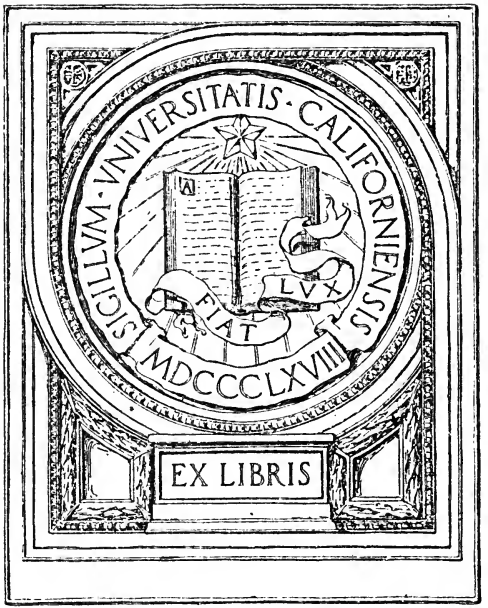
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THE MILLIONAIRE

THE MILLIONAIRE

BY MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF

TRANSLATED BY
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY THE AUTHOR

THIRD IMPRESSION

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
MCMXVII

First published in England April 1915
Reprinted September 1915
Reprinted July 1917

Printed in England

INTRODUCTION

THE following autobiographical letter was written by M. Artzibashef for publication at the request of a friend:

You ask me for an account of my life.

I must confess that your request embarrasses me somewhat. An autobiography in the true sense of the word is, as I see it, a difficult and intricate piece of work. For such as are equipped with the necessary presumption it is easy enough; every trivial occurrence in their life seems to them an important event. I lack this praiseworthy quality, and therefore must apologize before I attempt my task. What little I can tell you about myself is brief and dull. I have followed the usual course.

I was born in the year 1878 *in a small town in Southern Russia. By name and extraction I am Tartar, but not of pure descent, since there is Russian, French, Georgian, and Polish blood in my veins. There is one of my ancestors of whom I am proud, and that is the well-known Polish rebel-leader Kosciusko, my great grandfather on the maternal side. My father was a small landowner, a retired officer; my mother died of consumption when I was three years old, bequeathing me a legacy of tuberculosis. I did not become seriously ill until* 1907, *but even before that the tuberculosis never left me in peace, as it manifested itself in various forms of illness.*

I went to a grammar-school in the provinces; but as I had taken the keenest interest in painting from my childhood, I left it at the age of sixteen and went to a school of art. I was very poor; I had to live in dirty garrets without enough to eat, and the worst of it all was that I had not enough money for my principal needs—paints and canvas. So it was not given to me to become an artist; to earn anything at all I was obliged to do caricatures and write short ssays and humorous tales for all kinds of cheap papers.

Quite by chance in the year 1901 *I wrote my first story,* Pasha Tumanoff. *An actual occurrence and my own hatred for the superannuated schools suggested the subject. People have no idea of what a Russian grammar-school is like. The innumerable suicides of the pupils, which still continue, are a testimony of its educational value for Russian youth.* Pasha Tumanoff *had been accepted for publication by one of the most distinguished Russian reviews, but it was not allowed to appear because the censorship at that time categorically forbade any statements to be made which did not show life in the schools in a pleasing light. Thus it was impossible for the story to achieve publicity at the right time, and it did not appear until some years later in book form. That has been the fate moreover of many of my things. In spite of this the story was not without favourable results for me ; it attracted the attention of the editorial staff and stimulated me to further work. I renounced my dream of becoming an artist and transferred my allegiance to literature. This was very hard ; even to-day I cannot see paintings without emotion. I love colours more than words.*

Pasha Tumanoff *was followed by two or three stories which interested the editor of a small review, a man named Miroliuboff. My first introduction to literary circles I owe to him. Up till then I had never been in editorial offices, but had always sent my tales by post. This was because I imagined them as temples consecrated to literature, which I revered. Nowadays we live in other times and have other customs in Russia ; advertisement and influence dominate the literary world. However, Miroliuboff's name will leave its mark on the history of Russian literature, although he did not write himself. He was the last Mohican of the old idealistic, self-sacrificing school of literature, which has now been supplanted by commercial interests here, as it has in Western Europe. His energy, his intelligence, his touching love for his work, and the wonderful gift of a fascinating personality made his small review, which only cost a rouble a year, one of the most distinguished publications, while from a literary point of view it excelled all the other large and expensive ones. The greatest exponents*

of our modern literature—Maxim Gorki, Leonid Andreyeff, Kuprin, and others—contributed to it. It has now been abandoned, for Miroliuboff did not wish to lower its standard, as all the others did, even in the darkest days of the Revolution. Miroliuboff himself was obliged to seek refuge abroad from Government proceedings.

My acquaintance with him was of the greatest importance to me personally. I owe to him much of my development as a writer; and he made matters easier for me by appointing me sub-editor of his paper, although at that time I was absolutely unknown and very young. Miroliuboff was a born editor and taught me also to like the occupation, which I continued to follow even after his review had been given up, editing now one journal, now another. I look upon it as one of my merits that I have helped so many young writers, who are now becoming known.

At this time, that is to say in the year 1903, *I wrote* Sanine. *This fact is wilfully suppressed by Russian critics; moreover they try to persuade the public that* Sanine *is an outcome of the reaction of the year* 1907, *and that I have followed the fashionable tendency of contemporary Russian literature. In reality, however, the novel had been read by the editors of two reviews and by many celebrated authors as early as* 1903. *Again I owe it to the censorship and the timidity of publishers that it was not brought out at the time. It is an interesting fact that the novel was refused on account of iis ideas by the editorial staff of the same monthly review, "Sovremionny Mios," which some years later begged me to give it to them for publication. In this way* Sanine *made its appearance five years too late. This was very much against it: at the time of its appearance literature had been flooded by streams of pornographic and even homo-sexual works, and my novel was liable to be judged with these.*

The book was received with the greatest interest by young people, but many critics protested against it. This may be partially explained by the trend of thought of the novel; but no doubt they were greatly influenced by the circumstance that I patronized our literary aftergrowth, and at the same time stood aloof from the "commanding generals of

literature," so that I gradually found myself opposed to all the influential literary circles. I am an inveterate realist, a disciple of the school of Tolstoi and Dostoevsky, whereas at the present day the so-called Decadents, who are extremely unfamiliar, not to say antipathetic to me, have gained the upper hand in Russia.

Later than Sanine, *but before its publication, that is to say in the year* 1904, *I wrote a series of stories, such as* Ensign Gololoboff, The Madman, The Woman, The Death of Ivan Lande. *The last-named tale* * *brought me what is known as fame.*

In the year 1905 *the bloody Revolution began and long distracted me from what I consider " mine "—the preaching of anarchical individuality. I wrote a series of tales dealing with the psychology and types of the Revolution. My favourites among them are* Morning Shadows *and* The Stain of Blood.

I must observe that in these Tales of the Revolution *I said what I believe, and was attacked therefore on all sides. Whereas the Black Gangs reckoned me among the spiritual originators of the Revolution and one even condemned me to death, the Radical press attacked me because I recognized none of the party-barriers and made no idols of the revolutionary politicians. Subsequent events proved that I was right in many cases, when, in spite of my enthusiasm for the cause of liberty, I did not think the time had come to see a saint in every ringleader of the movement and to believe in the revolutionary readiness of the people.*

At this time much that I had written for purposes of agitation was confiscated, I myself was indicted, but the temporary success of the Revolution at the end of 1905 *saved me from punishment.*

Then the Revolution came to an end. Society rushed to literature which in quantity, if not in quality, had received a new impetus. The editors of the monthly review who had refused my Sanine *remembered it and were the first to publish it. It evoked almost unprecedented discussions, like those at the time of Turgeneff's* Fathers and Children. *Some praised the novel far more than it deserves, others*

* Included in this volume.

complained bitterly that it was a defamation of youth. I may, however, without exaggeration assert that no one in Russia took the trouble really to fathom the ideas of the novel. The eulogies and the condemnations are equally one-sided.

In case it might interest you to know what I myself think of Sanine, *I will tell you that I consider it neither a novel of ethics nor a libel on the younger generation.* Sanine *is the apology for individualism; the hero of the novel is a type. In its pure form this type is still new and rare, but its spirit is in every frank, bold, and strong representative of the new Russia. A number of imitators who have never grasped my ideas hastened to turn the success of* Sanine *to their own advantage; they injured me greatly by flooding the literary world with pornographic, wantonly obscene writings, thus degrading in the readers' eyes what I wished to express in* Sanine.

The critics persisted in ranking me with the number of second-rate imitators of Sanine *who displayed their "marketable wares" full of all sorts of offensiveness. Not until recently, when* Sanine *had crossed the frontiers, and translations had appeared in Germany, France, Italy, Bohemia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Denmark, and also, in part, in Japan, were other voices to be heard among the critics. Russia always does grovel before foreign opinion.*

What else is there?

My development was very strongly influenced by Tolstoi although I never shared his views on "non-resistance to evil." As an artist he overpowered me, and I found it difficult not to model my work on his. Dostoevsky, and to a certain extent Tchekhoff, played almost as great a part, and Victor Hugo and Goethe were constantly before my eyes. These five names are those of my teachers and literary masters.

It is often thought here that Nietzsche exercised a great influence over me. This surprises me, for the simple reason that I have never read Nietzsche. This brilliant thinker is out of sympathy with me, both in his ideas and in the bombastic form of his works, and I have never got beyond the beginnings of his books. Max Stirner is to me much nearer and more comprehensible.

That is all I can tell you about myself. Forgive me if it is too little. But a genuine autobiography is a confession, and this is not the right time. And I have neither leisure nor inclination to recount private incidents in my life in greater detail.

M. ARTZIBASHEF.

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THE MILLIONAIRE

I

ABOVE the horizon, round and lustrous, the moon hung between the dark heavens and the sea. As, suspended by unseen wires from the branches of the trees, all the little coloured lamps swayed and danced, they resembled a bevy of radiant humming-birds. From the flaring stage, where like some droll puppet the conductor flourished his arms and his coat-tails, as if preparing for immediate flight, the thrilling tones of violins resounded on every side. Leaping, laughing, singing, they danced along through the dark trees, in airy, fantastic fashion, away, away to the vast, shining shore. And here, beneath the gaze of the white moon, invisible, indefinite, they danced for the brief moment that made up their phantom life.

Mishuief leant his strong arms on the cold marble-topped table, as in moody silence he glanced sideways. If he looked at the stage it seemed to him that he was surrounded by senseless din and paltry commotion, but, as he turned towards the sea, all appeared calm and majestic and wistful as the pale moon overhead.

His fair, curly beard and massive shoulders denoted great strength and indomitable will-power, but his eyes, sunken and unhealthy, had in them a look of death. At the adjoining table there was a little convivial group; the men wore hats of roguish shape, and the women, all remarkably good-looking, were very much made-up. There was loud laughter as they drank toasts to each other from slender glasses, and joked without ceasing. With every fresh sally their voices grew louder, as they looked round at Mishuief, which involuntarily served to heighten the effect of their own mirth. Close at hand stood obsequious waiters with white napkins tucked under their arms, who never took their eyes off Mishuief, as though ready at a sign from him to plunge head-foremost into the sea.

Mishuief, though he saw all this, yet paid no heed. Once he had found it occasionally amusing; now it was merely a vexatious, inevitable formality.

"Theodore, why do you look so worried to-day?" asked Maria Sergeievna, as she timidly touched his arm.

She wore a provokingly charming gown, which only just allowed her feet to move freely. Wavering above her dark curls, the simple flowers in her hat formed a melancholy contrast to her painted face, tired eyes, and crimson lips. Clumsily, as some jaded bull, Mishuief thrust his broad head towards her, but said nothing.

Her beauty was just as alluring as ever, and through the black, filmy laces, still the splendour of her bodily charm made its wonted appeal. When they beheld it, all men were spellbound as by some dream of strange ecstatic delight. With Mishuief it was different. The simple fact that she had lost her real name, Maria Sergeievna, and was now called Mary, and that she no longer addressed him as "Fedia," but as "Theodor," using the familiar "thou"—this, as well as her action in leaving her husband in order to live with him, had effectually extinguished the passionate reverence with which till lately he had regarded her. From time to time his feeling now was one of cold, unaccountable aversion. He seemed to be taking his revenge for something, at the cost of unspeakable anguish to himself. Maria Sergeievna understood the reason for this, and thus in her eyes there was a shy, sad look, as if they dared not plead for pity.

"Let us go," said Mishuief abruptly, as, rising, he faced the inquisitive glances of those seated near him. She hastily got up in her usual attractively awkward way which once had distressed Mishuief so acutely. Caught at first in the lace of her gown, she dropped her handkerchief, and then her hand-bag, each time with a droll, nervous gesture, before she at last accompanied him.

They walked down to the shore where sea and moon alone held sway, and seated themselves on a bench at the extreme end of the pier. Facing them, and on either side, was the vast ocean across which lay a band o

trembling moonlight. Ceaseless was the sound of the waves breaking against the pier, yet all the while a silvery voice, melodious, persistent, if scarcely perceptible, echoed across the tempestuous ocean-levels a voice whose sad, mysterious chords aroused within the depths of the soul sweet memories and immeasurable despair. Occasionally a soft breeze tossed spray into their faces; the touch of it made them shudder.

Mishuief remained silent, gazing at the silver streak of moonlight. He felt the same strange depression which always overcame him when confronted with the inscrutable mysteries of night, making him oblivious of his surroundings. Gloom, and a great void seemed all.

"I wanted to have a talk with you, Theodore," said Maria Sergeievna in trembling tones, for she feared that he might be angry with her before he had listened to what she was going to say.

Mishuief was mute. All that he heard was the sound of the waves dashing against the pier; all that he saw was the white line of foam along the strand. With tears in her eyes Maria Sergeievna rose, as she nervously crumpled up her handkerchief.

"It is intolerable," she muttered, trembling as much with mortification as at the touch of the cool breeze. "Why do you vex me in this way?"

Without looking at her, Mishuief merely shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't stand it any longer!" She spoke quickly now, raising her voice more and more. "You've no right to despise me . . . no right to vex and humiliate me. If I couldn't resist your millions, as you say I couldn't . . ."

"I never said anything of the sort," replied Mishuief gloomily, his gaze still riveted on the sparkling moonlit sea. Maria Sergeievna paused, feeling utterly perplexed and crushed. Convinced though she was that he had made such a statement, not a word could she recall to prove this. Feeble and helpless, words failed her. She seemed hardly to know why, or against whom, she had to defend herself.

"Yes, but you think so . . . I know you do . . . and even if it were so . . . it was you yourself that wanted it all . . . wanted to get the utmost out of life . . . all for my sake!" She clasped her forehead in despair. "Ah! and what a price I have paid for these millions! It is they that have robbed me of my soul. . . . What am I now but the vilest of creatures . . . anything! Either . . . or else . . . or else. . . . As you please, but I can't go on like this . . . no, I can't." Here she became confused and incoherent, and could only gaze dejectedly at the gloomy ocean, as her hands shook and her lip quivered.

"If that's how you rate yourself . . . as the vilest of creatures . . . what position am I to take up towards you?" asked Mishuief suddenly, his glittering eyes still fixed upon the waves.

"Ah!" cried Maria Sergeievna, with a start, as she dropped her bag and handkerchief, which fell into the sea. Covering her face with both hands she hurried away. The wind at once caught her long dress, which caused her to fold it more closely round her, and her graceful figure resembled an apparition as it swayed in the breeze. Mishuief watched the tiny piece of white cambric dance for a moment on a wave and then disappear. Though scarcely conscious of it, a sudden tenderness moved him to follow, and soon to overtake her. Her pretty, sloping shoulders were bent, showing the graceful curve of her neck, white in the moonlight.

At the sound of his footsteps she stopped for a moment, still covering her face with both hands, a pathetic figure in her large white hat.

"Come, come! That will do, Ma . . . russchka!" said Mishuief, as he fondly called her by her pet name, and placed his arm round her shoulder. "Do forgive me! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

He expected her to repulse him, and in a fit of temper to shake herself free. It was her coldness that he feared, aware that then he would be utterly forlorn. But she only laid her head on his breast and thrust her face closer to his lips, as she looked up at him appealingly through

her tears. It was in her eyes and in the corners of her mouth, which betrayed a mournful smile, that Mishuief could note that submissive, eager-to-be-forgiven look that puppies and children have, after being chastised and then caressed.

In a moment that feeling, pleasant to himself, of tenderness and pity vanished, as if it had never existed, leaving only a dull sense of annoyance. He kissed her lips coldly, moving back a little as he said:

"Don't be always so peevish; it's really becoming quite monotonous. What is it that you want? I can't make you out!"

After a pause, he added, "It is time to be going home."

She smiled confusedly, as though she wanted to say: "Do forgive me . . . perhaps I was in the wrong. I don't know. I thought that you didn't care for me . . . that . . . you despised me . . . and oh! that's so hard to bear."

She at once became flurried, and in silence they walked along together, leaving behind them the pallid moon and the restless, surging sea. Myriads of dancing tones now floated forwards to meet them, yet they both were still conscious of an estranging influence.

As they drove home Mishuief was thrilled by the contact of her soft, supple body beneath its luxurious apparel; he noticed her exquisite profile *en silhouette*, the head bowed as by some insupportable burden, and he asked himself what it could be that had come between them; between him, the man who for so many years had adored her, never even daring to dream of her white beauty or the ecstasy of her kisses, and between her, the charming, gracious wife, thoroughly devoted to her staid husband, her attitude almost that of an elder sister, and her manner modest, innocent as a maid.

II

In brilliant sunlight the shore gleamed like gold. Even the sea itself, green and foam-flecked near the land, and blue and lilac in the distance, was covered with a golden glory. Half lost in the haze of the hills one could perceive white summer villas strewn, like toys in the grass, along their verdant slopes. The promenade facing the sea was gay with its usual modish throng of visitors that swept like a stream into the oval Public Gardens, making it impossible to account for so vast and brilliant an array of hats and gowns and smiling faces. The crowd seemed to wax larger of itself, like a flower-bed in which the blossoms grow apace. A confused clamour of voices and laughter filled the air. Blended with the sound of breaking waves and of trampling hoofs it became at last as an agreeable music to the ear. Maria Sergeievna and Mishuief were driving along the sea-front in one of the light Yalta landaulettes. Her white veil fluttered airily in the wind, past horses' heads and majestic coachmen, as the florid procession of parasols and hats dispersed. Suddenly the carriage stopped at a shop where dainty ladies' hats, like amorous birds and blossoms, adorned the window. Maria swiftly alighted and entered the dark doorway of the shop. Slowly, heavily, Mishuief got out also, and followed her. Several alert, obsequious shop-assistants at once darted forward, bowing and smiling. For a moment it looked as if a bland and courteous company of people were joyously welcoming their very dear friend. In a trice dozens of cardboard boxes flew open as if by magic, disclosing piles of white hats trimmed with ribbons of all colours, red, blue, pink, yellow, like blossoms lying on snow.

Simple little "baby" hats were then exhibited, as Maria wished to choose one of those, thinking that in a hat of this sort she would look like a pretty, petulant girl.

The shop-women prattled with excessive briskness,

while the male assistants talked affectedly in order to be taken for Frenchmen, and all the while, through the open door, the noise of the streets came in, and the rich sunlight. Maria Sergeievna went on looking and choosing, pleased as a child with all this coloured finery. She moved restlessly to and fro; her eyes sparkled, and she laughed as she surveyed herself in the mirror, standing sideways in order to get a view of her profile. And as each new hat with its bright ribbon was placed on her dark hair, her little pink face seemed prettier and more youthful.

Meanwhile Mishuief sat stolidly at the counter, a black spot amid all this noisy crowd, leaning on his walking-stick which he held upright in his ponderous hands. He looked drowsy, like some sick, sleepless man who sees nothing, hears nothing; neither sunlight, nor laughter, nor feminine charm, being merely conscious of a subtle, resistless force that slowly, silently, step by step, was undermining his existence. Sometimes his glance rested on Maria's animated features; then, turning away, he stared at anything near him; the corner of the counter, a shopman's varnished boots, or the angular shoulder-blades of a saleswoman discernible through her smart silk blouse.

"Theodore, just look here a moment. I shall have this one. It suits me rather well, eh? Or shall I get that one? What do you think? Give me your advice."

Thus she questioned him, while unable to control the nervous tremor that her voice and her eyes betrayed. She had recovered her wonted good spirits. The scene of the previous evening had ended in a passionate reconciliation. In fact, she had almost forgotten it in all this sunlight and bustle, and in the joy of spending money recklessly. Yet now Mishuief's gloomy face was going to spoil her pleasure. It even frightened her. It reminded her that kisses and amorous endearments, if they delayed the evil that had entered her life, could never undo nor destroy it.

"Is it never going to end?" she thought. "Are we

always going to have these odious scenes that make life absolutely unendurable ? "

" Come, now, which one shall I have ? Do tell me ? " she asked ; and again there was that strange, pleading accent in her voice, as if asking him to spare her.

" Have the lot," replied Mishuief absently.

She laughed ; and all the shop-assistants laughed with her. One of them, indeed, burst into a loud guffaw.

Mishuief, frowning, looked annoyed. The laughing faces instantly grew grave, and this only served to enrage him. He longed to shout at them ; even to kick and beat them. Words of mad abuse rose to his lips, but he remained silent, glancing downwards as if helpless.

" What's the matter with you ? Do tell me what to have ; now do ! " exclaimed Maria Sergeievna coaxingly. Mishuief noticed that such importunity on her part was designed to prevent anyone else from detecting his own indifference, which she instinctively dreaded. This caused in him a feeling of compassion, almost of kindliness, though he was sadder and more helpless at heart.

" Have the one with the blue ribbon. It suits you best," he said carelessly.

" No, really ? " cried Maria, smiling with delight. As she raised both hands to her head he caught a glimpse through the white blouse of her soft, supple shoulders. At these, one of the shopmen, who wore patent leather boots with buttons, cast a shy, lustful glance, and then his eyes suddenly met those of Mishuief. In a moment the expression of his face changed to one of servility and fear.

" Vermin ! " thought Mishuief, inwardly furious, as he looked at the fellow full in the face. The latter appeared completely crushed, and seemingly grew thinner and smaller. For nearly a moment this mute encounter lasted, which afforded Mishuief a certain morbid satisfaction. He noticed that the man wore extremely tight trousers and that his knees shook.

" After all," thought Mishuief, " if that shopman were in my place, he'd have a right to her, and to others of her sort ; whereas, if I were he, I should have to steal glances at her, like a slave."

He turned aside in disgust as he thought of all this grovelling rabble, and this woman, wounded but yesterday by a sharp word, and ready to drown herself, yet who to-day had forgotten everything in the paltry amusement of spending money.

"Shall you soon be ready? Do let us go!" he said, as he rose.

