin (1809–82), the English naturalist.

. . . that weird marriage à la Dostoyevsky: Chekhov must have had in mind such episodes as the marriage of the satanic hero Stavrogin to the idiot girl Mary Lebyadkin in the novel *Devils* (1871–2) by F. M. Dostoyevsky (1822–81).

154 *Khoma Brut*: a character in the story *Vy* in the collection *Mirgorod* (1835) by N. V. Gogol.

AN ANONYMOUS STORY

161 *Intermediary editions*: *The Intermediary* (*Posrednik*) was a publishing house founded in St. Petersburg in 1885 for the dissemination of popular works, including the folk tales of Leo Tolstoy.

162 *Znamensky Square*: the large square at the eastern end of the Nevsky Prospekt, the main thoroughfare in St. Petersburg.

165 *Yeliseyev's*: the most luxurious food store on the Nevsky Prospekt in St. Petersburg.

Gogol or Shchedrin: N. V. Gogol (1809–52) and M. Ye. Saltykov (1826–89, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Shchedrin' and is often known as 'Saltykov-Shchedrin') were the two leading Russian satirists, and—with Chekhov himself—humorous writers of the nineteenth century.

166 *the fairly senior rank which he held*: literally: the 'rank of actual

state councillor' (*deystvitelny statsky sovetnik*): grade four in the Table of Ranks.

167 *Nevsky Prospekt*: the main thoroughfare of St. Petersburg.
the Senate: see note to p. 35.
Prutkov: 'Kozma Prutkov' was the collective pseudonym used by the poet and playwright A. K. Tolstoy in conjunction with the brothers Zhemchuzhnikov between 1851 and 1884 for the publication of satire directed against Russian officialdom.

168 *What does the morrow hold for me?*: Lensky's words in Canto VI, verse xxi of *Eugene Onegin* by A. S. Pushkin. The song to which reference is made here is Lensky's aria from Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, based on Pushkin's novel.

169 *Officer Street*: a street in the west of central St. Petersburg.

174 *Contant's or Donon's*: the restaurants of Contant and Donon, both on the Moyka Canal, are listed in the 1912 Baedeker, the latter carrying one star.
the Old Town: literally: 'The Petersburg Side' (*Peterburgskaya storona*). Lying to the north of the River Neva, this was the oldest part of the city now called Leningrad, containing the Peter and Paul Fortress and Peter the Great's house.

176 *Three meetings . . . Vieni, pensando . . .*: reference is to Turgenev's story *Three Meetings* (1852). The line *Vieni, pensando a me segretamente* ('Come, thinking of me in secret') forms part of a quatrain from an Italian song, which Turgenev used as the epigraph to the story.
liberate Bulgaria: reference is to Turgenev's novel *On the Eve* (1860), the hero of which, Insarov, is a Bulgarian struggling for his country's freedom. His inamorata, a Russian girl called Helen, offers (literally) to follow him 'to the ends of the earth'.

183 *a typical red-tape merchant*: literally, 'a hero from Shchedrin': that is, one of those comic civil servants (*chinovniki*) who form the main butts of the satirist Shchedrin (see also note to p. 165 above).
visiting your superiors to wish them a Happy New Year: the practice of paying a formal visit to one's superior officer on this occasion was generally incumbent on subordinate civil servants.

190 *Sergiyevsky Street*: in the eastern part of central St. Petersburg, running east from the Summer Garden.

194 *the beard-and-caftan brigade*: literally 'their worthinesses' (*ikh stepenstva*), an honorific sometimes bestowed on Russian merchants, here used sardonically.

201 *Saint-Saëns*: Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921), the French composer.

204 *the gates of Gaza*: reference is to Samson's exploit in carrying the gates of Gaza 'to the top of the hill that is before Hebron'. Judges 16: 3.

205 *In some novel of Dostoyevsky's*: reference is to *Insulted and Injured* (1861) by F. M. Dostoyevsky, which includes an episode where an elderly father, Ikhmenev, tramples on a medallion containing the portrait of his daughter Natasha, cursing her as he does so.

209 *the Neva*: the river on which St. Petersburg (Leningrad) was built.

211 *Père Goriot*: reference is to the novel *Le Père Goriot* (1834) by the French novelist Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850).

213 *Canova*: Antonio Canova (1757–1822), the Italian sculptor, who died in Venice.
Faliero: Marino Faliero (*c.* 1274–1355), a Doge of Venice who sided with the mob against the nobility. He was beheaded after leading an unsuccessful *coup d'état*, and his portrait in the Palace of Doges was defaced.

224 *My fate, ye gods . . .*: a parody of Famusov's celebrated exit lines from the end of Act I of *Woe from Wit* (written 1822–4) by A. S. Griboyedov (1795–1829). In Griboyedov's original the 'tiny' daughter mentioned by Orlov was 'grown-up'. The couplet is correctly quoted in Chekhov's short play *The Proposal* (1888–9); see *The Oxford Chekhov*, vol. i, p. 77.

DOCTOR STARTSEV

227 *'Ere from the Cup of Life I yet had Drunk the Tears'*: from the poem *An Elegy* by A. A. Delvig (1798–1831).

229 *'Rushlight'*: a well-known folk-song.
'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever': literally: 'Die, Denis, you'll not write better!' This remark was made to the eighteenth-century Russian playwright D. I. Fonvizin by Catherine the Great's favourite Potemkin after a performance of Fonvizin's play *The Brigadier*.

230 *'Your Voice, to me both Languorous and Tender'*: the first lines of Pushkin's lyric *Night* (1823) read: 'My voice, to you both languorous and tender.'

232 *Pisemsky . . . A Thousand Souls*: reference is to the novel *A Thousand Souls* (1858) by Alexis Feofilaktovich Pisemsky (1820–81).

233 *The hour cometh when—*: John 4: 23.