"Yes, yes, I'm ready. I have chosen what I want," she hastily replied. "I'll take this one. . . . No, no, that one, with the light blue ribbon!" As she gave these hurried directions, she looked round at Mishuief, a black mass against the bright entrance.

"Let us take a turn in the Park," she said, as they came out into the sunlight, the pleasant air and cheerful noise.

"Very well," replied Mishuief carelessly.

After dismissing the carriage, they had already crossed the road when they heard a voice calling out, "Feodor Ivanovitch, wait a moment!"

A smart motor-car had stopped close to the kerb, in which, like a bouquet of lace and blossoms, three ladies sat with a smiling gentleman who wore spotlessly white clothes and pale yellow gloves, and waved his hand to them.

"Theodore, some one's calling you! It is Parkhomenko," said Maria Sergeievna, as she touched Mishuief's arm, and nodded and smiled at the immaculate owner of the car. The latter quickly alighted, and, flourishing his hat, advanced to greet her.

"Maria Sergeievna! As enchanting as ever! I've been looking everywhere for you!"

"Really?"

She laughed coyly, as he pressed her little hand to his lips. The ladies in the motor bowed and smiled. Parkhomenko, beaming, stood in everybody's way, while passers-by turned to look at the shining car. It seemed to Maria as if it was for her alone that all the town, and the hills, and the flowers had assumed such a radiant aspect. A consumptive-looking priest in a shabby cassock went wearily past, and glanced at her for a moment with his

large, bright, melancholy eyes before he disappeared in the merry crowd.

Then, as a young man, accompanied by two ladies, passed the group, he whispered hastily to his companions, as if eager to give them most important news:

"They're Mishuief and Parkhomenko, the Moscow millionaires!"

"Which is Mishuief? Where is he?" asked the ladies eagerly. "The one next to the lady. That big chap." The young man quickly pointed out Mishuief, at whom they gazed inquisitively. He turned his back, but Parkhomenko, beaming, observed:

"There! You see, everybody knows us, Feodor Ivanovitch!"

"Allow me to pass, please," said a voice, and in the tone of it Mishuief could detect bitter hate. Looking round, he saw a fair young man who wore a blue shirt under his shabby jacket. His honest eyes, as they rested on Parkhomenko, expressed mild aversion.

"Do let one pass," he repeated.

Scarcely noticing him, Parkhomenko stepped aside.

"Maria Sergeievna," he said, "let us motor over to Sououk-Su to-day. We did it yesterday in two hours; there, and back. *Parole d'honneur!* Most awfully jolly, 'pon my word! Simply flew! We'll have supper there, and then come back, eh? Motoring by moonlight's perfectly fascinating, 'pon my word it is!"

Thus he ran on, excitedly, brimming with joy at the fact of his own existence.

Maria gracefully demurred with a coquettish shake of her new hat, which indeed gave her quite a girlish look.

"We were there only two days ago."

"Ah! but to motor there is such an absolutely different thing. Away, away, over hills and dales! You've no idea how quickly one gets over the ground. It feels just like flying in a dream! 'Pon my word it does!"

"Well, well, we must see, later on. I'm going for a walk at present. Let us all go. The sea to-day is perfectly lovely."

The three ladies in Parkhomenko's car, all of them blonde, comely, and sensuous-looking, got out, laughing, as if they were taking part in a game.

"I say, Feodor Ivanovitch, why are you so cross to-day?" Parkhomenko looked the very picture of happiness as he asked this.

"He's always like that now," said Maria Sergeievna, answering for Mishuief, as if she herself were to blame, and glancing shyly at him.

"Then you ought to persuade him to buy a motor-car. That would instantly put him in a good temper. He'd be another man!"

Parkhomenko laughed heartily.

"This car of mine is a cure for all ills! 'Pon my word, it is! I'm not joking."

The four ladies walked along in a row, exciting universal attention. Parkhomenko trotted beside them, and his boisterous hilarity became infectious as he nearly trod on their toes. Mishuief, heavy of step, followed. In passing through the gaily dressed crowd that hummed like a swarm of bees in sunlight, Mishuief carefully scrutinized all the faces that met his, as if he would read what was written on each.

They again met the sickly priest, and also the fair-haired young fellow in a blue shirt. This time he was accompanied by a tall, haggard man, whose face wore a grave expression. Mishuief recognized him, and now remembered who his companion was. The grave-looking man was a well-known writer; the other, a young consumptive poet.

The author glanced coldly at the merry party, and instantly looked away. The poet then said something to him in whose voice, as in the angry expression of the other's eyes, lay malignant scorn for Mishuief, Parkhomenko, and all their pretty, pampered dames.

Faces, rows of them, went by; ugly, and handsome, in the bright sunlight, or the shade of parasols; a living kaleidoscope in which Mishuief, as was his wont, took a morbid interest. He observed how the unconcerned expression in the eyes of those he met suddenly changed

to one of dull curiosity as they fastened on himself. So used was he to the monotony of all this that at last the whole crowd appeared to have only one dull, flat face, that to him was intensely obnoxious.

The ladies and Parkhomenko were laughing loudly as Mishuief followed in their rear; and beside him walked Solitude, his inseparable companion. He longed to get away from everybody and everything, to a place where there was neither sunlight, nor human beings, nor human noise. If he could but stay there, alone, and undisturbed!

Beaming as ever, Parkhomenko looked round and made some remark. It was as silly and pointless as any other of his utterances, but designed to show what an important person he was, and how everything he said must obviously be interesting.

"What a lucky fool!" thought Mishuief, looking down at his feet. "I wish I were such an utter idiot as he is, for then, like him, I could be happy with my motor-cars, my millions, and my mistresses—and with all those parasites who pay no heed to my real personality, but are only interested in what surrounds it; who fear and hate me, yet who stick closely to me."

"Ah! here comes the General!" cried Parkhomenko. "Come along with us, General! Come and cheer us up!"

An old General in uniform, with a shrivelled, rosy face, and a skinny neck that his trim grey whiskers could not hide, ran feebly towards them. With senile gallantry he proceeded to kiss the ladies' hands, smiling effusively; and one could see from his manner that he was not quite sure of his reception.

Parkhomenko looked as pleased as if some one had provided him with a funny toy.

"Well, General," he said, "did the steamer bring us a lot of pretty women yesterday? I expect your heart went pit-a-pat, eh?"

He laughed loudly, pirouetting in front of the ladies, who had sat down on a bench.

"Do you know, Maria Sergeievna," he continued, evidently conscious that he was going to say something

extremely witty, " the General goes down to the landing-stage every evening in order to waylay any fair lady who is incautious enough to entrust herself to his care. He's a regular Don Juan. 'Pon my word he is! I'm not joking!"

" Aha! General! I had no idea that you were so dangerous!" said one of the blonde ladies in a languishing voice.

" Oh! you've no idea what he is!" Parkhomenko almost choked with laughing. " Every evening he goes there. Only, I must say, these hard-hearted dames treat him very badly. After he has got lodgings for them, looked after their luggage and paid the cabman, they elope the very next day with some young subaltern or other, and the poor General has to go down to the steamboat again. Fact! 'Pon my word! I'm not joking!"

" Well, I never!" exclaimed the buxom blonde, affecting intense surprise.

" You're always inventing something or other, Pavel Alexeievitch," retorted the General, blushing.

" Inventing, indeed! I like that! What about the little schoolgirl with whom you were caught the other day at Dschalita?"

" Why, that was my daughter, my own daughter, Niurotschka! Gad, what do you mean?" The General's face grew redder.

" Your daughter! Aha! We know all about those ' daughters '!"

" No, really! She was my daughter, Niurotschka!"

" That her name is Niurotschka I quite believe; and also that—" Parkhomenko paused and winked knowingly. Some specially subtle joke was surely coming. " For that matter, it is also easy to believe that you are now only capable of paternal affection. That is most probable!"

The ladies laughed and looked down, and the General tittered, too, though his face wore a slightly pained expression, as though some offence to his Niurotschka had been intended. For a moment he was inclined to

turn on his heel and walk away, but he lacked the courage, and could only stand there giggling nervously.

"Dat's astonishing! Dat's astonishing!" he muttered, looking helplessly to right and left.

"General," cried Parkhomenko, "why do you always say 'dat' instead of 'that'? Is it because you think it sounds funnier? Or have you got a hollow tooth?"

"Did I say 'dat's'?" The General's face grew red.

"Why, of course you did. Now, say 'that'! Distinctly, like this: That!"

"Dat's," repeated the General, with a supreme effort. Parkhomenko spun round on his heels with delight. The ladies laughed and so did Maria, as she turned her head aside, showing her delicate profile.

"General, you're a born comedian, 'pon my word you are!" cried Parkhomenko, shaking with laughter.

The poor General smiled feebly.

Maria Sergeievna felt sorry for him, as now some of the passers-by were looking round at him. To show her sympathy, she asked after his health, and spoke of his daughter whom, but a few minutes ago, she had seen in the company of her other merry school-companions. The old man was obviously touched. He smiled now in quite a different way, paying court to her after the manner of some old cat when stroked. Parkhomenko, however, began joking again, and continued to tease him, much to the disgust of Mishuief, who pitied the old fellow and would have liked to take his part. Yet not a word could he utter.

The young poet and his older friend, the author, again passed. Mishuief heard one of several young people sitting near, exclaim:

"Look! Here come Tchetyriof and Marussin!"

"Where? Where?"

Eager glances followed the bent figures of the two writers as, like some mournful blot on the bright multitude, they slowly disappeared. Then Mishuief overheard a heated discussion on the part of the young people regarding the literary merit of Tchetyriof.

It was as if this encounter were to blame for the sudden fit of depression which seized him. Again he felt an intense longing to escape from his surroundings; to find some solitary resting-place where he should see nothing, hear nothing.

III

THE arrival of the evening steamer was signalled across the bay by lights that, mirrored in the dark water, resembled garlands of bright flowers. From this side of the shore it was impossible to distinguish human beings, and the black vessel loomed weirdly in the dusk, as if it were some huge sea-monster that had risen from the deep. Yet the rattle could be heard of carriages arriving at the quay, and one felt that the gay little town was about to be invaded by a fresh throng of visitors roused to activity as their tedious journey neared its end.

It was on that day that Maria Sergeievna had joined Parkhomenko's party in their trip to a neighbouring watering-place, and Mishuief went out walking alone. He sauntered along the beach so as to get away as far as possible from the Casino and its gardens that were always thronged at night-time. For a long time he had not felt so happy in himself. The soft twilight and the gentle murmur of the waves were attuned to his present meditative mood. To be alone was what he desired, and to recall memories of something near and dear to him.

Lost in his thoughts he wandered along the silent, lonely shore, and faces half-forgotten rose up before him as in a dream. In the blue dusk, as the first pale stars trembled overhead, they swam before him, elusive apparitions that yet seemed touched with life.

Gradually his thoughts reverted to the time of his return from abroad, when he met his old friend and Maria Sergeievna, his wife. The tour, desultory and meaningless, had brought only disenchantment, and he had felt weary, overwrought, even to the pitch of hatred for his fellowmen. The simplicity of their *ménage*, to which he was unaccustomed, had cheered and consoled him; and he was soon drawn by them into the narrow circle of their pleasant home-life. He passed many days and evenings full of a delightful intimacy, made more memorable by the peculiar charm of a beautiful woman's society.

Then hidden love ensued—a strange, alluring combination of the most chaste regard and shameless desire. Finally came the moment when, timidly at first, she responded; and then, all that seemed impossible, all of which he dared not even dream, suddenly occurred, as their mutual passion burst into flame. Long and grievous had been the conflict between conscience and fierce physical desire. Such conflict from the first had seemed hopeless. Then there were ecstatic prospects of consummate bliss, as on that wondrous evening when she surrendered to him her splendid body, unclothed and unashamed. Yet, if there was joy in all this, it soon was lost in a morass of falsehood and deceit, as inevitably they built up an infamous barrier of lies and treachery between themselves and the man that both of them loved and respected. Deeper and ever deeper they sank in the mire, until, as it threatened to engulf them, a rupture, short and sharp, became inevitable.

Mishuief recollected how relieved they had felt when the crisis was past and a new life lay before them. But the past had left its sharp sting behind, and to this day it rankled in the wound. When the first vehemence of their passion had passed, Mishuief perceived that they had made a terrible, an irreparable mistake. Maria's variable moods, and the grief that she had felt, gradually caused him to see what an utterly contemptible part he was playing. This woman was in love with her husband, and with him alone. He, Mishuief, merely remarkable on account of his wealth, had for her but a casual significance.

Hitherto her life had been simple and frugal; now, quite naïvely, quite innocently, she longed for pleasure and display; but for nothing else.

"Of what good, then, was it to ruin the lives of three human beings?" he asked himself. The question horrified him.

"Somewhere, humiliated and forlorn," he thought, "there is a man living alone with the mystery of a wrong that can never be righted nor forgotten. A young wife has been snatched away from everything, like a toy that

is flung aside. And into my life merely another woman has come, bought like the rest!"

The brutal truth stung him like a whip; he winced involuntarily.

"I have no right to say that of her! Perhaps she sincerely loves me." Thus he strove to stifle the distressing thought, yet soon he felt that it was not killed, but had only crept into the depths of his inner self.

Mishuief threw back his head, strenuously endeavouring to banish these memories from his mind, as he walked along the promenade and then returned. Meanwhile it had grown darker; stars shone more brightly above the hills, and the murmuring waves seemed falling asleep.

"Oh! if I had but a man in whom to trust!" he suddenly thought, as he remembered one such who in bygone days, when he spent money in lavish style and cherished grandiose schemes, had been his intimate friend. Mishuief longed to see him and talk to him, as in the dusk the masterful personality of Nicolaief, the famous poet, suddenly seemed to appear.

Carriages in one continual stream now rolled towards him from the landing-stage. Hats, cardboard-boxes, and trunks went rapidly past; and faces that were new to him, with shining eyes. The roadway shook with the heavy sound of wheels. The sight moved Mishuief to disgust.

What crowds of people there are! Who ever gave all these their place in the world?"

By degree the rattling noise of the droshkys grew less and less. Again the rhythmic beat of waves on the shore could be heard as plainly now as if one were standing beside a desolate shore. Once more Mishuief walked to the end of the promenade, where a brilliantly lighted café stood, which was crowded with boisterous Turks in their red fezes. Then mechanically he turned homewards.

Near the public gardens he met promenaders of the usual type; an officer with a lady whose sinuous form, in its tightly fitting dress, swayed as she walked; and two or three men well-fed, who sauntered along with

glowing cigars between their teeth. Then came a couple of laughing, chattering girls; and suddenly Mishuief saw the old General with his small side-whiskers, and trousers having an enormous red stripe. He was accompanied by a pretty girl whose delicate complexion and simple, conventional school-dress at once attracted notice.

When the General saw Mishuief he hurried forward, bowing and smiling, as he dragged one leg awkwardly behind the other. As a rule he seemed shy of Mishuief, and kept aloof, but to-day he was anxious to impress his daughter with the fact that he knew a real, live millionaire. In his eyes and voice there was a certain petty pride as he said with excessive cordiality:

"Ah! Feodor Ivanovitch! We're going for a walk. What are you doing?"

"Good evening!" said Mishuief with a certain involuntary touch of hauteur, as he carelessly raised his hat.

"Allow me . . . to, er . . . this is my daughter, Niurotschka!" faltered the General. The nervousness he showed was not due to meeting Mishuief, but rather to a personal feeling.

Mishuief held a little trembling hand in his. The child was shaking like an aspen-leaf as she raised her dark eyes. When Mishuief smiled at her she also smiled.

Then they all three walked along together. The General began talking rapidly about nothing in particular, so as to encourage his daughter and also to show her how friendly he was with this millionaire. At first he became unaccountably familiar, and after some wretched joke he almost put his arm round Mishuief's waist, but just managed to check himself in time. Such incipient familiarity met with scant encouragement from Mishuief, whose manner perceptibly cooled.

The girl blushed repeatedly, and did not look at him. He could only see a little ear, a soft ringlet, and a delicate oval cheek. She stooped when walking, as if she were ashamed, and her dainty heels scarcely touched the ground. When the General made some particularly fatuous joke she bent her head still lower, and her cheek

reddened. But if Mishuief said something funny to amuse her, she suddenly tossed back her pretty head and laughed loudly. To Mishuief it was delightful to see her laugh. Indeed, this quaint pair pleased him. To him it seemed droll to hear them address each other as "girlie" and "daddy"—droll, and yet charming. As they walked through the gardens in the glimmering dusk Mishuief felt in a brighter mood than for a long time past. He talked frankly and merrily, first of his foreign travels and then, to gain the girl's confidence, of his grammar-school days.

"So you went to a grammar-school?" asked the General.

"Yes, we were brought up very simply, and at that time our means were more moderate."

Mishuief paused, chuckling at the recollection of his school-boy life. "We had some funny teachers at school."

"So had we," said the girl.

"Why do you say 'had'? Are you not still at school?" he asked smiling. He liked to think that she could now count as a "grown up."

"Oh, no! I left school long ago," replied the girl in a low tone.

"Nonsense! 'Long ago?'" cried the General gaily. "Why, it's only just three months."

"It seems to me ages since I left," said his daughter.

"Does it?" said Mishuief, feeling a sudden wish to take her in his arms and give her a good, honest kiss.

Looking at her more attentively he saw that she was not really as young as he had at first imagined. He glanced at the delicate contour of her bosom and at her plump arm and shoulder close to his own.

"Well, what's the next thing? Go to a High School, eh?" he asked kindly.

"I don't know," replied Niurotschka almost inaudibly, as she looked downwards.

The General wheezed, and stroked his whiskers. There was a momentary pause. Mishuief felt that he had touched upon a sore subject. He suddenly pitied them,

and it was pleasant to him to think that in a moment everything could be set right. Yet he hesitated to broach the subject; so, to create a diversion, he returned to his tales of school-boy life.

"We had a mathematical master, fat and pompous as some old alderman. During the lesson he used to walk up and down, giving us the benefit of his worldly wisdom. This was summed up in a single phrase. Yes; as he used to walk through the class-room twiddling his thumbs, he gravely drawled out:

"'There are phi-lo-sophers; there are work-ers; and there are favour-ites of for-tune!'"

"Aha! Feodor Ivanovitch, I am sure that he called you a favourite of fortune," was the General's flattering comment, as he tripped along smiling.

"H-m! He could hardly have said I was a worker."

"Why not a philosopher?" observed Niurotschka slyly.

Mishuief laughed, and again longed to give her a sounding kiss. Confused once more, the girl looked down. Her whole slim little figure suggested a certain mild sadness.

"Yes, indeed; why not?" was Mishuief's hasty reply. He was determined to cheer her up if he could.

"We had a geography teacher too; tall and thin as a rail. We used to call him 'Stick of Macaroni.' To explain the solar system we all had to play different parts. He himself used to represent the Sun; I was usually the Earth; a little Jew boy the Moon, and so on. The Sun stood on tiptoe in the middle of the class-room and turned slowly round; the Earth ran round the Sun in a circle, and the Moon simply flew round the Earth as hard as ever it could. At first it was all right, but very soon we bumped against each other, and then a world-catastrophe ensued. The Moon ran into the Earth, Mars hit his head against Jupiter's stomach, so this majestic planet abruptly sat down on the Sun, producing universal chaos!"

Niurotschka tossed back her head and her silvery laugh was a joy to hear. Mishuief found it so delightful that he continued to recount all sorts of nonsensical tales, just

as they came into his head. They only seemed funny because he told them in such a droll way. The girl now laughed incessantly, and the old General simply wept with merriment, while passers-by looked back at such a noisy trio.

"I once knew a deacon at Samara. He used to drink like a fish. One day somebody came to consult him about a religious matter. The deaconess opened the door and said mysteriously:

"'The Holy Father cannot see you.'

"'Why not? Is he full of the Spirit?'

"'Yes, yes, quite full."

"'Oh! indeed!' said the visitor sympathetically, and departed."

"Full of the Spirit!" Niurotschka burst out laughing; and, as she looked Mishuief straight in the face, her eyes seemed to say that she hoped he would cap that story with one much more absurd.

The General, however, shambled along behind them and said nothing. All at once he had become taciturn, and looked depressed. Mishuief's unexpected gaiety and frankness almost alarmed him. The fear within him was, so far, vague, indefinite; merely shy, helpless, bird-like fear for his pure, sweet child.

"For rich fellows like this one," he thought, "why, it would be a mere nothing!"

The conception of what Mishuief might be willing to arrange with regard to his little daughter became gradually clearer, yet the thought was one too horrible to harbour.

"Niurotschka! It's time to go home!" he said awkwardly.

"It's not late, Daddy."

The General in confusion muttered something to himself. His little face flushed; his eyes had a vacant, dazed look. When Mishuief observed this, he instinctively divined what was in the other's inmost thoughts. Something of the old bitterness surged up within him, and then, like a flash, came the suggestion: "Give them money and send her to the High School." In an instant an image of this girl in her virginal innocence rose up before

him, ripe and trembling, in the supreme moment of initiation and surrender. The vision smote his brain like a hot wave.

The girl looked up and made some remark.

"Yes, yes," replied Mishuief, recovering himself. Eager to allay the General's secret anxiety, of which instinctively he was aware, Mishuief endeavoured to show him how just and friendly and straightforward he was.

"He's every right to be afraid of me," he thought. "But I don't see that it's my fault, either. Anybody else in my place would do just the same. Who could help it?"

Again the fleshly thought assailed him, and though, by an effort he put it aside, he was sadly conscious of fighting against a force that he could never resist.

"How lucky you are!" cried Niurotschka, naïvely, after he had recounted other incidents of his past life. "You can travel everywhere and see everything. This is our first visit to Yalta, and to us it's like being in Paradise."

"There's no particular luck in that," replied Mishuief. "One can live anywhere. There are folk living at the North Pole, or at Kamskatka, in the Sahara Desert, or the Pinski marshes; and those who live there, even those can manage to invest life with a certain poetry. One can live without palms, without warmth, without vast cities. Such things don't really signify. Only one thing there is that man cannot do without—his fellow-creatures. In solitude man becomes dull and weak and useless."

"Oh! but I think that I could even live in a desert, if there were flowers there, and birds, and the sea——"

"Yes, very likely," said Mishuief with a smile, "but human beings like ourselves are endowed with complex and profound feelings. That these feelings may thrive, it is necessary that our surroundings should be equally complex and sensitive. Trees, and sky, and sea cannot alone suffice to appease the human soul. Though we may travel much, and view many sights——"

"Yes, but you can always be surrounded by as many

people as you like. You are able to do so much good," said Niurotschka timidly.

Mishuief's face changed. It wore a hard, cynical look.

"Ah!" he said bitterly, "good! But if people only come to you because of that good. . . ."

"Oh! but everybody wouldn't?" rejoined Niurotschka sympathetically.

Mishuief was silent. He was annoyed with himself at having let a girl see what was in his mind; but, after a pause, he said:

"Perhaps everybody wouldn't, yet, as most of them only come to get money, one is apt to disbelieve in the sincerity of anybody's motives, and to suspect them. It even makes one feel inclined to be brutal."

Mishuief's voice trembled, and he bit his lip. If for a moment he had felt kindly disposed, his calmer reason now prevailed. After all, this retired General and his school-girl daughter, who were they? Persons of no importance, to be bought with a price. He regretted this glimpse that he had given them of his inner self. So he abruptly turned the subject, and began to talk of trivial matters. His change of mood did not pass unnoticed by Niurotschka. Even her father had perceived it; and he made ineffectual attempts to enliven the conversation.

When they had reached the end of the Promenade a painful weariness oppressed them; they felt that it was time to separate. Witless and irresolute, the old General could not bring himself to go, but shuffled along, babbling meanwhile of the weather, the sea, and Yalta life. Without looking up, Mishuief occasionally answered:

"Oh! yes, quite so! . . ."

"You see, Feodor Ivanovitch . . ." began the General, "you see—" His daughter just then pulled his coat-sleeve and said firmly:

"Daddy, it is time to go home. I am getting cold."

"Yes, yes, girlie, we'll go at once," replied her father.

"Good-bye, Feodor Ivanovitch! *au revoir!*"

Still he lingered, after much shaking of hands, as if he felt that there had been an omission of some kind. Pale and silent, Niurotschka could only wait. She felt sorry

for them all—sorry, too, that this bright, pleasant little episode had come to an end. Indeed, she could hardly keep back her tears. As they were going, however, she laughed at some final *bêtise* of her father's, and then said clearly, and with feeling:

"Feodor Ivanovitch, we should be so pleased if you would come and see us."

"Thank you very much," replied Mishuief coolly.

Niurotschka blushed, looking sad and perplexed.

All the way home she was silent, listening to the grating sound of the gravel under her feet. To her it was as if happiness of some kind had come to an end, and for Mishuief her sympathy now increased.

IV

Slowly, languidly, Mishuief walked on, till he reached the end of the esplanade. Then he stopped and turned back. Words would have failed him to express all that was then passing through his mind. To no human being could the thoughts that troubled him have been told. It seemed to him that the sound of his heavy footsteps echoed not only on the broad quay but likewise on the roadway of his life, recording, though for no reason, his advance along a dead, useless path.

"It is time to die!" thought Mishuief, with a grim smile.

In a moment he felt light of heart. It was as if this thought had dispelled the gloom that oppressed him, for now he was conscious of nothing but a vast illimitable void. It was this spiritual sense of boundless space that for a moment affected the physical part of him, detaching him from Mishuief, the dull, sad, worn-out man. Yet it lasted but an instant, vanishing like a spark in the gloom. A sudden impulse seized him to fling himself, sobbing, upon the ground, and lie there, face downwards.

"What is the matter with me? Am I ill?" he asked himself in despair. "I possess all that any man needs—far more, indeed. To have even a hundredth part of what is mine is the fondly cherished dream of many of my contemporaries. What is it that I need? I, who have everything?" Vividly there passed before his mental sight a pageant of beautiful women, shining lakes and cities, pictures, theatres, horses, motor-cars—an entire world, full of light and colour, of movement and luxury. Then the vision faded, and seemed like tinsel that had lost its glitter.

"Not that! Oh! no, not that! . . . Then, what is it?"

Thus he vaguely questioned his inmost self, as he walked along once more to the end of the esplanade. As he turned round again the brilliantly lighted windows of a

café opposite attracted his notice, and he crossed the road.

"I feel rather slack," he thought. "Perhaps a drink may do me good."

Directly he had opened the heavy door and the porter had helped him to remove his overcoat, a confused sound of voices, laughter, and jingling glasses greeted his ear from all sides. The noise was almost deafening after the silence of the night. He was instantly recognized. Here and there amid the racket his name was to be heard, mentioned hurriedly, almost as a caution. Feminine glances were eagerly levelled at him as he lounged up the room between rows of tables. Near the buffet he was hailed by an acquaintance of his. It was Opaloff, an author from Moscow.

"Feodor Ivanovitch!" he exclaimed, rising hastily, with evident pleasure. He had delicate features and small eyes like those of a Japanese doll.

"Feodor Ivanovitch! Come and sit next to us!" he said, smiling genially. "Waiter, bring us a chair!"

Three men were seated at the table: the two writers whom Mishuief had met that morning and a bloated, bald, somewhat unsavoury-looking person in extremely tight linen trousers and a waistcoat of a truly outrageous type.

"I don't think you know each other," said Opaloff, as the others all bowed slightly to Mishuief.

"Tchetyriof . . . Marussin . . . Podgurski. . . ."

"Ex-author," added the bloated individual, in a tom-fool's voice which, however, might have been his usual one.

Mishuief briefly stated his name, a form of introduction that to him was always distasteful, for it seemed childish to repeat a name that every one already knew. In this case it was unavoidable, yet none the less annoying.

"Every one knows who you are, Feodor Ivanovitch," laughed Opaloff, and one could hardly tell if the words were spoken good-humouredly or in irony.

Mishuief's only answer was a faint smile. Even this

vexed him, as he feared that it might seem to acknowledge or deny the fact that everybody knew him.

The waiter hastily brought a chair, when Mishuief sat down, leaning his massive arms on the table and glancing at the adjoining one where three portly ladies in fine attire sat with a couple of smart young officers. There was a moment of painful silence. Opaloff stared at Mishuief with kindly curiosity, much as if a Polar bear had suddenly sat down next to him. Podgurski, who looked like a bundle of soiled linen in his tight trousers and sail-cloth jacket, also fixed his mean little eyes upon the newcomer. They had in them a look of impudence and greed. Tchetyriof and Marussin drank their beer in silence, and appeared not to notice Mishuief. The latter observed that Marussin's feeble, slender hands trembled continually and he recollected having heard that he was consumptive. He remarked the strange transparent look in his eyes, resembling the soft light in an April sky. Perhaps, so Mishuief thought, he might be a most unhappy man, yet good and true. He began to feel genuine pity for him.

Louder and louder grew the din in the café, as laughter, shouts, and the rattle of glasses were heard above the hum of voices. Sometimes a chair fell down with a crash, or a teaspoon was heard tapping impatiently against the rim of a glass, amid peals of shrill feminine laughter. Waiters with napkins hurried past. The light sparkled on glass and coloured bottles, as on the splendid jewellery that adorned soft necks and bosoms. Alone through the broad windows the dark night, unmoved, looked on.

"Why are you all alone? Where is Maria Sergeievna?" asked Opaloff, and from the tone of his voice one could perceive that her name suggested to him an ideal instance of feminine frailty.

Mishuief knew that for all men Maria Sergeievna had a charm both potent and disquieting and that, when they alluded to her, it was with a certain subtlety of tone. At one time it flattered him to note how fruitlessly all men were excited by this woman. Yet what latterly galled him was the thought that they had only begun to

speak of her as they did after her intimacy with him had become an open secret. She had been just as beautiful before, though at that time purity constituted her special charm. Now, by his touch, that purity was sullied, and she stood unmasked before men, a degraded creature to whom all could have access.

"She has gone to Semeïd," replied Mishuief curtly.

"Ah! Then I must have met them! With Parkhomenko, I think?"

Opaloff appeared delighted, and Mishuief at once divined the reason for this. Opaloff, so he thought, must have felt certain that sooner or later Maria would pass into Parkhomenko's keeping. Now he was more than ever convinced that all was in readiness for the transfer, as her lover Mishuief figured at present on the retired list.

"That is what he imagines," thought Mishuief.

"Was that Parkhomenko?" asked Podgurski suddenly.

"Yes, yes, that was he," replied Opaloff, as his Japanese eyes twinkled.

"Do you know him?" continued Podgurski. "I wish that you would introduce me to him. I want to see him about a business matter."

"Want to borrow a bit, probably! On the non-repayment system, eh?" asked Opaloff with a laugh.

"What if I do? Do you think he wouldn't part?"

"I am sure that he wouldn't," said Mishuief.

"Well, what about you? Would you fork out anything?" asked Podgurski, turning suddenly to Mishuief.

There was something so frankly impudent in the speaker's tone that Mishuief for a while remained silent.

"Perhaps," he said at last, with a smile.

"All right, then, please give me twenty-five roubles, will you?" Mishuief looked gravely into Podgurski's eyes, and after a moment's reflection he smiled again, and handed him a twenty-five rouble note across the table.

The genuine quality of such insolence was what pleased him. Podgurski had hardly expected to get anything,

had indeed displayed no special eagerness, but, on seeing the money, his eyes glistened. Taking the note, he calmly thrust it into one of the pockets of his greasy waistcoat, saying :

" Thanks ! "

Mishuief noticed how the gentle-eyed Marussin strove to repress a smile as he glanced furtively at Podgurski for an instant. His companion, Tchetyriof, affected to see nothing, but looked away across the room.

" Well, you're a cheeky fellow, 'pon my word ! " exclaimed Opaloff. From the look in his eyes one could see that he also had thought of borrowing money from Mishuief, but, alas, too late.

" Damned if I care ! " replied Podgurski unabashed. " I'm a cheeky fellow, and you're a journalist, and he's a millionaire ; but which of us is the worst off, I'm hanged if I can tell ! "

At this the others all laughed ; even the sullen Tchetyriof smiled, at which Mishuief was surprised.

" I say, do you know what ? " continued Podgurski, as if about to impart some delightful news, " I vote you stand us all a champagne supper, eh ? Will you ? "

Mishuief shrugged his huge shoulders. This sly youth and his barefaced method of fleecing an absolute stranger amused him.

" Very well," he said : " only you must order everything yourself."

" Good ! Capital ! " cried Podgurski. " Waiter ! " he yelled, never caring that his behaviour caused every one to look round. The manager came forward, a lean old man, with grey whiskers, who had long kept near Mishuief, like some hound lying in wait. He tripped along, rubbing his hands and smiling blandly. Podgurski at once proceeded to order supper, just as if all his life he had been used to the costliest food. Mishuief watched him in astonishment. Deft as a conjuror, Podgurski, while giving elaborate directions as to the cooking, noticed this and said, " My tastes are those of a millionaire, as you see ! You think that you're the only person that knows how to eat and drink ! "

"And do you know, then, what millionaires think?" asked Mishuief with unconscious hauteur.

"Of course I do. I know everything. When I was a famous author——"

At this the others laughed, but Podgurski paid no attention. "I've come across millionaires, just as I've met other chaps. I can see through them, too, right through them, like a glass of vodka."

Champagne was brought. With it came an odour of ice, and a sense of coolness, as if the doors of a cellar had been opened. Stroking his luxuriant whiskers, the old manager strove as far as possible to comply with Podgurski's unreasonable demands.

The latter grew intensely excited; his scanty hair seemed to stand on end; his bold, greedy eyes shone, and the absurd waistcoat looked even more grotesque. As he joked, and drank, and shouted, it was evident that, if not exactly happy, Podgurski was at any rate enjoying an excellent meal. Mishuief watched him, intensely amused to see that this fine gentleman cared not a jot for millionaires, or for men-of-letters, or anything else in the whole world. He had got his champagne, his cigars, and his jokes; nothing else was of importance to him except his own personal wants.

Tchetyriof and Marussin ate but little, and drank nothing at all. Nor did they speak, except to exchange a word or two with each other, listening attentively, as artists would, to all that was going on. It was obviously their intention to ignore Mishuief altogether, and this distressed him. Opaloff, on the other hand, was extremely obsequious, and all the while did his utmost to engage him in conversation. His jokes and desultory remarks were all made with a wish to please the millionaire.

At an adjoining table sat a robust lady in a remarkably smart *decolleté* gown.

"Have you ever noticed, Feodor Ivanovitch," said Opaloff, "how a woman's skin in artificial light, such as that of a restaurant, always looks wet?"

"Wrong again!" broke in Podgurski, who had noticed Opaloff's furtive attempts to please, and now sought

to make him look ridiculous. "Restaurant light has got nothing to do with it."

"Oh! but it has; and I'll tell you why. The light in restaurants is always saturated with moisture."

"It is simply perspiration," said Podgurski with authority. "But one thing's certain: wherever there's a lot of women there's a smell of scent, and powder, and stale flesh."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Mishuief smiling.

"Yes, yes; you may be right," said Tchetyriof.

The lady at the next table now got up, letting her feather boa fall. The view of her exuberant figure was not missed by Opaloff, who said to Podgurski, while looking at Mishuief, "I'll tell you something else. When a woman suddenly drops a feather boa her whole back for a moment seems to be stark naked."

"Not so bad!" said Podgurski in a tone of approval. "You ought to tell that to Parkhomenko. I dare say he would pay you for a thing of that sort."

"I think you said just now that you didn't know Parkhomenko," observed Marussin, looking embarrassed.

"Did I? Very likely. If so, I simply told a lie," rejoined Podgurski coolly.

Marussin's confusion became so apparent that it was as if he, and not Podgurski, had been caught telling a lie. Mishuief's kindly feeling for him increased and he thought what a good fellow he was.

"Oh! I've known Parkhomenko for ever so long; knew him in Moscow," continued Podgurski. "Nobody knows him better than myself. I've got him—here!"

So saying, Podgurski held out his broad, greasy hand. The movement of it, with its stumpy fingers and dirty nails, expressed such tenacity and greed that they all involuntarily looked at it. Even Mishuief felt almost afraid.

"While old Parkhomenko was alive he used to be very strict with his son. He often beat him and always kept him short. He would tap on the counter with a couple of twenty-copeck pieces, and say, 'Take this, and be off!' So at that time Pashka was always trying to raise money

—with forged bills, of course—and that's how I happened to run across him. Ah! I could tell you a lot about some of his little tricks! One little bit of paper is all I want; just one; and then I'll bleed him till he squeals like a pig!"

"Is that really necessary?" asked Marussin, blinking his eyes in a vain effort to avoid looking at the speaker.

"Ah! Nicolai Nicolaievitch, you don't know the chap as I do! He's the vilest of the vile! A reptile full of venom! Whoever sets his heel on it deserves to have forty sins forgiven him. Baser than three kings and four archbishops put together! And cruel! My word! He had read somewhere that out in Africa the officers used to nail nigger women to boards and then shoot at them with their revolvers for a wager. Well, what do you think? His one idea is to imitate them, and crucify a woman! And some day he'll do it, too! When his father lay dying and was unable to utter a word, this Pashka Parkhomenko burst into the bedroom and seized the old man by the beard:

"'Vulture!' he cried, 'this is the reward for your life of theft.'

"And when he came into his fortune he was fifty times worse than the old boy. And isn't he mean? Dirty beast! Millionaires only exist in order that other folk may drink champagne at their expense, but this brute's not even good for a bottle of fizz!"

"Then you think that millionaires are not good for anything else?" asked Tchetyriof, apparently in jest, though every one, including Mishuief, at once felt that it was a hit at him.

"Of course I do, damn it all!" replied Podgurski, who had grasped the other's meaning and evidently wanted to provoke a scene.

Here Opaloff interposed.

"And what is your opinion of Parkhomenko?" he said, turning to Mishuief.

For a moment the latter did not reply. The unmistakable hatred in Tchetyriof's voice pained him, saddened him; for Tchetyriof, the poet, he both liked and esteemed.

It was depressing to feel suddenly helpless and surrounded by enemies.

"It seems to me," he said, as he gazed downwards at his hands on the table, "that you are in error. A man may be a millionaire and yet be of more use than merely to soak others in champagne."

Tchetyriof smiled slightly and looked at him with an expression of stubborn hatred. Mishuief trembled, and his face grew flushed.

"You seem to be offended," said Podgurski.

"No, I am not offended," replied Mishuief; "and I did not say that because I am myself a millionaire. Parkhomenko is an exception. He is a degenerate, and degenerates are to be found in all classes of society. I certainly think that a man may be like this or like that quite apart from the gold that he carries in his pockets."

"I quite agree!" exclaimed Opaloff.

"Parkhomenko is no degenerate," said Tchetyriof coldly. "In a *milieu* where money is supreme, and where for money everything can be bought or sold, Parkhomenko and such as he have their legitimate place. A real millionaire ought to be like that. If there are exceptions, it is they who after their fashion have degenerated, and count as examples of human paradoxes."

There was such hatred underlying this speech that Marussin looked up and blushed, while Opaloff fidgeted nervously on his chair.

"Why should that be?" asked Mishuief, and there was a certain sadness in his voice. "Take me, for instance—"

"I am not speaking of you," was Tchetyriof's curt rejoinder.

"Yes, but suppose you were speaking of me?" said Mishuief gently.

"Present company, you know, is always excepted, my dear Feodor Ivanovitch!" said Opaloff interposing.

"No, but why should it be?" continued Mishuief, lowering his voice even more. "It would be extremely interesting to me to have the opinion of Sergei Maximovitch, whom, as a poet, I most cordially appreciate."

It was now Tchetyriof who turned red.

Without looking at him Mishuief knew that his opponent did not believe him, and only thought he was trying to be conciliatory. This distressed him the more. He regarded Tchetyriof as a poet of fine calibre, and could not conceive why this thoughtful, truth-loving man, who scarcely knew him, should already hate and insult him. Controlling himself with an effort, he continued in the same undertone :

" I honestly mean what I say."

Marussin was touched at the sight of this big, strong, experienced man of the world speaking with such gentleness to those who repulsed him. He even felt mildly annoyed at Tchetyriof's attitude.

" What Sergei Maximovitch probably wishes to point out," he said, blushing, and opening his kind eyes, " is that the accumulation of gigantic wealth in the hands of one man seems absurd."

" Now for a dose of Socialism ! " sneered Podgurski.

" The millionaire himself, as he lives and moves, is to my mind an absurdity," was Tchetyriof's harsh rejoinder.

" What can the unfortunate millionaires have been doing to you, I wonder ? " asked Opaloff, who again sought to turn the current of talk into a calmer channel.

But this interruption roused Mishuief.

" I must ask you, Sergei Maximovitch, to be more explicit," he said coolly but firmly.

" How can I be more explicit ? " was the glum rejoinder. " I have said what I think. I consider the life of a man in whose hands immense power is placed, having no right to it, as nothing if not absurd. You cannot but feel that such a man in himself is less even than a cypher, and that, without his millions, he would be of no earthly use to anybody. Therefore the only logical inference is that he must either remain an absolute nonentity, or else use this immense power to good purpose. Yet how can it be utilized ? What can wealth, enormous wealth, procure ? Luxury, violence, debauchery. Under such conditions it would be extraordinary to assume that a man would readily renounce all that happens to be

placed so pleasantly in his way. A rich man finds enjoyment in debauchery, violence and despotism."

"But surely not in that alone? Look at Tretiakoff,* for instance!" was Mishuief's gentle remonstrance.

"And what was Tretiakoff, pray?" interposed Tchetyriof bluntly. "A despot, just like all the others. A man who spent his whole life in forcing art to follow the particular direction approved by himself, and who was responsible for that detestable art-movement in Russia which arrested the healthy progress of our national art for at least a dozen years."

Tchetyriof's feeble but penetrating voice was only just audible above the general noise; it sounded forced and angry.

"It is one of two things; either the millionaire, if he takes the path that suits his position, must feed upon his fellows, destroying life by battening thereon like a bloated maggot in manure, or he must remain that which he is already, an insignificant appendage to his millions."

"But cannot the millionaire be himself a man of talent—a poet, a painter, a sculptor?" asked Opaloff.

"Certainly he can," replied Tchetyriof, shrugging his shoulders. "But in order that such talent may develop and bear fruit, he must know what it is to struggle and to endure. What can a man know of suffering when, without the least effort, he can attain the choicest pleasures of life? The thing's absurd!"

"Feodor Ivanovitch," said the manager, who had noiselessly approached, "you are wanted at the telephone."

Tchetyriof suddenly stopped speaking, and his eyes appeared shrunken, as if in thought he were continuing his vehement speech.

"What?" said Mishuief, who at first did not understand.

He looked pale and sad, and his eyes expressed spiritual pain.

* A wealthy Moscow merchant, the founder of one of the largest and best art galleries in Russia, to which the public has free access.

"M. Parkhomenko would like to speak to you on the telephone, sir."

"Yes, much of what you say may be right," replied Mishuief, without looking at Tchetyriof, "and I quite understand your meaning, though you express it somewhat brutally, I think. Excuse me, gentlemen, I shall be back in a moment."

So saying he followed the manager, and as he pushed past the rows of tables he was watched by curious eyes.

Parkhomenko invited him to come to a restaurant outside the town. A singer of *chansonnettes*, named Emma, whom Mishuief knew slightly, was to be there.

"And where is Maria Sergeievna?" asked Mishuief mechanically.

"She has gone home in the car," was the reply.

"Good."

It was dark and airless in the telephone-box. Mishuief shut his eyes and leant against the wall. That feeble voice, so full of hate, still rang in his ears.

"Yes; he may be right, after all. . . . But why such bitter hatred? Isn't he aware of that?"

When Mishuief returned to the table Tchetyriof and Marussin were just about to go.

"Ah! you are going?" he asked, with an effort.

"Yes."

"Perhaps we shall meet again," he said, as they shook hands.

"Perhaps," was Tchetyriof's cold reply, which seemed a reiterated expression of implacable hate.

Mishuief hastily glanced at Marussin's face, which wore a look of perplexity; the frank, gentle eyes were fixed on something far away.

A wave of conflicting emotions surged up within Mishuief; anguish, fury, and a sudden burning desire to do some wild, wicked deed, just to show them that he was yet stronger than they, and that he could trample on them like weeds, if he wished. But the impulse was a momentary one; and, as he watched the two depart, his countenance grew pale and strange as that of a man marked out for death.

V

BARE-shouldered, with bosom dilated, her hat at a saucy angle, and flounces fluttering provocatively, a woman leapt into the room.

The men had been drinking heavily. In this heated air, reeking of cigar-smoke, wine and liqueurs, they were wrought to such a pitch that a woman's presence seemed necessary to create a diversion, and to break the monotony of their night's debauch.

Her entrance was the signal for a display of frenzied excitement. Red-faced Parkhomenko with blood-shot eyes and moist moustache rushed towards her. Upsetting a chair, he seized her by her slender waist and lifted her on to the table. A bottle was knocked over, and a wine-glass fell to the floor in fragments.

"Oh! don't! You'll let me fall!" she screamed in her excited, high-pitched voice, which roused the revellers to madder merriment.

"Hurrah!" cried Parkhomenko, "Lovely woman for ever! Give her some wine! She shall make up for lost time!"

In a dense crowd they all stood round her, as with shining eyes and twitching fingers they longed to touch and taste. Parkhomenko held a goblet of yellow champagne to her laughing, scarlet lips; Opaloff, his grey face showing patches of dusky red, kissed her bare arm above her glove; and a fat financier with a wet, gaping mouth, gurgled and slobbered in ruttish glee. It was as though, gibbering and whining, they were all ready to fall upon this dainty flesh and tear it to shreds.

Only Podgurski, unconcerned, continued to drink his liqueur, while Mishuief lounged on the sofa and looked about him, dull-eyed and drowsy.

The others carried the woman to the couch, and there deposited her, probably hurting her somewhat in doing this. But she only laughed loudly, administering little slaps to hands that constantly touched her with shameless zest.

"Gently, sirs, if you please! Hands off! Where's the champagne?" she cried. "I mean to have a good old drink, after my success. You should have seen what a reception I had to-night! An absolute *furore!*"

And she merrily sang a snatch from one of her latest ditties.

Opaloff brought her wine, and suddenly switched on an electric pocket-lamp underneath the wine-glass. The foaming wine sparkled like liquid gold, and its radiance was reflected in the woman's laughing eyes with fantastic and charming effect:

"Oh! how splendid! Again! Do it again, dear!" she cried.

Opaloff was about to turn on the light again when Parkhomenko snatched the lamp out of his hand and flashed the white dazzling ray across her eyes. They had the yellow luminosity of a cat's. At first she shut them tightly, as if the light hurt her; then she laughed. They could all see how painted she was; the bistre on her eyelashes, and the wrinkles which in so young a woman were deplorable proofs of youth on the wane. Even Podgurski and Opaloff were touched to something akin to pity. As if by accident Parkhomenko caught his foot in her lace wrapper and tore it.

"Good gracious! what are you doing?" she cried in alarm.

Parkhomenko pretended to trip up, and this time made a bigger rent in the lace, so that her dainty leg was exposed to view. His face with its black moustache expressed cat-like cruelty.

"Stop it! Don't!" she screamed, angry and afraid.

Opaloff appeared distressed, but hovered round the couch, and his face might have been that of a grinning Japanese doll. Podgurski appeared uninterested in the proceedings, yet at the very moment when Mishuief, much against his will, was going to interfere, he suddenly said.

"Pavel Alexcievitch, stop that, please!"

Parkhomenko was literally quivering with excitement. He pretended to adjust the girl's dress, but in reality his moist hands were fondling her shapely form. She

laughed hysterically, almost in tears because her smart dress had been spoilt.

"Stop that! What are you doing?" exclaimed Podgurski once more.

"Do leave her alone, Pavel Alexeievitch!" said Mishuief, supporting him.

But Parkhomenko either could not or would not hear. His red face with its mad, cruel, lustful look was horrible to behold.

"Do you hear what I say? Hands off!" said Podgurski, in a lower, more threatening tone. Mishuief looked round at him in astonishment, expecting Parkhomenko to reply. The latter, however, said nothing, though he momentarily ceased to molest the girl, looking evidently scared.

"We'll soon mend that. Just give me a couple of pins," said Opaloff, the mediator, turning good-naturedly to the *chanteuse*, who was holding together the remnants of her lace wrapper.

"How proper we are, all of a sudden!" sneered Parkhomenko, as, like a dog, he slunk away; "One can't even have a bit of fun."

"There's a limit to everything," said Mishuief coldly.

Parkhomenko for a moment was thoroughly disconcerted, for he could see that his "bit of fun" had amused no one. Yet he soon became unnaturally vivacious, and turning to Emma, exclaimed:

"Oh! what's the good of pins? Let me do it, Opaloff; I know a better way than that!"

Thereupon he produced two bank-notes of one hundred roubles each, which he thrust into the girl's bodice.

"Here, Emmy dear! Don't be angry!"

Emma at once became quiet and her eyes sparkled. Suddenly she kissed Parkhomenko on his black moist moustache.

"Oh! I say, it *is* good of you!" she exclaimed, and one could hardly tell if she honestly thought so or not.

"Good, indeed!" said Podgurski in a mocking voice. "First he tears your dress, and then he gives you money! Splendid fellow!"

It looked as if, in another minute, he would rush at Parkhomenko and pommel his rotund, self-satisfied face.

"Pretty way to behave!" he continued, "to tear people's clothes off their backs, and then chuck money about! It's like some clown at a fair!" His deliberately insulting tone was unmistakable. "Why don't you smear the waiters' noses with mustard? It would be just as funny. Or you might shove your head through a mirror?"

Parkhomenko smiled and winced. Mishuief was surprised to note his look of impotent fury; it reminded him of some little cur that would like to bite, but durst not.

Podgurski went on in the same strain of banter. He suggested that Parkhomenko should make a tour through the town in four state carriages; told him he ought to try a champagne bath; or drive through a wall, after the manner of a well-known Moscow merchant. At all this Parkhomenko laughed uneasily, unnaturally. It was plain that, though furious, he felt afraid.

How did you manage to tackle him like that?" whispered Opaloff.

"Easily enough!" was the contemptuous answer. "These gentlemen think that with their wealth they may do anything. But if they happen to run up against a fellow who doesn't care a damn for their money-bags, they very soon knuckle under!"

The fat Jew financier with such tact as he possessed now sought to smooth matters over, and began to relate anecdotes concerning famous millionaires and their eccentric achievements. One or two of his tales proved to be quite amusing, so that the talk soon became general, and at last Parkhomenko, wrought to a pitch of enthusiasm, exclaimed with flashing eyes:

"Ah! but there's nothing in all that! I've got a brilliant idea. How would it be to harness half a dozen ballet-girls to a landau—just as they are, you know, in their muslin skirts and tights—and then drive through the Morskaia! Oh! it would be awfully *chic!*"

"How silly!" said Emma peevishly." They would never make themselves so ridiculous!"

"Oh! wouldn't they, though? For a couple of thousand one could get a whole team of stockbrokers!"

At this the fat financier burst out laughing, and fairly slobbered at the mouth.

"That *would* be really too funny! Ha! Ha!"

"Yes, of course it would!" cried Parkhomenko in his excitement. "Imagine the nice little pink legs trotting along, and the bare necks that one could touch up now and again with the whip! It only wants a little working out and the effect would be jolly fine!"

Mishuief still sat on the couch and hardly drank anything. In his eyes there was the same look of weariness and disgust. Yet he seemed unable to move, but sat there stolidly, feeling afraid to be alone lest he should think, lest he should long for something mysterious and inconceivable. Almost deafened though he was by their shouts and laughter, every word and every movement served to increase his disgust.

"That tradesman's son," he thought to himself, "who looks like a sheep, or some big tom-cat teasing a mouse, and who finds enjoyment in whipping naked ballet-girls, and in maltreating a poor *cocotte;* that fat financier, perpetually smacking his lips, as if he were chewing roubles; and Opaloff, a man of real talent, crushing all his finer artistic instincts underfoot in order to curry favour with Plutocracy! "How appalling to think that men are really like that, and that he must pass his life among them for many years to come! He remembered Marussin and Tchetyriof, and sadly pictured to himself their remote, implacable souls, containing that something within them which he could not understand. It roused once more his bitter resentment. Only for Podgurski sitting there, drinking and smoking, did he feel a certain passing sympathy." Whatever he may be, at least he wasn't afraid to protect poor Emma. . . ."

It was now late. They had all drunk to excess, and could shout and laugh no more. Their fatigue showed itself in a certain nervous restlessness. Emma looked flushed, expectant; in her eyes, yellow as a cat's, there was no trace of shame. She seated herself on the men's

knees, danced the *matchiche*, pinched their arms, and pressed her nude shoulders nearer to their lips. The men by degrees became mad. Only Mishuief and Podgurski, the latter drinking on, unmoved, kept their seats. The others crowded round Emma, and it was evident that to one of them she would very soon fall as his prey. . . .

"These wretched, wretched men!" thought Mishuief; and in that moment he felt that he himself was the most wretched of them, and the most forlorn. . . .

Suddenly Parkhomenko sprang on to a chair and cried:

"Look here, gentlemen! There are three of us. . . ."

"Five!" was Podgurski's mocking correction.

"And only one woman! . . . I propose that we draw lots for her!"

"For shame!" cried Emma, pretending to be shocked.

"Or else . . . no, we won't draw lots. We'll have an auction! That'll be great sport. The highest bidder to be the purchaser!"

"Splendid idea!" assented the financier.

"Eh? What? Podgurski, you shall be the auctioneer! Now then, Emma, get up on this chair. . . . Down with your bodice! We must see what we're buying!"

"Have I got to do that?" cried the girl giggling, as if she had been splashed with cold water.

"Yes, yes, there's no help for it!" shouted Parkhomenko. "It's to be a sale by auction, so don't make any fuss!"

* * * *

"Now then," cried Podgurski, as with a knife he tapped the rim of a glass, "a woman named Emma is put up for sale in public auction to the highest bidder. The property may be viewed and even handled by intending purchasers. Well, gentlemen, shall we say three hundred roubles for a start? Who will bid more?"

"Four hundred!" cried Parkhomenko, raising his glass.

"All right, then," said the financier, "let's call it five hundred."

There was a look of greed and lust in his eyes, delighted

though he seemed to be. It was not lost on Podgurski, who laughed.

"Five hundred," he said. "Who bids more? . . . Going . . ."

Opaloff's red perspiring face wore a vacuous smile. A mad idea darted through his brain: to borrow the money from somewhere. Simultaneously, like a flash, came the thought of his hotel-bill to be paid on the following day, the cost of the return journey to Moscow, and his wife's pale, sulky face. But, before his eyes, nude and splendid, stood the glorious woman that he desired.

"Borrow it, somehow . . . might get it, later on . . ." he thought, yet all the while it was quite clear to him that he could not possibly get money from anybody, that he would have to travel home, and that he would never dare to risk it.

So his handsome, refined features were distorted by a foolish smile.

Mishuief himself was conscious that he could not remain uninfluenced by the amazing proceedings. His wide nostrils became dilated as he watched the glowing faces and glanced threateningly at Emma. Suddenly he thought:

"How would it be to snap her up under their very noses?" and his eyes flashed. The sense of his own power intoxicated him.

"Be quick, gentlemen; it's cold," said Emma shivering.

"Six hundred!" exclaimed Parkhomenko enraptured.

"Six hundred!" repeated Podgurski. "Any more bids?"

Something strangely tormenting now surged up in Mishuief's mind, a dark, brutal desire that briefly strove with his own disgust and contempt for his surroundings and for himself. It was this something that proved victorious.

"Going . . . going . . ."

Parkhomenko leapt towards Emma, whose attitude was already one of submission.

"Seven hundred," said Mishuief gently. A look of brute force unbridled at last, darkened and disfigured his face. Parkhomenko was thunderstruck.

"Going . . . going . . . going—gone! cried Podgurski.

Emma laughed hysterically. But there were tears in her painted eyes, tears of shame which to herself, perhaps, were incomprehensible.

VI

It was already dawn, and from the horizon a delicate iridescent light broke on the dreaming town. Night, growing pale, retreated timorously to the hills; the shadows grew grey; everything appeared transparent, even the distant hills lay wreathed in opal mist like clouds at sunrise.

The sound of hoofs was heard as a droshky rattled along through the deserted streets leading to the villa where Emma lived.

Mishuief was still trembling from the emotion which had suddenly seized him. The woman that had been sold was entirely in his hands. Her large eyes had a strange, startled look in the grey dawn. In fact, there was something strange about her whole personality. Just as within the melody of a dance, flashy and obvious though it be, there sometimes lurks a shy, tremulous note of sorrow, so in this half-nude, painted *cocotte* another personality at times furtively revealed itself, being that of a miserable, dejected woman. Thus, all the while she laughed, drank, danced and flirted, round the corners of her painted eyes and mouth fell the shadow of some hidden grief. It was this that gave her a certain piquancy and charm. At the restaurant, in the electric light, this strangely sad expression was hidden beneath the bold mask of the saleable *hetaira*. Now, however, when all was at an end, and she was at the disposition of the man who had bought her, the look of melancholy and weariness returned, and blended strangely with the grey, desolate mists of dawn. . . . On reaching the villa they passed through the garden filled with the scents of southern flowers. Mishuief followed Emma, who led the way to the house like some submissive slave.

"What is this that I am doing?" asked Mishuief of himself. "Is it madness? A base, cowardly act? Well, perhaps it is; yet why shouldn't I do it, if I have

the power and the will? Bestial, yes; despotic, yes, for aught I care!"

There was a touch of malicious exultation in this thought, as if he were revenging himself upon one that was fairer, purer than he, and that now he intended to thrust from him utterly.

Suddenly, in a hoarse voice, he said to Emma, "Let us stop here."

At first she did not understand, and glanced involuntarily at the turf in the shade of the rose-bushes and the shrubs. That glance he swiftly intercepted, and in a wild impulse of animal passion seized her by the hand.

"No! No! Here it's impossible!" she whispered, as her lips whitened.

As she started backwards, her cloak slipped, and the grey dawn-light touched her quivering shoulders.

"But if I wish it?" Mishuief smiled grimly.

Still she resisted and recoiled, looking round her with wild, sad eyes. There was a brief struggle, and then, suddenly, in the magical atmosphere of that garden at dawn stood a woman half nude, clad only in strips of tattered lace that, light as sea-foam, fluttered round her. Brutally, with a wild sense of mastery and of possession, he caught her by her white, supple neck and thrust her to the ground. . . .

For what ensued he felt only bitter shame and a strange, humiliating fear. All those whom he had met a few hours since—Tchetyriof, Parkhomenko, Maria Sergeievna, Marussin, Opaloff—passed swiftly before his mental vision. In Emma's eyes, as they met his, he could read disgust and helpless hatred; they recalled the look of loathing and rebuke in those of Tchetyriof. Then, as if a shadow had fallen across them, her eyes expressed terror, deference and greed. She made an effort to speak; her lips trembled; and Mishuief, seeing this, felt sudden fear. She no longer seemed human, but something pitifully repulsive. Her wicked eyes had a false, impudent look; and her lips were set in a treacherous smile. Stepping forward, she put her white arm round his neck. The

pale morning light fell on the graceful outlines of her form and was lost in the soft shadows of her bosom.

Upon Mishuief the effect was at first almost horrifying; but in another moment he felt only loathing for her and for himself. Senseless appeared to him the terrific storm that but a moment before had thus fiercely raged, and of which not a trace remained. His actual feeling was one of sheer disgust.

"Never mind," he said awkwardly, "I'll send you the money later."

Again she leaned towards him, smiling seductively, but Mishuief turned sharply round and walked away. The garden-gate creaked noisily behind him. Around him all was void and silent; only the grey-blue street lay before. He could hear the sound of her little steps, as she hurried along the gravel-path, and the rustle of her silk skirts. Then all was silent and desolate.

So, too, in Mishuief's heart, silence and desolation reigned, as the whole feverish nightmare vanished, leaving only a sense of helpless woe. Standing still for a moment in the middle of the street, he gazed at the pale blue morning sky where two pink cloudlets floated, like birds in flight to distant sunlit shores.

VII

Every evening a band played in the municipal gardens. The bandstand, resembling a huge illuminated shell, was filled with musicians that moved and swayed like strange insects. Rows of slender, graceful violin-bows slid up and down as if they were the legs of grasshoppers, and the conductor might have been mistaken for a beetle that was continually opening and shutting its wings.

The flutes piped sweetly, the violins wailed and screamed, and one grave, mournful trumpet made the final harmonies fuller, richer, and more complete.

The walks were thronged with noisy people, and the sound of shuffling feet and chattering tongues rose on the air like a wave, now appearing louder and now more faint, as it died away in the depths of the dark alleys, and then surged up again in a wild stream of laughter, shouts, and vibrant feminine voices.

A fantastic procession of smiling faces passed along in the dull blue electric light, as they suddenly arose, became fused, merged in each other, and then separated, seemingly in the tortuous mazes of a dance. As canopy they had the dark blue dome of heaven, silent, majestic, and filled with radiant southern stars.

Thus the festival progressed, brilliant, careless, brimming with life; yet it seemed to Mishuief that in all this merry throng he was but a dark blot, the seal and sign of all that is solitary and unprofitable.

It was on this day that Maria Sergeievna, looking specially charming in a new blue dress, had again gone out with Parkhomenko in his motor. All day long, like a black shadow, a grim sense of unrest had weighed upon Mishuief's mind. Maria latterly had been abnormally bright and gay, and Mishuief knew that in his absence Parkhomenko never ceased to pay assiduous court to her. He could easily imagine with what deft and impudent assurance Parkhomenko was playing his dirty game, and how he would gradually draw the noose tighter and

ever tighter. Yet Maria was still utterly fascinated by the perpetual charm of her new life, now that after long years of indigence and dulness, she had been plunged into a vortex of luxury, and so she danced unwittingly and all too carelessly the perilous dance above the abyss. Even her dresses, in which she cleverly contrived to suggest propriety heightened by daring touches of *demi-mondaine* freedom, obviously indicated the excitement which her dazzling personal charms aroused.

Probably she herself hardly gave it a thought, yet Mishuief knew that under such conditions it needed but an accident, a moonlight night, some sudden licence, an unexpected, frivolous caress, and she would then only regain her senses when all was at an end.

To Mishuief the idea seemed absurd and indeed unspeakably painful that Maria Sergeievna should give herself to a man who would only look upon her as a successful means of stimulating his jaded lust. It was utterly disgusting, and quite at variance with her charming personality. At times he rejected it as unthinkable. She was beautiful, clever, cultured, and had loved two men, both of whom were above the average. Thus, after their affection, an intrigue with this Parkhomenko, half beast, half idiot, would seem vile beyond all conception.

Yet at times he was tortured by the thought: "In what way am I better than he? I have greater intelligence, finer perceptions. Granted. But, when we began our life together, did I show her this intelligence, these finer feelings, or merely the same animal lust? Once she loved her husband, who was certainly a far more intelligent and talented man than myself; and then she gave herself to me because I could procure for her luxury and enjoyment. It was with the prospect of a new life that I seduced her. Parkhomenko achieves the same end with his impudence, his despotism. . . . She came to me without love, solely because I was wealthy; she came just as the lowest of women would have come. In her case it was worse, for she hid her mercenary motives beneath a profession of love. Could anything be more vile?"

Musing thus, Mishuief lounged along through the crowd. He walked slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on the ground, sick at heart, nursing a grief that he was powerless to define.

In one of the alleys he met the old General and his little daughter Niurotschka, who laughed her silvery laugh and tossed back her head, showing her pretty chin. While yet at a distance she had seen Mishuief, and in her quiet way gave him a droll side-glance; it was like a timid challenge, of which she herself was unconscious. Her bright, youthful face was to Mishuief as a breath of pure, fresh air, yet he only bowed and passed on.

A few days previously the General had summoned up courage sufficient to ask the millionaire for his help in order to send the girl to the Moscow University; and this help Mishuief had promised to give. The idea pleased him at first; it seemed delightful to be of assistance to this pretty little girl. Then in his troubled mind arose morbid misgivings. Perhaps the General was offering him, the millionaire, his daughter, and that she knew nothing of it seemed inconceivable. Mishuief clearly foresaw that he would meet the girl in Moscow, and that each from the very first would be sensible of their mutual relations, she feeling under an obligation to him for his generosity, and he, counting upon her gratitude. . . .

Inevitable, simple as it all seemed, it made a horrible impression on Mishuief.

"Yet why should it be so?" he asked himself. "Perhaps it will never get as far as that! Perhaps we shall just remain good friends, and I shall grow really fond of her, and in her pure life my own will become fresh and wholesome? Why do I always foresee something vile? There are other ways, other possibilities of living. Men live happily, honourably. Why is it only I who . . . ? Or have I within me some special germ of moral disease? Must all that I touch become filthy and putrid? What a nightmare! I am sick at heart; I am killing my very self by such hideous delusions!"

His features became distorted, as though a knife had pierced his heart; and a sudden dread seized him, a

dread of remaining longer in this disturbing, foolish crowd. Leaving the gardens, he entered a restaurant facing the sea, and sat down at a small table on the balcony.

"Feodor Ivanovitch, why are you sitting there, all alone?" cried a voice from the quay below, as the fat, unsavoury Podgurski approached him with a greedy look in his twinkling eyes, and wearing the same unsightly clothes.

"Good morning. I expect you find it a bit dull, eh?" Taking a seat beside him, he asked: "I say, Feodor Ivanovitch, what are we going to drink?"

Mishuief smiled. For some reason or other, in the presence of this insolent, luckless youth he felt greater freedom. There was no mistaking the predatory instincts of Podgurski. They were there, on the surface, for all to see. Yet it was also plain that his relations with Mishuief did not depend upon whether the latter would give him money or not.

Podgurski saw at once that Mishuief was bored, and honestly wished to cheer him up.

"Have you heard the latest? Opaloff won thirteen hundred roubles yesterday from Parkhomenko."

"Did he really?"

Mishuief good-humouredly appeared to be greatly interested.

"Yes; and what do you think was the first thing that he did? He went and collared Emma, and has dragged her off with him somewhere. He was in such a hurry, too, that he even left his necktie behind. He must be having a glorious time!"

"In his case, it wouldn't want much to give him a glorious time, I should say," laughed Mishuief.

"That might not be much for you, but for Opaloff, whose wife runs about in a flannel dressing-gown, and is always having babies, it's simply Paradise, full of scents and lace, and luxury. Oh! I should rather think it was!"

"I say, do you know what we'll do?" he continued in a livelier tone. "We'll go to the Casino."

"What can we do there?"

"Gamble, of course!" was the reply, as if Podgurski were proposing something extremely diverting.

"What's the good?" asked Mishuief languidly. "Too boring."

"Well, then, let us drive down to Emma's place, and see Opaloff reclining in the lap of luxury."

Mishuief did not answer, and Podgurski, who saw that his proposal was negatived, made yet another.

"What can I do for you?" he exclaimed, rubbing his forehead in perplexity. "Oh! I know! If you like I can take you to a place where. . . . You don't see such things, even in Paris. Let's go, shall we?"

"No, thank you. I really don't want to go." Mishuief's face expressed disgust.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't."

Podgurski eyed him curiously.

"I suppose it's on principle that you won't go, eh?" he sneered. "Up to the present I always thought that millionaires were never troubled by that sort of thing."

"Don't you admit, then, that millionaires may have even the most primitive sense of purity?" asked Mishuief in a graver tone than he wished, as he smiled nervously.

Podgurski eyed him once more, and at first did not speak. Then he abruptly changed the subject, told sundry droll stories, and poked fun at Parkhomenko and the Yalta public. At last he suddenly asked for a hundred roubles. Mechanically, Mishuief produced his pocket-book and handed him the money, thinking all the while of something else. As he opened it, Podgurski scrutinized the coloured edges of the bank-notes it contained, and when Mishuief laid the wallet on the table the other could not immediately take his eyes off it.

'There's one thing I can't make out," said Mishuief slowly, as if in answer to his own thoughts.

"What is it?"

Mishuief did not reply at once, but glanced sadly aside,

as if he could not say the grave thing that oppressed him.

"It's like this," he stammered, still looking downwards, "whatever I may say or I may do, nobody views it in the same way that any other person's words and deeds would be viewed. No one ever tells me that what I think or feel is wrong; their one idea is: he's a millionaire! He's got millions! If you only knew how boring that is!"

Again he smiled nervously, aware that "boring" was not the word that he wanted, but a stronger, more serious epithet.

Podgurski gazed at him, wide-eyed. He had entirely forgotten the recent conversation, and could not understand what Mishuief meant by this remark.

"Tchetyriof was right, after all," he thought. "It seems to have upset him a bit. But he's really a fool, and his own fat will choke him!"

"All that sort of thing's so unnatural," continued Mishuief, looking pained and sad. "Why do you, for instance, treat Tchetyriof, who earns a hundred times what you earn, in such a casual way, while . . ."

"Hm! Tchetyriof," replied Podgurski, "however much he earns, does it all by his brains. As long as his strength holds out he can work, but if he became ill and no longer the fashion, his position would be much what mine is now. And what sort of an income do you suppose he has! There's little difference between his way of living and mine. But a millionaire! That's something very different. Life on another scale; possibilities of quite another kind. His position, for one thing, is a peculiar one, and his relations with others are all of an exceptional nature. I really can't see what it is that worries you so!"

"It does not actually worry me, but it troubles me," replied Mishuief, feeling disinclined to say too much, and ashamed to open his heart to such a fellow as Podgurski.

The latter was silent and listened attentively.

"It's the unique position assigned to me among my

fellow-men that exasperates me," continued Mishuief reluctantly, as the other did not speak. "Why can't people admit that I am just the same sort of man as any other, that I think the same, feel the same as——"

"Perhaps I personally am of that opinion," said Podgurski, smiling, "but you can't get away from the fact that money is a huge force; and you yourself can't help utilizing it. We each of us live according to our means. We others have only ourselves to reckon with, and our good or bad qualities, but when you come along with your money, it's a very different affair. Everybody knows that. It doesn't matter a damn to me, really, but still I feel that you are not like myself or Opaloff or Tchetyriof. Probably you won't do me any harm or any good, but still, you could if you chose. That's where it is. I said I didn't care a damn if you'd millions or not, but I must honestly confess that I made a mistake." Podgurski laughed and made a gesture of resignation, as it were, to fate.

Mishuief nodded, eager to hear what was coming, and Podgurski continued almost peevishly: "Whether you like it or not, I can never forget that you are a millionaire and lead a life of luxury and enjoyment such as I have never even dreamed of, and that you could plank me down a thousand roubles, if you liked. But, on the other hand, you might play me a dirty trick. Why, look at Parkhomenko——"

"We are not talking of Parkhomenko!" interrupted Mishuief, in a tone intended sharply to dissociate that name from his own.

"Yet for us you are both exactly alike!" exclaimed Podgurski eagerly and with absolute conviction. "We can never know how you think, nor how you feel."

He remained silent for a moment, as if something had occurred to him.

"Look here! It annoys you that others regard you as different from themselves. But you yourself, Feodor Ivanovitch, why don't you do something to show us what you really are—your real soul, not that of a millionaire, no, just that of a Mishuief? It is because that not

for a moment can you ever forget that you are a millionaire! Instead of getting into closer touch with other men and winning their sympathy, you insist upon this sympathy as a right, and are annoyed at not getting it. Well, that is certainly not . . ."

"It seems to me that I am only too ready to gain their confidence," retorted Mishuief hotly.

Podgurski shrugged his shoulders.

"There it is! 'Only too ready.' There would be no such word as 'too' in my case if I wanted to tell all my troubles to Opaloff. But with you it's 'only too ready'! You seem to think that it's condescending on your part to speak to me with perfect frankness. You are really ashamed of being so candid. Come, now, isn't that a fact?"

There was a certain covert animosity in Podgurski's tone, as he added triumphantly: "But you don't notice this yourself, I am sure!"

"The fact is," replied Mishuief gravely, raising his broad shoulders, "you would never have noticed this in anybody else, but you can't forgive it in me. You listen to what I say, yet I am sure that you look upon me as a *poseur*, or even as an absolute fool."

At this Podgurski showed some confusion. He smiled uneasily.

"I can't deny that. There is certainly something in what you say."

"Yes," added Mishuief, nodding his head. "You will not understand that I am heartily glad to talk to you just because your behaviour, good or bad, is in no way influenced by the fact that I possess millions."

"Oh! I quite believe that," was Podgurski's answer. Then both were silent, aware that there was a latent note of insincerity in their talk. Mishuief became sullen and depressed, while Podgurski felt irritable.

"He's simply mad!" he thought. This discussion, false as it was, served to make him furious with Mishuief.

Through the open window there was a vision of the dark, undulating ocean, and from the shore faint sounds arose of tramping horses and of distant music. Podgurski

felt that he ought instantly to continue the conversation, but at the moment found nothing to say. Mishuief sighed heavily.

"Well, I must go," he said.

"Where are you going? Won't you stop a bit longer?"

"No, I've got a headache. Good-bye!"

Podgurski, with an imperceptible shrug of his shoulders, thought to himself irritably: "Deuce take it! What a dull fellow he is!"

In that moment he spied the pocket-book which Mishuief had left lying on the table. He wanted to call him back, yet something deterred him.

On reaching the street Mishuief lounged along in the direction of the gardens. He seemed to have a sinister recollection of something strange that disturbed him. Was it of his recent futile talk with a young scamp, or of a sudden movement after he had turned his back to leave the café? What could it be?

Suddenly he remembered that he had forgotten his pocket-book. Before he was absolutely conscious of this, he felt that something horrible must have happened. He walked faster, till the thought that Podgurski would certainly steal the money, pained him, and he at once returned to the restaurant.

As he entered, he almost collided with the young man, whose insolent and yet confused expression was enough to confirm Mishuief's suspicions.

Their eyes met, and Mishuief said bluntly: "I left my pocket-book behind."

Podgurski's eye-lids twitched, and he appeared eager to join in the search. "Oh! really? I didn't see it. Waiter!"

"It doesn't matter," said Mishuief gently.

"Doesn't matter? It must surely be there!"

Podgurski became nervous and restless; his eyes resembled those of a trapped fox that is ready at any moment to bite.

Mishuief looked him full in the face.

"It really doesn't much matter to me," he said with some hesitation. He only wanted Podgurski to under-

stand that he would not be angry with him about this cursed money, if only the fellow would make a clean breast of it.

But Podgurski's face showed greater fury; even his teeth were visible.

"What do you mean by that? I tell you I didn't see anything!"

Mishuief gave the fellow a cursory glance, smiled, and then, with a gesture as if to shake him off, went out.

VIII

When Mishuief reached home and had sat down at his bureau to go through a pile of letters and telegrams, Maria Sergeievna entered, fresh and radiant as ever. It was as if with her entrance she brought the fragrance of the hills and flowers, and the fresh, pungent savour of the sea. Yet in her eyes and in her smiling face, before she had uttered a word, he read the lie. Falsehood and fear were what he saw there; a fear that only beautiful women know. This subtle game, where beauty, helplessness and lying have a part, gives to them a moving and a mysterious charm.

She called him by name and tripped somewhat too vivaciously towards him, laying her hand on his shoulder. "Ah! so you've come back, darling? I've been longing to see you."

Mishuief gazed in her dark, shining eyes. Suspicions flashed across his mind. For a moment he felt irresolute and exhausted.

"Oh! you've no idea how charming it was there! We motored over to Sinferopol—ever so far. The whole way there we sang and laughed and joked; and then afterwards we had supper at Gourief."

Mishuief looked at her and said nothing. The slightest flush was perceptible on her delicate cheek; her form became more supple, like that of a cat, and there was a false gleam in her eyes.

"No, but tell me, you're not angry, Feodor, are you, because I go off for these jaunts? I know that I've neglected you shamefully. Why didn't you come, too? It was delightful. But, without you, it's not the same thing, somehow!" She attempted to kiss him, as her lithe body swayed towards him.

Mishuief recoiled.

"Look here, Mary; no hypocrisy, please!" he blurted out.

"What's the matter?"

Maria Sergeievna opened her eyes wide, as if honestly amazed, but one could read in them more plainly than ever mean, feminine falseness.

"I can see that you've been doing something or other," he said confidently. "So you needn't tell lies about it, but I advise you to say frankly what it is. That will be best."

Maria laughed a little false laugh, and again sought to let her physical charm assert its wonted influence. But, contrary to custom, it only roused Mishuief's anger.

"None of that! Stop it, I tell you!" he said, thrusting her aside.

"How extraordinary you are to-day! Why are you so upset?" Maria Sergeievna affected astonishment and now forcibly tried to embrace him, but so roughly did he push her backwards that she seemed in pain, and there was a look of terror in her eyes. "Good gracious!" she exclaimed.

"Now, then, out with it!" he shouted, in a fury.

Maria started back in alarm, yet her false eyes still encountered his.

"Oh! it's nothing! A mere nothing. I hadn't meant to tell you at first."

A cold shiver passed across Mishuief's forehead. He felt that in a wild outburst of fury he might lose his self-control, and that, if she did not speak out, something awful would occur.

She herself appeared sensible of this, for she approached him cautiously and let her slender finger-tips rest on his elbow.

"Well, you see . . . now, you mustn't be angry . . . it was just this. . . . We had supper at Gourief, on the balcony, you know, looking on to the sea; it's such a lovely place, and then. . . ."

She kept dragging out her story and all the while pressed his elbow gently, tentatively, with her pretty little fingers. Mishuief could feel how they trembled.

"Get on with it, do!" he roared.

Maria almost collapsed. Her eyes became perfectly round, scared as those of a cat.

"You see," she stammered hurriedly, never moving from the spot, "I met Vassia there. . . . I met my husband and he asked me to come in, as he wanted to speak to me. I ought not to have done it, ought I?"

The question itself showed plainly that it needed no answer, for she knew that she ought not to have gone. Another touch of falseness.

Mishuief was silent, breathing hard.

She gently approached him and again fondled his hand. "Are you angry with me?"

The tone of her voice showed that she had foreseen his anger and was now striving to appear unconscious of having done wrong.

Mad with rage, Mishuief suddenly leapt to his feet, and without a word flung her from him. She almost fell over an arm-chair, but with feline swiftness just managed to slide into it in time.

"What is the matter with you?" she began, as her lips turned white.

"Kindly tell me this," said Mishuief, speaking in a strangely suppressed tone, as he looked at her with cold, hate-filled eyes. "Do you seriously think it possible that I should not be angry with you? What is the good of all this hypocrisy?"

"But what have I done that is wrong?" she faltered; and this time her helplessness was not assumed.

"What have you done? Here——" and he paused for a moment, painfully conscious that he would not find the right words. "Here; I'll tell you. Either you frankly confess to me that I am nothing to you, and that you only came to me as my mistress . . . and all the while . . . or . . ."

Mishuief never finished his sentence. Suddenly he felt pity for himself. He had loved this woman so dearly; had sacrificed for her sake a friend to whom he was attached; and had acted in a low, despicable way, thinking that his lies and treachery would at any rate keep her near him. These continual meetings with her husband had often led to the most humiliating outbursts of jealousy. He had even told her once that it was only

for his money that she had given way to his advances. Now, all at once, he saw that he had really spoken the truth. She had never loved him; she loved the other man, and was ready to go back to him; while to him, Mishuief, she was false and deceitful simply through fear. He felt that his position was at once a ridiculous and a foolish one.

"The lowest of *cocottes* would not have behaved thus!"

In those words a mass of the bitterest, foulest invective was concentrated. He was seized by an uncontrollable desire to strike her, and to treat her with the utmost brutality, just to show her that, as she had only come to him for his money, she was now his property, to do what he liked with. But when he saw her look of helpless, slavish horror, it was so intensely painful to him that he fell forward on the table, leaning his head on his hands, anxious only to hear nothing, to forget all. For some moments this silence lasted. Mishuief did not move; his massive head was propped helplessly on his hands; a pitiful sight.

For a long while Maria Sergeievna stood motionless, watching him. Then the gentle light of womanly compassion shone in her eyes. She softly approached him, and stood perfectly still. Mishuief could hear her sweet breath come and go, as soft, warm fingers lightly touched his hair.

IX

Scenes such as this one had occurred before, each one becoming more violent than the last. To Maria Sergeievna they were inexplicable. Sometimes she thought that Mishuief must be mad, and then again, at times, in a fit of passionate remorse, she accused herself of all sorts of misdeeds that in calmer moments she would never have admitted. She saw plainly the approach of some inevitable mischance, yet knew not how to free herself from the nightmare that haunted her. Quarrels of this sort had latterly ended in hysterics and utter exhaustion.

"We are both going mad!" she used to exclaim in despair. Sobbing bitterly she would cling to Mishuief as though for protection. This he bore in silence, his eyes fixed on the dark chasm where all must inevitably end. So, in this way, the present stormy scene had come to a close.

Prostrate and tearful, Maria lay beside him her morbid longing for a reconciliation still unappeased. At last she murmured:

"I ought not to have gone because it worries you. But, do believe me, I felt so sorry for him; he seemed so unhappy, so ill! And I wronged him, oh I wronged him!" And to Mishuief, whose brain, after such emotion, if tired, may yet have become clearer, this seemed both simple and natural.

"Forgive me," he stammered, "I am mad, absolutely mad!" And he kissed her hot, tear-stained cheek in a sudden access of affection, remorse, and self-contempt.

She at once thought that everything would now be happily arranged, and that, after mutual explanations, the next day would see the beginning of a far happier life. She showed intense eagerness to tell him all that was in her mind.

"I know that your idea is that I never loved you, but only came to you because of your money. You may have

reason to think so, for I am silly and selfish. But it is not so, it really isn't, for I love you more than my life. I've been fond of you for ever so long. You're so . . . so big and strong, and yet so sensitive ! "

It was now dusk in the room and Maria Sergeievna's face loomed white against the dark sofa-cushions. Her eyes were opened wide ; her voice had the fretful quality of a sickly child's.

" It always gladdened me to see that you were conscious of your own power, and that others all submitted to you. Of course I was pleased when you spent such lots of money on me, which I didn't deserve. But, as for rich men, there are heaps of them, and, if I liked . . . but you are bigger, stronger than any of them. What we women adore in a man is strength, might ! "

Moved now to tears, Mishuief kissed her tenderly, proudly conscious of his power, feeling that she loved him and him alone.

" I am such a silly thing, I don't know how to explain myself rightly," she murmured. " My life had been so tedious, so monotonous. It was as if all was at an end, and that there was no prospect, nothing to look forward to. Then you brought something powerful into my life, and I became, as it were, crazy with delight. I used to dream about you ; I ran after you as some little school-girl might have done."

" And yet it was not I that really did this," observed Mishuief, vaguely desirous to get at her inmost thoughts.

" Yes, yes, it was you, you ! Big, strong, mighty as a king ! But that's not the most important thing. Had you been poor I should have given myself to you just the same. You are all in all to me ! " And she nestled closer to him, expanding like some blossom beneath his caresses. Mishuief felt that there was less and less reason for his previous suspicion.

" I am simply a despot, that's all ! " he thought.

He hoped that she would say more, and thus allay his fears yet further.

" Yes, but your husband was cleverer and more talented than I am. After all, what am I ? What was it that

really made you care for me? Surely not because I'm as healthy as a bull?"

He spoke thus contemptuously of himself on purpose, longing for her to protest in passionate words that should console him.

But this question offended Maria Sergeievna deeply. She did not at first reply, as the right words failed her. In the gloom Mishuief could not observe the expression in her eyes. During that moment of suspense he was again haunted by vague and terrible suspicion.

Then she began to explain why she considered him cleverer, better, and more original than anybody else. She spoke in haste, passionately, vehemently. But he always negatived her assertions, declaring in a false, spiteful tone that her husband was a most distinguished man. He described him as the soul of honour, thus casting shame on himself. Gradually her husband's familiar personality became clearer to Maria; the sensitive face of this kindly man whom still, without knowing it, she loved. Memories came back to her of their early affection, their first caresses; memories that grieved her beyond measure. At last her protests of love for Mishuief became more and more unconvincing. Proofs failed her to show why she had fallen in love with him. To her amazement she felt that it was her husband, good and true and honourable, who possessed her real love. Thus, without words, the fact became clear to her, though till now she had obstinately, and she believed honestly, denied it, that it was her craving for a new life of show and luxury that had led to the breach. She suddenly ceased speaking, terrified to think that this awkward pause would mean her undoing. Mishuief waited, gazing hopelessly into the gloom; waited for what he had long foreseen must happen. She again made an unsuccessful effort to speak, and then all at once burst into tears.

"Why do you torment me like this? I know of nothing—nothing."

Mishuief made no reply. He breathed hard, and it was as if body, heart, and brain were sinking downwards into some dark, illimitable void.

Maria only sobbed. Still he was silent and waited. Then for a moment, still weeping, she furtively looked up. A violent slap on her face resounded through the room.

"Ah!" she screamed in astonishment and pain, being half-stunned for an instant.

"Drab!" he cried hoarsely.

With that he staggered away in the darkness, striving to avoid contact with her soft, motionless form, and knocking against the furniture as he hurried to the door.

"It's all over," said a dull voice within him.

In the middle of his study he stood still, wide-eyed, listening with feverish anxiety for some sound at the back there. Yet all was silent as the tomb. He was afraid to move even a finger, for it seemed to him that the slightest motion would bring with it death. His whole spirit was immersed in grief too great for speech. Shame, and a poignant sense of utter loneliness, grim pity for himself and for her, were all blended with a certain fiendish glee at having at last got his revenge upon some one, though at the cost of his own destruction.

"It's all over!" he said, with a strange smile. He tried to check this senseless smile, yet it broadened into a convulsive grin, as his jaws twitched, and his whole countenance hardened into one hideous, mad grimace.

X

It was a breezy day, and the wide blue-green ocean was flecked with foaming crests. All objects stood out in sharp and brilliant relief; the tones of the whole picture seemed more intense; the vivid colours of the ladies' dresses on the steamboat; the sides of the vessel, and her moorings. The wind gave a touch of capricious restlessness to everything, yet vast as was its environment, the little shining town itself and its denizens had almost a mimic, toy-like effect.

There would be a long while to wait before the boat started. Mishuief and Marie Sergeievna were both feeling sad and ill at ease.

The crane rattled noisily as it swung heavy chests through the air and deposited them in the hold. Across the gangway connecting the ship with the land passed a continual throng of gaily dressed passengers, notably ladies. Cries from the ship were answered by cries from the shore, and flowers were flung across, that by sudden gusts of wind were tossed into the water. The ladies gripped their hats; fluttering dresses revealed dainty insteps, and the whole effect was one of uncertainty and impatience. Yet it seemed as if the steamer would never finish taking her endless cargo on board, and start. At times the hooter sounded, its hideous noise gradually overpowering all others, and when its deafening scream became intolerable, it gave one short gasp and then suddenly stopped. A strange silence ensued when the shrill sound had died away amid the distant hills. Again one heard loud eager voices talking, and the rattle of the crane.

Mishuief stood on deck, silent and heavy-hearted. He felt that Maria kept repeatedly looking at him and he could see that, in her dark eyes, despite all efforts to appear cheerful, there were tears.

Maria said nothing. Already yesterday they had decided to part. After that last awful scene what more was there to say?

"Ah! well, it's the end; let us hope that it is!" she muttered to herself, as vaguely her white-gloved hand tapped the bright brass deck-rail. This nervous movement in itself showed Mishuief all that she felt and thought; it told him of the grief that was torturing her little heart. He pitied her; he felt that the blame lay at his door. Yet in his heart all was vacant. It seemed impossible to go back, to renew the former intimate, affectionate life, or even to imagine it. Something had snapped; between them all was cold, void, his one desire now being never again to let things drag on as in this case. It must all end far sooner!

"Ah! well," thought Mishuief, as he stared at the garish crowd, "she'll get along all right without me, and she'll lead the same gay life, denying herself nothing, being solely intent upon luxury and enjoyment."

It seemed to him that she would have to find another man with whom, as once with himself, she could fall in love; a man who could give her not only honest affection, but also gratitude and sincere esteem. Yet for some reason or other he could not picture to himself such a man; first it was the round, black-whiskered face of Parkhomenko that rose up before him, and then that of the loose-lipped financier.

"That might happen, too," thought Mishuief. "She exchanged her pure true love for her husband for me. Why? Because I provided her with new impressions and the possibility of an untroubled, merry life. It will now be difficult for her to go back to her former one; she will have to remain in the new groove, happy, laughing, and devoted to dress and finery. So it will go on until the glamour of life fades. The pity of it! But for this I alone am to blame. Ah! well, I shall just live on in the old way. It will be horribly dreary and lonely—an absolute blank!"

Again the steam-whistle shrieked. The air quivered, the deck shook, and for an instant it was as if sea and sky vibrated at the sound of that inhuman voice. There was great bustling on deck as passengers shouted and waved their handkerchiefs. Maria Sergeievna grew pale. Her

dark eyes expressed sad submission. Mishuief felt a pang at his heart. In this last moment of farewell both were touched by the pathetic hopelessness of it all.

It was impossible to note the actual moment when the steamer began to move, yet suddenly the dull-green strip of water between the steamer and the pier grew broader and broader.

Mishuief, as he stood on deck, strove for a long time to distinguish Maria's graceful figure amid the crowd. The steamer was now going at full speed, and foam-crested waves lay between it and the shore. The quay became smaller and smaller, yet still Mishuief could perceive her little white form touched by sunlight and buffeted by the breeze. And as the view of the little town and the quay and Maria swiftly melted into a mimic panorama, he felt a sharp stab at his heart, knowing that in the whole wide world he stood alone.

His former life had abruptly ended; it had vanished for ever in yonder blue distance. Before him lay the vast tumultuous sea.

"Well, be it so," he thought. "Perhaps it is for the best. Somehow or other I shall manage to pull through."

The scene on deck was a bright and festive one, where groups of smartly dressed ladies, carrying bouquets, were laughing, talking, and listening to the band which suddenly began to play. Through the blue mist, green shores and rosy hills could be descried. High on a rocky promontory stood a white convent like a seagull poised above the waves. Mishuief continued to pace the deck, still sorrowful and hopeless.

Whither should he go, and why? he thought, as he glanced listlessly at shore and sea that to him were such a familiar sight; here, as on the coasts of Italy and Egypt, yet that could now no longer charm him by their azure loveliness which makes the human heart feel free as a bird on a sunlit summer morn. All that he noticed was the strange screaming of the gulls that followed and accompanied the boat.

XI

MARIA SERGEIEVNA stood in the middle of her bathroom where the walls and grey and white tiles of the floor reflected the cold electric light, and a sturdy maid was lustily rubbing her down with a moist sponge. . . . Heavy at heart, grieved and perplexed, she seemed lost in her thoughts.

"Perhaps it is too cold, madam?" asked the maid, who noticed that her mistress shuddered slightly.

"What?" exclaimed Maria Sergeievna, starting backwards and staring at the girl with wild, sad eyes.

"Isn't the water too cold, madam?" repeated the maid.

"No; it is all right."

Dipping the sponge in lukewarm water the servant continued the process of vigorous rubbing as before. To Maria it was positive torture to stand thus and be shampooed while her heart seemed broken. She longed to be alone, to fling herself on the bed and bury her head in the pillows; to lie down as the dead, and never more to see, or hear, or feel.

But she was beset by domestics of the trained, impassive sort that only attend upon patrician families, and of whom Maria always secretly stood in awe, just as simple, middle-class folk dread the flunkeys of the aristocracy. They continually watched her, with cold, inquisitive eyes.

She wished the events of the previous day to remain hidden, and that none should know that she had been cast off, her position being merely that of a mistress, to be struck in the face, and dragged like the veriest trull through the mire.

Ever since Mishuief's departure she had striven her utmost to let nothing be known of the rupture. At the steamboat she endeavoured to smile and look pleased, and when she went home with all her grief she forced herself to figure as mistress before the servants and to let everything go on in the house as usual, though all the

while she felt like the slave of these hirelings who were nothing to her. When her maid politely said the bath was ready, she at once went to the bathroom, where, nude and unspeakably miserable, she submitted to the girl's superfluous and painful attentions. How the heart of that little woman ached as she stood there, surrounded by light and warmth, under the soothing influence of steam and scents! Pampered though her body, in her soul there was a sense of utter solitude. To her it was all a mockery.

"That will do, Claudia, that will do!" she said, feeling that in another moment she must positively collapse.

"But what about the douche, madam?" asked the girl, as without waiting for an answer she turned on the spray and with her hand tested the temperature of the water that fell from it like warm rain.

Tears came into Maria's eyes as she stood under the douche. When the girl had swathed her in a dry, soft bath-wrapper and had left her alone in the bedroom, she wrung her hands and hid her face in the pillows, weeping helplessly, silently, like a child.

Her whole life passed before her; bygone sorrows and dark forebodings of the days to come; bitter deceptions and the sense of an appalling, irreparable error.

Never once since her life had undergone a fundamental change and she, the wife of a quiet, kindly man, living in her little, simple world, that yet had its sunshine, disappeared to become a restless lady of fashion, revelling in luxury and bedecked with lace and diamonds—never once had Maria given her former life a thought. That pleasant happy time was not to be remembered without a pang of remorse that would have conclusively disposed of all remaining justification for her conduct. It had been terribly tragic to see her forsaken husband, once so infinitely dear to her, choked with emotion, and only able to stammer out, "Little mother, little mother! You surely aren't going to leave your boy? What shall I do without you?" Her heart seemed ready to break as she saw this grown-up man sobbing bitterly; and when he exclaimed, "What shall I do without you?" she suddenly

remembered that it had been impossible to picture him as he was, before she had been his wife, to pet and take care of him. In that instant she saw all his loneliness, sadness, and poverty, while she was going to enjoy a life of luxury and splendour. Just for one minute her decision had seemed to her to be madness. She had embraced her husband, kissing him affectionately, and drying his tearful eyes. It was the new life, full of colour and splendour, that allured her on the one hand, while unbounded pity yet moved her for this sorrowing husband, helpless as some forsaken child. She had felt that her will-power was growing less and less, and that the dreams of a new life, like some dazzling romance of fairy-land, were fading fast. To save herself from flinging all to the winds and in order to remain, she steeled her heart by a touch of cruelty that for herself was the most painful of all. For the last time she surveyed the well-known room, the lamp, the marriage-bed, the portraits of herself done by her husband, the intimate surroundings of her home; and the vision of it all cut her to the heart. To go away like this, how horrible it seemed! Yet again she mastered her emotion and went out. He no longer wept, nor implored her to stay, but sighing deeply he clutched at an old cloak of hers that she had left behind, as if afraid that this last relic too might be taken from him. That act of his alone had been horrible to witness. The memory of it thrilled her, as the memory of some ghastly crime. To escape from it Maria Sergeievna plunged into a mad whirl of gaiety and frivolity. By degrees she came to forget the past; her spirits rose, and she grew used to a luxurious life, which really pleased her much. Theatres, balls, fine dresses and the society of wealthy people provided her with perpetual enjoyment; an unending dream in which she almost began to believe that she was happy. Yet, in certain rare moments when alone, she thought of a forsaken, solitary man far away tortured by everlasting grief.

"How is it with him? What is he doing now?" she thought, grown sad, ashamed, and then rushing out into the gay world, where she laughed and flirted as before.

Yet now, like dust, all the glitter had been brushed from her life, and before her a chasm yawned. She felt at her wits' end, and in her poor little head there was utter confusion. Where should she go? What should she do? To whom should she give her heart? Everything was at an end. Only a deserted mistress remained; a wife without a name, or any claim to regard. She had ceased to count as a human being; she was just a thing, a rag that, having been used, could be flung into the street.

So, too, it horrified her to feel that there was no going back; no return to the life that hitherto she had led. Her road, whither would it lead?

"That is retribution!" she murmured mechanically, "yes, retribution!"

On the little table beside the bed lay the money which Mishuief had left for her. She looked at it in horror as, like a caged animal, she convulsively tore the pillows with her nails.

XII

It was on a rainy autumnal day that Mishuief reached Moscow. As he left the railway-carriage the cold, damp air seemed to penetrate to his very marrow.

The huge square of asphalt in front of the railway station glistened like a lake on which apparently wet droshkys were floating; and shivering foot-passengers splashed hurriedly past him in the slush. In the distance behind the grey curtain of rain, countless roofs and church cupolas were dimly discernible, and little rain-soaked gardens opening on the street looked doubly dreary. To Mishuief it was strangely depressing to think that for days they had been without sun here; there was no blue sky, no delightful flowers. All these wet people hurrying along appeared to be utterly weary of life; and, if they lived it was just because they had got used to the rain, the leaden skies, the cold and the damp, and no longer heeded them. Even had they heard that, somewhere far away, at this moment the sun was shining brightly on radiant blue seas, and smiling fields, they would never have believed such a thing, but would have still gone splashing along through the puddles as fast as they could. Mishuief, however, used as he was to it all, never thought of such a thing. The tender beauty of springtime held no charm for him, nor did the grey skies of autumn influence his mood.

As he had let no one know of his arrival at the station there were no servants to meet him. His luggage he entrusted to a porter, and drove home in a droshky, shivering in the dark, damp vehicle.

While yet at a distance he recognized the well-known silver-grey house. Its immense height and its façade grotesquely decorated in the modern style with a huge shield inscribed "Mishuief Brothers" at once arrested attention. In front of the cavernous-looking main entrance there was still the old bustle and stir. Dripping vanmen were packing and loading yellow cases from

which damp straw peeped in places, while black and yellow vans drove out or in, and sounds of bitter wrangling and abuse floated on the humid air. Indoors, the vast rooms cold as the yards outside, with huge windows, were lighted by dull-green electric lamps. Rows of heads stooped over papers that rustled, and there was a clatter of slates.

"The same old routine," thought Mishuief, almost as if he had expected to find something different.

Having deposited his things, he walked through the whole counting-house. As always on these occasions when he found himself amid these formal surroundings, his face assumed a cold, haughty expression, as if he wished to mark the vast difference between himself and all others.

Well-dressed and of smart appearance, all the employés hastily rose amid general silence and bowed. Mishuief acknowledged this by a slight nod. Many of them he did not know, nor had he the slightest recollection of ever having seen any one of them before. It was only the head clerk, a bald-headed veteran, with a face like a crumpled bank-note or an *eikon*, greeted him as follows: "Welcome home, Feodor Ivanovitch! Your brother's in his office. He's been expecting you back for a long while. Did you have a pleasant journey?"

Mishuief could not help smiling. To Yalta and back seemed to him a fairly short trip; yet he recollected that to this old clerk, who had spent his whole life mewed up in a counting-house, a journey of that sort seemed nothing short of fabulous.

"Thank you, yes, pretty fair," he said coolly and yet not unkindly, as he shook hands and passed on.

Bent over a monumental desk, his brother Stepan Ivanovitch Mishuief sat writing, while with his left hand he tapped a large slate. A faint light from the window fell on his large bald head. In the room there was a general gloom. It looked tedious and dull as some gigantic ledger within whose pages a human being was crawling about.

When Mishuief entered his brother looked up with his

wonted expression of dull discontent. To the former the glance seemed an unpleasant sort of greeting, but when Stepan looked more attentively, his features relaxed in a faint smile. "So you've come at last!" he said, rising.

The brothers kissed each other. Stepan was as tall and heavily built as Mishuief, but his face was sallow, and unhealthy looking; there were shrivelled bags under his eyes, and his voice sounded hollow and faint, as if he were dead beat.

"I'm very glad that you've come," began Stepan Ivanovitch after they had sat down facing each other and had lit their cigars. "Glad for various reasons. First, of course, I wanted to see you, and then, your presence is absolutely necessary, because at the works things are in a shocking state. Besides, there is a personal reason. But of that we will talk later." Stepan Ivanovitch looked away for a moment and again smiled feebly.

"You will have seen in the papers, no doubt, that the factory has now been closed for a fortnight. I daresay, too, that you know the nature of the men's demands?"

"Yes, I do," replied Mishuief curtly.

"Well?"

Stepan looked at him with cold, searching eyes, and to Mishuief it seemed as if it were not a brother talking to a brother, but the head of a firm conferring with one of the shareholders. He would have been better pleased not to discuss these matters, but Stepan was waiting for his answer, so controlling himself, he said:

"H-m! I think that in many ways they are quite just."

Involuntarily he blinked his eyes and glanced aside, certain that at this Stepan Ivanovitch would prick up his ears. The latter still looked hard at him, and it was a long time before he spoke, as if the effort were too much for him. Then he said:

"Good. But may I ask you if you quite realize that these terms, in the present state of the market, will ruin us?"

"I am not talking of that," replied Mishuief. "All

I said was that the men's demands were just. Whether they are profitable to us or not is another matter."

"Yes, a very different matter," was the dry response. "But it seems to me that it is just that of which we ought to think first."

Mishuief sighed, as though oppressed by some odious burden. Yet, with a desire to appear acquiescent, he said:

"Of course it is. Only I think that the justice of these claims is not altogether a side-question. It is one of two things. Either they are unjust, and in that case the only way is to fight them, or else, they are just, when we must think how we can satisfy them."

He strove to keep calm, anxious to avoid a quarrel of any kind. Yet, while speaking, he felt the old anger that galled him. He noticed that his brother, as usual, only listened to a part of what he said. Just those things which moved him most Stepan disregarded as unnecessary and superfluous, saying nothing, but fixing on Mishuief his cold, hard eyes. Then, sighing, he drummed on the edge of the table with his fingers, and said in a forced voice:

"Yes, yes; we will discuss it all later on. You must be tired after your journey. Have you lunched?"

"Not yet."

"Then come upstairs to my place."

Stepan Ivanovitch rose slowly from his seat. His apartment on the upper floor was a small one. It seemed strange that of this whole huge, comfortable house, only one little corner should be really his, where he could enjoy rest and refreshment. Everywhere else, above, below, on all sides, strangers swarmed, like bees in a mammoth hive who, many of them, never even knew Stepan Ivanovitch Mishuief by sight, nor if he really existed and were not merely a myth.

There was a chilly look about the dining-room with its old oak furniture; and this cold, lifeless effect was heightened by the white napery and the pallid light that came in through the windows.

"Well, so you had a good journey, eh?" asked Stepan

Ivanovitch, trying still harder to purse his dry lips into a pleasant smile. He was fond of his brother, and pitied him for being, as he thought, morbidly eccentric.

"And where's your Maria Sergeievna now?" Stepan Ivanovitch smiled, without looking at his brother.

"She's staying on there . . . for the present," replied Mishuief. Suddenly something seemed to stab his heart like a knife. Somewhere, far away, he could see the little forsaken woman that he loved and that loved him, and that had now gone out of his life for ever. To him now she seemed an utter stranger, as if they had never loved, never kissed, never felt that they were all in all to each other.

Why this had to be Mishuief in this moment could not imagine. All that then he had thought horrible and insufferable now seemed trivial and exaggerated. Yet he felt that it could not have happened otherwise. Striving to master his feelings and not to notice the gnawing pain at his heart, he began to recount some of his experiences in the South, and to ask for all the latest Moscow news. Large and massive, the two brothers sat down opposite each other, imposing, as it were, their appalling weight upon the floor and all that swarmed beneath it. On its polished surface the cold grey light gleamed, as on the silver and china, while the amber wine sparkled as if that alone held gladsome sunshine on this dripping, desolate day.

After lunch a sense of warmth made conversation easier. Mishuief, with folded arms, leaned on the table as Stepan Ivanovitch, assuming an easy attitude, began as follows:

"I've had a rather unpleasant experience lately, and as you know more about these things than I do," he said with an awkward smile, "I want to ask your advice."

Mishuief looked at him curiously.

"There was a girl who came here, you know, as cashier. Young and very pretty. Well, you'll see her for yourself, because I am anxious that you should go and pay her a visit."

Stepan Ivanovitch lit a cigar, and the bags under his

eyes became puckered as he blinked through the smoke. It evidently pained him to tell this story; he felt that it made him appear ridiculous.

Mishuief looked at him in amusement and surprise. A pretty girl, not a *cocotte*, not a *chanteuse!*

So absolutely out of keeping with Stepan Ivanovitch's personality did this sound that one might imagine that he was joking.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Mishuief, endeavouring to hide his astonishment.

"What's the matter? . . . Why, I've been intimate with her. Now you've got it! said Stepan Ivanovitch with an effort.

"And now?"

"I don't seem able to explain the whole thing properly to you. You know how I've worked all these years, and that romance was never in my line. But I can't deny that this girl has brought something new, something fresh into my life."

Before Mishuief the image rose of a pretty little girl with a soft dainty chin that involuntarily one was eager to kiss. Possibly she had a silvery laugh, and had given herself heedlessly to Stepan Ivanovitch, never even noticing that he had a bald head, a shrivelled countenance, and a dull, commercial mind. Perhaps, though, she had perceived this, and had striven to cheer, and enliven his life, to share with him all her wealth of youthful joy.

"She really seems fond of me, too," continued Stepan Ivanovitch. "Of course she at once tried all she could to turn me into a social-democrat! Ha! Ha!"

He laughed a false kind of laugh in which there was yet a touch of tenderness.

"H'm!"

Mishuief could not help smiling. He felt quite sorry for the simple little girl.

"But that's not the worst of it. The fact is, that she's—well, what's the word for it?—that's she's in the family way."

"Aha!" Mishuief's eyes softened with compassion.

"And it becomes more and more plain to me that

her position in my life will have to be reckoned with. I've begun to be afraid of quarrelling with her, and so I give in. In business matters, too, she interferes, shows temper, and states terms. . . . In short, it is time to put a stop to it all! said Stepan Ivanovitch, breaking off suddenly, as the former cold, dull look came into his eyes.

"Why put a stop to it?" asked Mishuief gently and considerately. "I suppose you're tired of her, eh?"

"Tired of her? Not a bit of it! On the contrary, I feel certain that I should be awfully dull without her."

The speech sounded dry and commonplace, yet to Mishuief there was a deeper note in it to which he warmly responded.

"Then why worry yourself about it? Go on living with her as before."

"Unfortunately she's not one of that sort. She'll expect to have a recognized place in the eyes of the world —not to remain just a mistress."

"Then let her have it by all means. Marry her, and I daresay you'll be happy."

Mishuief smiled again. But the expression of benign perplexity on his brother's face changed. The hard, commercial look came back.

"If I wanted to marry I shouldn't choose a wife who would sit at my desk, make a helmet of all my business-papers, and laugh and cry at the same time."

Mishuief imagined what his brother would look like with a paper cap on his head, and laughed aloud.

With an awkward gesture of annoyance Stepan Ivanovitch turned away.

"Yes, you may laugh; but it's no laughing matter for me. I can't forgive myself for having been such a fool. I ought never to have let things get to such a pitch . . . and that's why I am obliged to ask you to go and see her, and come to some sort of arrangement. Can you do this?"

Mishuief shrugged his shoulders. He felt suddenly sorry for his brother into whose sterile, lifeless soul, as by magic, a golden light had come which he now desired to shut out.

"Why?" thought Mishuief. "So that he may go on sitting at his desk and poring over accounts and bills of exchange, and leading the old dull life? What on earth's the good of that?" But he answered:

"Of course I can. But why should I. Is there no other way but that of settling things? Perhaps. . . ."

By the strange look of pain on his brother's face Mishuief saw that all remonstrance would be useless.

"Do you really mean to say," began Stepan Ivanovitch suddenly, "that I cannot understand how things are? Supposing that I were not a millionaire, and that she had not had the opportunity of remoulding the soul of a millionaire, well, what then? Do you think that she would then become fond of me? That sort of thing's not exactly in my line."

He smiled bitterly.

"Why a millionaire?" asked Mishuief.

"Oh! Well, that hardly needs explaining," replied the other without looking up. Then after a pause, he said, "Let us talk about something else."

Mishuief's heart ached. His thoughts reverted to the past. The picture he had evoked of a cheerful little wife grew dim and slowly faded. He sighed deeply; and in his jaded eyes there was the look of one who holds within him death.

XIII

TOWARDS evening Mishuief drove out to see his friend Nicolaief. The first snow had fallen, and though much of it had melted, on hedges and banks it still lay in white, fleecy patches. The air in the streets was fresh, buoyant, and the bells of all the churches began to ring for evening prayer as if the entire city of Moscow had but one melodious brazen voice. On Mishuief the effect was exhilarating after that long, depressing interview with his brother. His splendid horses bore him past the large pools of water in the streets. Each with its edge of snow, these black lakes yet reflected golden gleams, and beside them moved unceasingly a lively, joyous crowd.

So, too, Mishuief's heart felt glad and full of expectancy; for he thought of Nicolaief, with his broad shoulders, dishevelled locks, and jovial voice. Already he felt the gladness of their meeting and heard their brisk questions and replies that preceded hearty, honest talk, which for much that grieves can provide an outlet and a cure. Mishuief thus looked happier; for a long while past he had not felt so strong, so sure of himself.

It was an unpleasant surprise, however, on reaching Nicolaief's house, to find rows of hats and coats hanging up in the hall, and to hear a brilliant soprano voice singing some operatic air in the drawing-room, from which the penetrating odour reached Mishuief of scent and of cigars. He stood still outside the door for a while. It had never occurred to him that at this time Nicolaief was seldom to be found alone. He feared that the pleasant meeting and hearty talk would, after all, not be his. But just then the door was flung open, and Nicolaief came striding out, looking a regular Volga brigand in his blue shirt and baggy breeches.

"Fedia! Aha! How are you, my pigeon? Where have you been hiding away all this time?" he cried, in a voice that rang through the house, as he grasped Mishuief's hand. "Why are you looking so blue?"

They embraced, and the kiss he gave the other's honest lips yielded Mishuief a pleasure far more subtle than any that he had ever bestowed on women.

"Well, you are just the same," he said, glancing affectionately at Nicolaief. Then, as they entered the drawing-room, he whispered: "What a host of people you've got! I wanted to have a quiet chat with you."

"That's all right!" replied Nicolaief, with a wave of the hand. "Don't you worry about that. I get a mob like this every day in my house; I'm used to it by now. Can't help it, my dear chap. I've become a celebrity you see!"

"Well, thank goodness that you have!" said Mishuief genuinely pleased, as he glanced at Nicolaief who, broad-shouldered though he was, appeared slim beside the other's height and massive proportions. It was delightful to be near this jovial, kindly fellow, who, if he loved him, loved him solely for his own sake.

As they came into the drawing-room a tall lady in black with grey, fascinating eyes like those of an actress, advanced.

"Here, Lydia," cried Nicolaief gaily, "this is my friend Mishuief. Just look at him! Isn't he a colossal millionaire?"

Mishuief laughed, and the handsome grey-eyed lady laughed too. But he did not like to hear such laughter.

"Delighted to see you," she said in a musical voice, holding out her plump white arm which was bared to the elbow. She then proceeded to introduce him to her guests, of whom there were many, yet their faces all had but one expression. Everybody looked over-affable, with teeth displayed by a fixed smile and secret curiosity in their eyes. It was just this same face that had haunted Mishuief all his life. He loathed it. Yet so delighted was he at seeing Nicolaief again that he paid no heed.

"Now, my friends," said Nicolaief, as he stood still in the middle of the room, "you may sing and shout and dance as much as ever you like, while my friend and I are going to have a little chat. Lydia, will you excuse us?"

"Of course, of course!" cried his wife, as she raised her handsome eyes as well as both arms, the gesture being obviously intended to produce an effect. "Go, by all means, and I'll send you in some tea."

As he sat down in Nicolaief's study on a broad Turkish divan, Mishuief glanced round the room with pleasure. It was still just as of yore; the same books and papers piled up on the floor, the table, and in the cupboards. There was nothing except this leather-covered divan that in any way suggested the comfort which befitted a famous author's "den." Mishuief recollected that in Nicolaief's rooms when as yet a student and unknown, there had been just the same untidiness and confusion. He himself had not altered in the least, except that he had grown somewhat stouter.

Their talk from the very outset was easy, natural, and entertaining, like everything else in which Nicolaief had a share. In five minutes he had heard the whole story; the rupture with Maria Sergeievna, the disagreeable meeting with Stepan Ivanovitch, the various adventures abroad, in hotels, theatres, and museums; and finally the vague morbid fears that for so long had tormented Mishuief's heart.

"I don't understand you," said Nicolaief sharply, yet not unkindly, as he strode up and down the room. "The same sort of thing happens to me. It's a long while since anybody came to me simply because they liked what I had done or what I had said. It's the famous poet to whom they want to pay homage now. Well, it doesn't matter to me; in fact, it's rather pleasant. Man is by nature a slave; yet one can always find some men who will open their heart to you simply and naturally."

"As regards yourself it's a different matter," replied Mishuief with a touch of sadness. "You are famous; but first and foremost you are a poet, that is to say, a man who only by the might of his own soul dominates other men and draws them to himself. If I knew that there were such a lot of young fellows in Russia who count themselves specially fortunate not to have a word with me even, but simply to see me, I think I should

be utterly swept away by the tide of their youthful enthusiasm. Then, perhaps I should be happy."

"Ah, but, on the other hand, there are many to whom you give help."

"No; that's not exactly correct," said Mishuief, shaking his head. "It's not I myself who make this money, and, after all, it belongs to them in a way. Besides those to whom I give a little money, hate me, and those who get a good lot out of me are angry because it isn't more. They all view with secret hostility any good that I can get for myself by means of my wealth. They seem to think that I am stealing, squandering their property, their fortune."

There was a tragic sound in his voice as he said this. Nicolaief stood still in the middle of the room and looked grave and thoughtful.

"That may be; and yet it does not put you in the right." He tossed back his hair, as if he had found something that he had lost.

He reminded Mishuief that to this wealth, since it had come into his hands, he was perfectly entitled to hold fast. Whether a millionaire, brought into existence by the labour of the masses, had a right to such existence was a matter of no importance. Millionaires exist; and, so far from wishing to destroy them, other men are ready to submit to them. It was within the power of every millionaire, he said, to commit crimes of the most infamous description, just as easily as to do good to his fellow-creatures. Mishuief had chosen the latter course, and no sensible man could possibly mistake his intentions.

As he spoke, Nicolaief became intensely animated; his eyes shone, and he smiled genially.

"You have nearly ten thousand workmen in your hand," he said, with a fervour that seemed to emanate from his inmost being, striving to make himself heard above the sound of the piano and the tempestuous vocal roulades that came to them from the adjoining room.

"But they have not only you as their master; your brother owns them as well. Why hasn't he done what

you do? Or why don't you do as he does? Every kopeck that you give to your workmen you give of your own free will. Nobody can force you to do it. Now, do you suppose that the workmen don't know this? They know a good deal more than we do."

Mishuief looked at him trustfully.

"When the news was published of your suicide the workmen would not believe it. One of them said to me, with tears in his eyes, 'That's not possible. Such a man as that would never take his own life. He is just hiding away somewhere from enemies; and when the time comes he'll turn up.' So now you know!" cried Nicolaief enthusiastically.

Mishuief felt himself trembling from head to foot through sheer joy. All at once he seemed to be confronted by a vast crowd of these docile, harassed, hungry workmen, as a veritable sea of trustful eyes turned to his. He could see himself, too; not his usual gloomy, melancholy self, but an energetic, benevolent man, firm of purpose, sure of his goal. The thought that his life of personal influence had ended stabbed him like a knife, yet the momentary pain of that reflection was lost in a host of other jarring sensations.

"Oh, brother," he said, in a trembling voice, "it was not in vain that I had you so much in my thoughts and longed for this meeting!"

Nicolaief smiled pensively. For a while both were silent as the brilliant voice in the drawing-room ceased.

Later, as Mishuief sat down with Nicolaief and the other guests at supper, both he and his host felt happier and more animated than ever. The others listened to them in silence, almost in awe. Nicolaief told Mishuief of an idea which he had of starting a new paper to which all the younger and most brilliant writers of the day should contribute. He proposed that Mishuief should finance the scheme, and the latter gladly agreed to do so. All things seemed now to be good, and life worth living since he had felt the charm of Nicolaief's influence.

Nicolaief's wife, the lady with the grey eyes, a well-

known singer, was particularly attentive to them both, showing herself continually eager to content her husband by her affectionate sympathy and care.

"She seems to be genuinely fond of him," thought Mishuief; and to her also, he felt drawn as to a real friend.

"How he manages to attract people to himself! Not like me. . . ." And he sighed.

"And may I ask, Sergei Petrovitch," asked one of the guests, as his moist Jewish eyes were turned inquiringly to Nicolaief, "do you intend to invite Tchetyriof to contribute to your *Living Thoughts?*"

"That we shall be better able to decide later on," replied Nicolaief carelessly, yet a shadow seemed to cross his face as he spoke.

Mishuief thought it strange that, for a minute at least after this there was a dead silence, while in the large grey eyes of the hostess, who with her white hands was passing a dish, he could detect a flash of positive hatred.

"Is he really afraid of Tchetyriof?" thought Mishuief, utterly astounded.

He knew that by many Tchetyriof was held in higher esteem than Nicolaief, but had never for a moment imagined that to the latter it signified in the least. The thought that Nicolaief was jealous of a rival whom he detested troubled him deeply. Just at that moment he observed the grey eyes fixed on the poet eagerly, almost greedily. He said to himself: "This woman is only fond of Nicolaief because he is famous."

It hurt him deeply to think that this could be so. Then in another moment the grey eyes beamed as before, and Nicolaief laughed and joked in his former exuberant way. Yet, somehow, in spite of all this, Mishuief could not feel as light-hearted as at first, when he drove home at a late hour through the empty streets of dreaming Moscow. Here and there, in the dim lamplight, he discerned the nebulous form of some prostitute loitering at the edge of the pavement, and this did but add to his spiritual unrest, as thoughts vague and disquieting revolved within his mind.

XIV

White snow furnished a background for the square-built, smoke-stained factory sheds, black chimneys, and fences, as also for the surging mob itself, which, rabid and ready to resist, filled the yard and the adjoining streets; a grimy, hostile crowd.

The factory was in the hands of the strike-committee. The yard was one living mass of red, excited faces and waving arms. The troops and police, who had been called out, took up their positions on both sides of the streets, forming regular lines of grey and black; and from a distance one could see the horses restlessly tossing their heads, and officers in their grey uniforms running over the snow.

Only one approach, the one from the Moskva, had been left open, and from this direction crowds of other workmen came trooping in.

Hastily summoned by telephone, Mishuief drove up in a one-horse droshky, going straight into the yard. He looked pale and his lips quivered. He had been suddenly roused that morning without sufficient time to think out what he should do. He only felt a vehement desire to set matters straight and believed that he would succeed. He knew that, if it were in any way possible to influence the malcontents, it was he alone that could do it; so that, allied to his nervous excitement, was the firm belief that the workmen would follow him and that he would be able to avert a catastrophe.

Already at a distance he had heard the dull roar of many voices, interrupted by occasional shrill exclamations. As the horse, going at full trot, swerved into the yard, the din was deafening. He hastily glanced round at the sea of faces and the red walls of the building, from all the windows of which hands were waved excitedly. He stood up in the droshky, which creaked beneath his weight, and then he sank back heavily in his seat. At his appearance the uproar suddenly ceased, and only at

the back of the crowd some discontented murmurs and shouts could be heard. His arrival had been observed from the windows of the manager's office, and Schanz, the head manager, white and distraught, appeared at the top of the stone steps with a military policeman on either side of him.

Swept forward as by some resistless tide, Mishuief rushed up the steps, took off his hat and waved it. Silence ensued, as countless eager faces, both old and young, gazed up at him. Not a sound, except a muffled noise on the fringe of the crowd and in the street beyond it.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Mishuief in a clear firm tone, knowing that they would listen to him, "I have only just got back, and, as yet, I don't know all the facts of this matter. I am at once going to attend a meeting of the strike-committee and the management, and until negotiations are at an end, may I ask you not to take action in any way? You'll trust me, won't you? Is that all right?"

Before the crowd could utter cries of consent, somebody signalled from a window on the third floor of the building, and Mishuief instinctively felt, before he could look closer to see what has occurred, that this was a signal to the men to greet him.

"All right! For your sake!"

He hurried into the house, the friendly shouts of thousands ringing in his ears. As he entered the counting-house the first thing he saw was Stepan Ivanovitch's surly face, on which he read hatred, malice, and scorn. Stepan scarcely glanced at his brother, but Mishuief walked straight up to him, when he looked up and said drily, "Well, what do you think of things now?"

"What do I think?" replied Mishuief with emphasis. "Why, that all can be satisfactorily arranged, and that, if you'll give me a free hand, the men will all resume this very afternoon."

He looked his brother frankly in the face; but the latter's glance was cold, almost malignant.

"Quite so," he replied mockingly, "if we are disposed

to ruin ourselves by this afternoon the men will resume work . . . for three days."

Mishuief turned round. The five men present looked at him without speaking, and all their faces wore the same hostile, dogged expression.

"Enemies, eh?" thought Mishuief, glancing at his brother. "Good! We'll see who gets the upper hand."

"Why ruined?" he asked, with a jerk of his head. "Do you mean to tell me that the concession of twenty per cent. will eat up our huge dividend? That's a little bit too much, eh?"

It hurt him to regard his brother, whom he always had loved and pitied, as a foe.

"It's not a question of twenty per cent.," replied Stepan Ivanovitch coldly. "Twenty per cent. won't ruin the business, though, as things are at present, it's quite heavy enough. Yet what guarantee have we that, after this precious twenty per cent., we shall not be asked for forty or fifty per cent.? Do you really think that this twenty per cent. is any good to them? Why, it's absurd! Twenty copecks on a rouble means for them only another bottle of vodka. It is not a question of the twenty copecks, but of the uncompromising greed of these people who think they are really entitled to a hundred per cent., not merely twenty or forty, and that they have every right to demand what is theirs and to kick us out into the street."

"What right have you to talk like that?" said Mishuief in an undertone. "The men are starving, worn out with work that in two days would utterly knock you up; and then you talk of drink and of bottles of vodka! No, no, brother, that won't do at all! Now, I maintain that if we give them at once what is absolutely necessary, they will resume work and not dream of asking for anything more. For they know better than we do that this disproportion is not our doing, and it is not towards us, personally, that their hatred is shown."

Stepan Ivanovitch shook his head, apparently too furious to reply. It was this stubborn refusal to accept what Mishuief considered a simple and just solution of

the difficulty that caused him to add, with some heat, "Very well, then; don't give them anything! Kick their representatives downstairs. Let them smash up your factory, and raze it to the ground. I should be only too glad to see the cursed place swept off the face of the earth!"

Stepan Ivanovitch smiled an evil smile.

"It's all very fine to talk like that," he hissed through his clenched teeth, "but the troops won't let them smash up the 'cursed place,' as you call it. At any rate you've had the benefit of it just as much as I have! Bah!"

"The troops?" asked Mishuief in amazement. In that moment he hated his brother, and felt convinced that Stepan hated him. "Are we going to let these starving men be shot down because they demand what is their right? Do you understand what you are saying?"

"I understand everything. It's no wish of mine that there should be factories and workmen. Some day, I hope, such things won't exist. But, at present this factory happens to belong to us, not to them, and if they touch a single stone of it I'll have them shot down like so many mad dogs! Yes, that I will!"

With that Stepan Ivanovitch rose, ponderous, massive as a rock. The pale wintry light touched his broad forehead.

"But to that I won't consent," exclaimed Mishuief hoarsely. "If you give orders to shoot, I'll side with the strikers. Then we'll see if you dare to do such a thing!"

Stepan Ivanovitch turned away and walked to the window.

"That's your affair," was his callous rejoinder.

With beating heart and trembling limbs, Mishuief stood as if rooted to the spot.

"Feodor Ivanovitch," began Schanz in a mild, ingratiating tone; and Mishuief caught sight of his little fox-like face. "I think that you're getting too excited about all this, and that you exaggerate matters. Concessions of some kind will have to be made. We're all of us aware of that, and I know that Stepan Ivanovitch

is ready to admit this, too. Of course he is. The point is, to what extent can such concessions be granted. But, from what I could gather at our former consultations, you were ready to accept the strikers' terms in their entirety. This can never be done, Feodor Ivanovitch. Such a thing is obviously quite impossible!"

Producing a pile of carefully kept books, the manager at great length sought to convince Mishuief that it was sheer folly to accede to the men's actual demands, and the latter, dazed by the relentless logic of figures, felt at last unable to act, unable to reply. He would have to give in, though he rebelled against doing so with his whole soul.

Angry murmurs could be heard without. The sound was as that of some distant waterfall, while at times loud cries rose up from below. Schanz, the manager, still continued talking, as he cited facts and figures in endless succession.

"Understand this much," struck in Stepan Ivanovitch, but in a quieter tone; "no middle course is possible, They'll never agree to ten per cent. There was some talk at first of thirty; however, the strike-committee gave in and accepted twenty. But, as to agreeing to ten, they'll never do that!"

Mishuief raised his sad, weary eyes, as his brother continued:

"One must either grant everything or nothing. Nothing, so that, after the inevitable catastrophe, we may have it in our power to dictate our own terms."

"And till that happens?" asked Mishuief, turning pale.

"Till that happens, well!" Stepan looked away, and snapped his fingers viciously.

"No!" cried Mishuief, drawing himself up to his huge height. "I cannot, I will not consent to let the men be shot down simply because they are starving and their interests are not our interests."

"Very well, then, go to them yourself, and put your own proposals before them!" said Stepan Ivanovitch, as he flung out his arms.

Mishuief stood there silent, with downcast eyes. He longed to have Nicolaief beside him at that moment. He felt sure that they two would be able to break through this magic circle.

"That is what I mean to do. Rather go to them than——" His voice here failed him.

"Hm! As you please," replied Stepan Ivanovitch. "Perhaps you'll be successful. But I warn you that you are running a great risk."

"In what way?"

"You will draw all their hatred upon yourself. These very workmen, about whom you are so concerned, will in a moment forget everything that you have tried to do for them; and, if you show that you are against them, they'll hate you more than anybody else, just because you took their part at first and therefore they believed in you."

Mishuief looked at him in silence.

"Listen, Fedia," said Stepan Ivanovitch kindly, "do you really think that all this doesn't affect me tremendously? But you are running an awful risk. Don't do it, I beg of you!"

For a good while Mishuief stood perfectly still. Then he turned sharply round and walked out. He felt that if he did not go that . . . Hark! he fancied that he heard the sound of musketry and of shrieking, that he saw blood. With head thrown backward and a vague sense of grief that chilled his heart, as if he alone had chosen to bear a heavy cross, he took his stand on the stone steps outside.

Tumult and white light seemed to overwhelm him. Thousands of expectant faces were turned towards him; on some of them there was a look of gladness. He began to speak.

What then occurred came swiftly, furiously, as some horrible typhoon. He could hardly hear the first words he uttered, but in an instant he saw how the faces round him changed. In a moment the expression of trust and gladness had vanished. Amid that huge crowd Mishuief felt all at once that he was quite alone; utterly isolated,

a stranger to them all. He strove to recover himself, but already what he spoke had no force, no point. All in a moment the bond of sympathy, firm as it had seemed, was broken; indeed, it might never have existed. He stood there, face to face with foes.

Afterwards he remembered that a little dark man with piercing eyes, a turner by trade, began to answer him.

"No more lies!" the man shouted. "You've shown your real face to us now. You're just another that thinks first of his millions and millions of roubles before he gives a thought to the millions of human beings who have only asked you for their rights. That's all we want now. Let them shoot us down, do! Shoot away! Hangman, do your work!"

Pale as death, Mishuief tried to speak, but words failed him. Sudden terror seized him, as when in a dream one falls into some horrible abyss.

Some fellow seized his arm, and instinctively he shook him off, while endeavouring to speak louder. But on the crowd this movement of his had the effect of a threat. Others now assaulted him, a snowball hit his eye, and amid frantic yells he disappeared head foremost in the crowd. With a wrench he freed his right hand and hit out blindly, striking some one's head with terrific force. For an instant there was space round about him, and then he saw red-capped Cossacks riding into the yard and heard whips whizzing through the air. Horror-struck, he dashed towards them, but he was attacked from behind and fell, dragging with him the swart little turner, whose head was broken, and spattered with blood

XV

In crimson splendour came the shining dawn, and at her coming the dark blue heavens, roused from their dream, grew brighter above the spacious sea. Drowsily the green wavelets broke against the steamer's side, and the ocean and the distant hills were as yet shrouded in opaline mist. High up, some topmost peak, touched already by sunlight, shone like a golden flame.

Mishuief slowly crawled up on to the deck, and with jaded eyes, aching still after a sleepless night, surveyed the scene. On board the steamer passengers were not yet awake. Two or three sailors were swabbing the slippery deck, and confused sounds could be heard proceeding from the cabins. The steamer's noise was dull and continuous as the waves lapped monotonously against her sides. Mishuief shivered repeatedly in the cold air. His sleepy face looked as if it had been crumpled up, and his hair was dishevelled.

Crossing to larboard he stood for a long while gazing at the green frothing water or at the distant sunlit hills. Then, going to the upper deck, he sat down at one of the little marble tables that, screwed down tightly in their places, seemed cold and comfortless as ice. Leaning on this with both his massive arms, he gazed about him. There were now signs of life on board. A steward in a white jacket with huge silver buttons ran past; the first officer, chilled by his long night watch, descended from his post; two girls, their eyes still heavy with sleep, came out of the first class, apparently much surprised to find the weather so bright and sunny. Then a lanky Englishman in a panama hat, looking as if he had stepped from some book of caricatures, propped his legs against the seat opposite to his, and lit a huge cigar. A little boy in a sailor-suit came running on deck, and the sunlight fell on his plump, little bare legs. Other passengers, smiling and sleepy-eyed, now appeared, and soon life on board the steamer pursued its busy, cheerful course. Two

bright-eyed French women, like twittering, merry birds that greet the morning, sat down at the table next to Mishuief's. They looked about them and, spying their gloomy neighbour, glanced at each other and laughed.

Mishuief felt inclined to get up and go. Human faces, human voices were hateful to him; false tongues, false eyes, he shunned them all. Yet he was trembling in every limb; his back ached, and his eyelids throbbed with pain. To move would have been torture. He rapped smartly on the table to attract the hurrying waiter's attention, and was just about to call out to him when he saw the Frenchwomen looking at him curiously, as they knew that he was a famous Russian millionaire. He remained dumb. Had he in that moment heard his own voice it would have sufficed, so he thought, to cause one of those mad fits of rage to which latterly he had often been subject. In the whole world there was nothing more odious, foolish, and futile than his own voice.

The servant stood waiting, silent and surprised. Then Mishuief, to his own astonishment, took out a pencil and wrote on the marble top of the table, "Bring me some coffee."

With head awry, like a hen about to peck at grain, the waiter read what was written, and then hurried away.

The idea amused Mishuief. Why had he not thought of it before? Quite simple, too. One could thus always remain dumb, and get from other persons that which one wanted without hearing their false voices or one's own. The whimsical nature of such a proceeding pleased him, as in this way he thought he could mock his fellow-men and hide himself from them.

Yet, when the coffee was brought, he gazed seawards, lost in his thoughts. His aching head was propped against his hands, through which his ruffled locks of hair emerged, and in his eyes there was a dull, leaden look. For many days he had brooded thus, and when in a brief, unrefreshing sleep the thoughts that harassed him were lost, he had an awful sense of sinking downwards, ever downwards, helplessly in the huge fathomless void. Latterly he had travelled much, but the impressions of

such journeys were dim and blurred, like vague memories of the long-forgotten past. Yet an ever-recurring group of faces flashed across his disordered brain. They were always present; he saw them as clearly as one sees figures in the unnatural glare of a feverish dream. Now they rose up again before his eyes that hardly noticed the blue-green panorama which met his view.

First he beheld Nicolaief's perplexed countenance, which recalled their last interview. There he stood, in the middle of his study, opposite the tattered figure of the roaring, raving Mishuief, looking aside and nervously fingering the tassels of his girdle. Choking with mad rage, Mishuief strove to understand how it was that this man, the best of all he had ever known or loved, could not see the monstrous injustice of which he was a victim. Brutes in human shape, to whom he had done nothing but good, and to whom he had wished to sacrifice his whole life, had ill-used him, beaten him, had wanted to kill him. The thing was amazing, infuriating, yet all that he heard was Nicolaief's disloyal, embarrassed voice persuading him that they were not to blame.

"They're just brutes! Low, senseless, greedy brutes!" shouted Mishuief. "What had I done to them? Why did they treat me thus?"

"Yet, look what they had to suffer—all for one man," was Nicolaief's quiet answer.

"Suffer, indeed! They didn't suffer half enough! I'm glad if they did suffer; yes, I'm delighted, delighted!"

Mishuief shouted louder and louder, yet, as his fury increased, Nicolaief's expression grew colder and more hostile. When Mishuief bitterly reproached him with callousness and want of sympathy, he replied calmly, but with cruel malignity in his voice:

"Possibly in this case they did wrong. It was an outburst of blind fury on the part of desperate, toil-worn men. But, to be quite candid, how do you stand with regard to them? You're their enemy, like all the rest, like your brother——"

"I am their enemy?" cried Mishuief, aghast.

"Yes, that you are. You lived, like all the rest, by

the sweat of their brows; they bled for you; and if you refrained from crushing them underfoot, even if you went so far as to help them, that is really not so meritorious after all."

Mishuief's bruised face, with swollen lips and blackened eyes, grew hideous, even pitiable, to behold.

"So, you think that they would have done right if they had killed me?" he asked breathlessly.

Nicolaief turned pale as again he fidgeted with the tassels of his girdle.

"If that's the case," began Mishuief, "then you are——" But he stopped short.

Then, to his supreme disgust, he noticed a changed expression on Nicolaief's face, the result, as it seemed, of some afterthought. The poet suddenly attempted to gloss over his previous remarks and to be anxious to conciliate Mishuief who, in his overwrought state, was quick to detect the falseness of such words and the reason for their utterance. Nicolaief appeared afraid to quarrel, lest Mishuief should refuse to find money for the proposed journalistic venture. Both were silent. Mishuief felt unutterable shame, and Nicolaief's honest face grew red with confusion. For a moment their eyes met, and in that moment the bond of their lifelong, loyal friendship melted and left no trace. Half an hour later they separated, not as two intimate friends, but as foes who hated and despised each other.

Afterwards Mishuief spent the long tedious hours of that night in travelling. He had determined to go to the man whom he had robbed of all his happiness. Why he had sought out this man he could not tell, and not till he saw the other's questioning look did he dimly perceive what he had done. It may be that he desired to meet a man, even an enemy, who would look him fairly and squarely in the face.

Maria Sergeievna's husband stood before him, haggard and grey-haired, gazing fixedly at him with burning, unquenchable hatred in his eyes.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Is what you did to me not enough? Have you come to mock me? Do

you suppose that you have a right to do whatever you like ? "

Mishuief, though he did not recollect the exact words, could yet clearly see how the other's face first expressed astonishment; and then, having understood, bitter, almost triumphant scorn.

" Aha ! " he said softly, " so, apparently, there is yet something which money cannot buy. That's good."

Then he laughed louder and louder, and at last drove him from the door as one drives a dog. Mishuief went. He had long since lost the living thread that had drawn him to this man, and he could not conceive why he had ever gone to him.

That night in the train he could not sleep, tormented by hideous visions. Before his eyes there rose up the image of a famous poet whose very name since childhood he had reverenced and loved. Would he receive him ? The idea cheered him for a time until the reply to his telegram arrived. Yet when he knew that the venerable man was willing to see him, the scheme appeared futile.

He was going to be received, so he thought, merely because he was Mishuief, the millionaire. For Mishuief, the man, this philanthropist did not, could not care. The whole idea collapsed; Mishuief saw that it was absurd. There was no need to go to any one for counsel or advice. No one could tell him what he did not know himself. Then, for the first time in his life, he thought of renouncing his wealth and of becoming poor, like most other men. Yet that again seemed impossible. There was no need to go here, or there, for comfort. He would always be, and continue to be, just what he was. Nothing could cure the malady that once and for all had maimed his soul. This new thought that for him there was no further place in the world became clearer and more firmly rooted in his brain. Sighing deeply, he shut his eyes. At that moment he overheard a youthful voice say in Russian :

" It's wonderful, when you travel by the Southern express, how you get the impression that spring is returning not day by day but hour by hour. You simply rush

to meet it. I cannot express myself rightly, but to me there is nothing more enchanting. Yesterday everything was grey and cold; to-day it has thawed in places, and between the birches one sees patches of green. To-morrow we shall see the blue sky. How delightful!"

Mishuief mechanically opened his eyes and looked at the speaker. He was a very young man, probably an invalid, and he was talking to a girl with bright, merry eyes. They were standing on deck, and the breeze lightly touched her soft hair. From their beaming faces Mishuief knew that they, at all events, were really happy. Then once more he gazed at the shore, and again closed his eyes.

Close by, two French women were talking about a bull-fight.

"Before the toreador kills him all the matadors drive him with their red cloaks in one direction; you see, in one direction, until he's utterly dazed . . . and then the toreador stabs him. It's horrid, I assure you."

In a moment Mishuief seemed to see the huge head of a bull with staring, bloodshot eyes.

He trembled all over, and got up from his seat. There were passengers everywhere on deck. Laughing and chattering, they turned to watch him as he quietly passed them and went aft.

There he stood, gazing at the track of foam churned by the steamer as she cut her way through the waves. It was as if he were searching for something in this mysterious frothy stripe. Then, as it seemed to him, he had found it. He looked round, at the sky, the hills, the merry folk on board who sat at some short distance from him. Then, suddenly, he jumped overboard. It was done clumsily, and of this he had a lightning-swift impression, as he felt ashamed that his fellow-passengers should see it.

There was a hideous buzzing in his ears; nose and mouth were choked by water that burned and stung. His brain seemed bursting as he sank down into the green chasm that engulfed him. Then, as he rose to

the surface of the water, he saw through the dripping spray the steamer like a white spot in the distance.

"Help!"

But at once he began to sink in the dull green abyss, as his chest seemed rent in pieces. A shoal of little fishes darted aside, like splinters, in all directions, yet instantly returned to stare with round curious eyes at his outspread overcoat, straddling legs, yellow tan boots, and blue, lifeless head that slowly sank, deeper and deeper, into the cold green gloom beneath.

IVAN LANDE

IVAN LANDE

I

As winter approached, the little town became tranquil. All its youth and activity had forsaken it for populous cities. Only the aged in body and spirit remained at home. Their life was the traditional one, regular and monotonous. They played cards, went to church, read books, and thought that in this way life should be spent. Snow, like a pure cold shroud, covered the streets, and in the houses feeble, sleepy folk pottered about, for whom everything by now had reached its end. Yet in spring-time, when fragrance rose from the black, moist earth, and on all sides there were magic touches of tender green, as the glad sunlight warmed each grassy slope; when at eventide all things lay hushed and expectant, then each day brought some one back by rail to the town, and in the streets bright, pleasant faces could be seen, young, joyous as the spring itself. Just as birds go back to their old nests, and as in the old spots grass again shoots up, so all the young, life-loving folk were wont to return to their little peaceful, yet somewhat dreary town.

Thus in the May of this year, Ivan Lande, a student of mathematics, had arrived, his father, chairman of the rural district council, being recently deceased. Throughout the day he had remained with his mother, who tearfully recounted the details of his father's death, and not till the twilight hour did he take up his cap and walk down to the boulevard.

The avenue lay at the border of a large river swollen now by spring floods. At one place there was a steep cliff, where two old green benches stood, the wood of them mouldy now through damp.

Beyond the river it was growing dark, as the horizon gradually faded from sight, and faint stars gleamed in the sombre sky. It was that moment of solemn peace

when something invisible appears to float, calm and majestic, above the land. Far down the river a ship's steam-whistle uttered a weird, melancholy noise, as if to give notice of danger, or to recall some sad and inevitable occurrence. On the broad glossy surface of the water, strangely bright amid the general gloom, a black moving spot could be seen which left in its wake a broad, even streak.

At this hour the boulevard was absolutely deserted. Only from the club-windows fell shafts of yellow light in which noiseless shadows moved, and close to the cliff dark figures could be dimly discerned, and the glimmer of lighted cigarettes, as in the distance voices and laughter resounded.

Lande smiled, and walked on slowly in that direction. Light, yet somewhat feeble of step, his approach could hardly be perceived.

"I say, shall we sing a song, or shout till they hear us on the other side of the water?" cried a pleasant feminine voice, that in the dense, warm air was delightful to hear.

"Well, you begin," was a man's cheery rejoinder, as some one laughed.

Lande, coming nearer, said:

"Good evening!" quietly, but so distinctly that he was at once heard.

"Hullo, Lande!" exclaimed Shishmariof, a young student with boisterous energy, as he held out his big hand. Lande, smiling, gave it a hearty grip, and his greeting to the others was equally cordial. They all were glad to shake his slender hand, and in this universal pleasure there was so much that was charming because so perfectly sincere, that Molotchaief, the artist, a big, strong fellow who had never seen Lande before, felt its influence. When Lande, approaching him, said, "Let me introduce myself, my name's Lande," the artist replied:

"I am delighted to meet you," as he smilingly looked into Lande's calm eyes. "I have heard about you," he added, in a voice resonant as some brazen bell.

"Really?" asked Lande, smiling and turning away.

Yet this did not betoken indifference, but rather a certain latent intimacy as if he had known this long ago.

"What were you all talking about?" he said to the group.

"Oh! Maria Nicolaievna wants to jump over the moon!" laughed the little student.

"That's charming of her!" said Lande, as he smiled, and nodded kindly to Maria.

A sickly student, Semenof, coughed huskily.

"Still suffering?" asked Lande kindly, as he put his hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, just the same as ever," was the gloomy reply. "Not so bad as that, come!" said Lande, but his voice shook.

"No, my boy, I'm done for!" replied Semenof, as his features, wrinkled by disease, were distorted by an unnatural smile, and his voice expressed resentment and acute despair. "There'll be some fine weeds grow out of me soon!"

All were silent. A cold, strange, and yet horribly intimate sensation seemed to freeze their vitals. Then, like a slack violin-string, Lande's gentle voice was heard, saying:

"No, don't say that, my little pigeon! One mustn't talk like that about what no one really knows. Some day we shall all have to die, not merely I, or you, but all of us, and then we shall all know at once if the end is just weeds, as you say, or a new life. All! Don't you feel how much that word implies? It is impossible that such a wealth of thought and suffering and affection should vanish without a trace and simply reappear as 'weeds.' All of us feel this, too, and believe it. So do you. Only, you won't believe anything, because, like a child, you're afraid of what is new to you, what you don't understand. We don't know what death is, and that is why we are afraid of it."

The simple sincerity with which these words were spoken soothed the other's tortured brain; like some soft odour, some genial ray, caressing to the spirit, and that points to brighter horizons, to a distant, roseate dawn.

In Semenof's trembling heart child-like, trustful hope was aroused, as he said laughingly, "Blessed are they who believe."

At this there was a general sense of relief. The invisible phantom softly receded, and removed from their talk its dreadful, icy hand.

Like some black shadow a tall man now came striding along the boulevard, kicking up the sand as he went.

"That is Firsof," said Lande, as he hailed him by name.

"Who is it?" asked Molotchaief softly.

"Oh! some official at the Finance Department," said Shishmariof, with an impatient gesture. He seemed to be annoyed with Lande.

The black shadow stopped.

"It's you, isn't it, Ivan Ferapontovitch?" asked a dull, grating voice.

"It is I," replied Lande.

There was a sound of shuffling feet, and the dim shadow gradually changed into a long, lean man, who approached.

"Welcome, Ivan Ferapontovitch, welcome!"

With a show of excessive cordiality the new-comer stumbled over the other's feet to get to Ivan Lande. His somewhat boisterous manner seemed to be assumed.

"I say, look out where you're coming to!" exclaimed Semenof irritably.

"Good evening, Firsof, how are you?" said Lande as he grasped the other's hand.

"Ah!" replied Firsof, rubbing his hands, "how should I be? At work, hard at work. Life's nothing but that. Though, of course, I have my spiritual life as well. Church is what renovates me."

His voice had a false ring in it, as if he wished to praise himself and show off before Lande.

"Your life's not exactly rich, is it?" said Shishmariof with obvious irony.

Firsof turned slowly round.

"Don't you think it is? Greater riches than communion with God I do not know. Very likely you are not of that opinion."

Almost threatening was the tone in which this was said, yet Shishmariof only glanced contemptuously at him, and did not answer.

"Yes," drawled Firsof, after a pause, "the other day I had to serve on a jury here, rather an interesting case, it was, of a workman accused of theft. At one time he was foreman at the weaving mills, here. Probably you know him. His name's Tkatchof."

"Tkatchof?" cried Lande in amazement. "It's impossible!"

"Yes, yes," continued Firsof gleefully, "it was theft right enough. A trifling matter in itself; but the way that he behaved! Just imagine! He wouldn't have anyone to defend him, but conducted his case himself. 'Of course, I know that I've stolen,' says he, 'but if anyone on the jury is without sin in this respect then let him judge me.' Blasphemous, I call it! Till then I never realized how mighty are those words!"

"I can't see that the words matter in the least!" was Semenof's interjection.

"Of course, it's the words, and the making use of them like that!" said Firsof angrily.

In clumsy fashion he then tried to explain that inspired words, words of our Lord, should never have been used by a man of that sort with reference to his own evil deeds. Yet all that he said was so dry and lifeless that nobody listened.

Stretching out her arm which, in its loose white sleeve, looked the wing of some large bird, Maria Nicolaievna exclaimed in glee:

"The moon! The moon is rising!"

Firsof stopped short, evidently annoyed.

"Ah! yes. No doubt the moon's of more importance."

"Everything is of importance," said Lande smiling.

Above the dark horizon the moon's red disc slowly floated into sight. At once on the gloomy surface of the river sparks appeared, and a frail tremulous golden bridge was flung across it from shore to shore, like some mute mysterious appeal to come over into a new, azure world.

"How lovely!" cried Maria Nicolaievna enthusiastically, and her full, rich voice echoed down the darkening slopes. Lande turned to look at her charming face as she gazed dreamily into the gloom.

"Ivan Ferapontovitch," said Firsof, in the same rasping tone, as he rose, "we shall meet again, I hope. I must go now."

"No doubt we shall," replied Lande, as he feebly shook the other's hand.

Firsof took leave of the others, and went shuffling onward.

"What pleasure can you find in talking to such a fellow?" asked Shishmariof, when he had gone. "A grumbler and a skin-flint, always running to church, and worrying his child when he's at home."

"He. . . ."

"Oh! don't let us talk about him, please," exclaimed Shishmariof irritably.

Lande smiled sadly and was silent.

The moon had now risen, and her silver shield hung overhead.

"Now, Molotchaief," said Maria Nicolaievna, "paint something like that. Then I shall at once think that you're a great artist!"

Molotchaief gazed at the moon without speaking, and Shishmariof watched him.

"He'll paint it directly," was his mocking remark; then, turning to Lande, he said eagerly:

"Lande, do you know what happened at Verschilof's mill? He wanted to give his workmen a lot of putrid meat, and so they smashed his windows and thrashed the manager. Twenty-one men have been arrested."

"Now then, Lande," asked Semenof, to rally him, "were they in the right?"

"Yes," was Lande's firm reply. Then, as Semenof uttered an exclamation of surprise, he added:

"Their families are in terrible straits. It's a shocking story. We did what little we could for them, but——"

No one spoke. Lande's eyes were fixed on the ground, and his thin fingers twitched slightly.

Semenof coughed, and the sound echoed across the cliff. Gliding upwards, the moon, as she rose higher and higher, gradually revealed in ghostly outline the opposite river-bank, and over the fields and the river itself white mists floated. The air grew chill and damp. Semenof buttoned his overcoat, pulled his cap right over his ears, and got up.

"I must go home," he said, "it's getting cold. Sonia, are you coming too?"

"No," replied a slim girl, who had sat the whole time close to the edge of the cliff.

"Very well," said Semenof carelessly, "it's cold. You'll come and see me, won't you, Lande?"

"All right."

"Good-bye."

"What?" asked Molotchaief mechanically.

"The artist is lost in his thoughts! Good-bye!"

And Semenof went slowly along the boulevard, stooping as he walked.

"I say, Lionia," said Lande slowly, after evident reflection, "we must help this fellow."

"All that it was possible to do has been done," replied Shishmariof. "There's no help for it."

Lande got up.

"Why not?" he said thoughtfully. "Come and see me to-morrow. I must go now. My mother expects me."

It soon became very cold. The earth and the sky, the river's surface and the features of human beings, all had a frigid, transparent look like that of blue ice. Shishmariof with Lionia went in one direction, and Lande, Molotchaief and Maria Nicolaievna in the other.

II

"If you'll be my model, I'll paint a picture," said Molotchaief, as he bent closer to Maria Nicolaievna's moonlit face.

"Why not two; while you're about it?" she laughingly replied, as her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

Lande looked up at her and said:

"It is good—" but then he smiled, and did not finish his sentence, which would have been, "It's good that you are both so young, so handsome, and so much in love with each other."

"What are you going to do for the workmen?" asked Maria Nicolaievna, remembering Lande's words and looking suddenly grave.

"Nothing much; something just as a temporary help. I've got some money."

Molotchaief looked at him, and was impressed by the expression of steadfast determination in that haggard, moonlit countenance and those large, glorious eyes. He felt suspicious, half jealous of the other, as with curling lip he asked:

"Are you going to give it to them?"

"Yes," replied Lande.

"All of it?" To Molotchaief it sounded like a bad joke. "I really don't know, my lad," was Lande's good-tempered answer, as if considering the matter. "Perhaps the whole of it if necessary."

And you . . . have got lots of money, I suppose?" asked Molotchaief ironically. "The fellow's a *poseur*," he thought to himself, annoyed, really, because he knew it was jealousy that gave him this false impression.

Maria Nicolaievna listened attentively as Lande continued:

"I have . . . not very much, you know . . . four thousand."

And again Molotchaief could not help thinking, "that hesitation's all done for effect."

Then he chanced to look at Maria Nicolaievna, which made him forget Lande.

"Your face is just like one in some picture by Stuck, when you laugh or when you look serious," he said with enthusiasm.

Maria Nicolaievna laughed, and for an instant her white teeth gleamed in the moonlight. Lande as he looked at her perceived the truth of what Molotchaief had said.

"Do you really mean to give them all that money at once?" she asked, trying to hide her face from Molotchaief.

"Yes, all at once!" said Lande smiling.

There was such calm earnestness in his voice that she for a moment became thoughtful. His words had touched some tender chord within her inmost soul.

"He's delightful!" she thought. "And so absolutely original! A saintly man!"

She remembered that Semenof had once called him this.

"No, he's not saintly, in the sense of being crazed on the subject of religion."

She did not want him to be that.

When it came to saying good-bye, Lande seemed irresolute, as if he would have preferred to remain with the young couple.

"Good-bye," said Molotchaief coolly, as he hastily held out his hand. Lande paused a moment and then, smiling, went his way, full of a great tenderness, of a boundless sympathy with the whole world.

Maria Nicolaievna walked for a good while beside her companion without speaking, her soul filled with solemn peace.

"This Lande's simply crazy," said Molotschaief. An absolute fool! Not even that, perhaps!" he added with a grimace. "He's not handsome, but interesting-looking."

"Oh! you know nothing except about your art; that's all!" said Maria Nicolaievna, as she laughingly looked up at the moon.

"No, I have only an eye for what is beautiful," replied Molotchaief, and to these simple words he gave a special meaning which she did not miss.

"And, besides the beautiful?"

"The devil only knows. Nothing, I should say!" Molotchaief shrugged his shoulders.

Maria laughed, and her bosom as it heaved beneath the white bodice in the moonlight looked almost nude. Molotchaief's glance was fixed upon her ravishing profile and her dark, shining eyes that were not turned to him but seemed fraught with mystery and cryptic promise.

Silence reigned. Behind one or other of the distant dreary houses a little dog began to bark.

"I want to live," said Maria Nicolaievna softly at first, but gradually raising her voice. "I want to do something, I want to love!"

Then, with a sudden peal of silvery laughter, "I want to jump over the moon, as Shishmariof said! No! No! It's sleep, that's what I want! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Molotchaief, as, still trembling, he heaved a deep sigh. "Good-bye!"

Behind the fence the sound of light footsteps could be heard, the turning of a key in the lock, as the door clumsily opened and a sleepy voice mumbled something. Then was all still.

Molotchaief walked on through the silent moon-silvered streets, free from disturbing thoughts; conscious only of his great happiness.

III

When Lande reached home, his mother was seated at the table waiting to get supper ready for him.

Since her husband's death it had been a dreary, desolate home for her; everything seemed to have come to an end, so she thought. Some fatal power had divided her life into two equal halves. Sad and tedious though the past had been, it was not without joy or sunshine. But now all was cold and vacant. It was only the thought of her son that shed a gleam of light upon her dull existence, and which made what she did of any significance.

"Vania?" she called gently, from behind the lamp.

"It is I, mother dear," replied Lande, as, throwing down his cap, he sat down beside her and leaned his head on her shoulder. She stroked his soft fair hair and thought that all which life still held for her was centred in her boy.

"Will you have something to eat?" she asked, laying her hand on his shoulder.

"Yes," replied Lande, as he kissed her hand with its short, wrinkled fingers.

"My own dear boy," said his mother, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Mother, what did father really leave us? I mean, how much altogether?"

The question did not at all surprise his mother, as Lande might want to be certain if he could continue his studies or not.

"Not much, Vania," she said sadly, while thinking of something else. "This house, here; and then, thank God, there's my little annuity, which is not so bad. But, in actual cash, we've only got four thousand."

"That's about what I thought. The house and the annuity are yours, of course, mother, but, if you don't mind, I'd like to have the money, as I want it." When he said this Lande felt a sense of oppression at his heart.

"Yes, yes, take it, do! It was really left to you."

She looked thoughtfully at him and stroked his hair.

"What do you want to do with it?" she asked tenderly, smiling at him as if he were a child.

Not for an instant did Lande think of concealment. As he looked into her eyes, his face brightened and he cheerfully replied:

"I want to give it to the families of the workmen that Vershilof has turned into the street."

"What?" cried his mother. Then, smiling, she said, "You're just like some silly child, although you've got a good big beard, too."

Lande smiled sadly, and did not answer.

"But you don't seriously mean it? It's the sort of thing you might do," continued his mother, as the tone of her voice suddenly changed to one of anxiety and caution. Yet ere she had finished speaking she saw by his clear, wide-opened eyes that he was really in earnest. For a moment she was silent, and stared at him in amazement. Then, more to console herself, she added, "How absurd! Why what would become of you?"

"That will be all right, somehow," was Lande's mournful rejoinder. He felt that an insurmountable icy wall had risen up between them.

"It's absurd!" repeated his mother with stubborn emphasis, as if she were bound to ward off something hostile and evil. It was, in fact, impossible for her to approve of such a scheme which meant the annihilation of all that had been accumulated during her long, industrious life. He made no reply, conscious in his heart of a grievous wound.

That night, as he lay in bed, he thought:

"What's be be done? Mother can't and won't understand. It will be an awful shock to her, but I can't act, otherwise. We should never agree about this, and, loving her as I do, I should have to give in. That cannot be; and therefore I must go away."

It was appalling to think that for the first time in his life he must sever the ties which bound him to one he so deeply loved. Then, in the darkness, he seemed to see

the dying Semenof coming towards him, a vision that strangely thrilled him.

"Here I lie," he thought, "convinced that, by this rupture I am bound to create sorrow and pain, and yet —perhaps, in spite of everything, what is there, if I look before or after? Chaos, a limitless void! I am less, far less, than a grain of sand; my life in eternity scarcely counts for a moment. It is as if it had never existed. Yet here I live, and believe, and devote myself to others? What is this that I am doing?"

He shivered from head to foot, and it seemed as if he were suspended above some horrible abyss. Then he remembered a kitten that one of Verschilof's coachmen had picked up by the scruff of its neck and flung on the ground. Poor little kitten! It was killed instantly. It was as if he himself had been seized by the neck and were hanging helpless in mid air, at the point of death. In another moment he would be flung to the ground; a terrific blow; and then silence, darkness, the end! To his over-wrought nerves this sense of solitude was unbearable. Involuntarily he attempted to pray: "Oh, Lord, Lord!"

Suddenly, amid the general whirl of ideas and impressions, one thought seemed to emerge like a flame:

"I pray here, as I lie in a warm bed, while Verschilof's workmen after a hard day's work are sleeping on the bare boards."

Urged by a sudden impulse he sprang up, fell on his knees and pressed his burning brow to the cold floor. As he wept there, in the darkness and the silence, to his soul there suddenly came peace. He remembered the workmen, and at once determined to give them the money; all of it, all that he had. How to do this, as yet he knew not; nor did he ever think that this would grieve his mother, rouse opposition from others, and add to the cares of his own life. Yet a sense of new-found joy overcame him as, straight and shining, the road that he should take lay clearly before his soul.

IV

NEXT morning Lande went to the prison, the white high walls of which shone at some distance from the town, as they rose above the broad bank of the river and near a pleasant green meadow. The sunlit bayonets of the sentries, dark solitary figures, flashed in the blue air.

Lande was conducted to the Inspector, a man with a long silvery beard, such as one might see in some picture of a saint. He received Lande politely, as his thin lips moved nervously, and the look on his face was one of inquiry and distrust.

"My name is Lande. Perhaps you know me? I am anxious to see Tkatchof, he who the day before yesterday was acquitted. I understand that he is still here."

The Inspector's bony fingers moved slightly.

"That you can do; yes. He is still with us. You can see him, of course," he repeated, as if to convince himself of the fact. "You shall be accompanied to his cell, or he can come here, if you like."

"I would rather go to him. Possibly he would not wish to come and see me, as he hardly knows who I am."

The Inspector looked hard at Lande for a moment and frowned.

"Sidorof, accompany this gentleman!"

"What do you think I ought to do about this fellow?" asked Lande, in a confidential tone. "You see, I should like to propose——"

"You can discuss all that with him personally," was the Inspector's brusque rejoinder, as he busied himself with papers on his desk.

An old soldier with a bristly moustache and a black baggy uniform raised his ragged cuff to salute the Inspector and said:

"At your service, sir! This way, please."

Lande followed him into the courtyard. It was clean and spacious, yet the air seemed close, although above it

lay the soft spring sky. It smelt of sour cabbage-soup and cobblers' shops; there was also a strong penetrating stench from the latrines.

"Not exactly a nice sort of place, this," said Lande.

With his little peasant's eyes Sidorof glanced round the yard in comic perplexity, as if to find out what was not nice about it.

"No, it's not," was his brisk, cheery reply. It seemed to please him greatly that he and Lande were of the same opinion.

Lande watched how the fellow plodded along clumsily in front of him, and added:

"A sorry business, isn't it, to have to watch over other men?"

"Yes, it is," replied Sidorof in the same cheerful tone.

"It was better, at home, in your village, when you were working in the fields," said Lande, feeling full of pity for the soldier.

"Yes," replied Sidorof, "working in the fields is all right."

It was this cheery voice of his that made Lande feel happier.

"Why has Tkatchof not yet been discharged? He has been acquitted."

"He doesn't want to go," said Sidorof smiling.

"Why?"

"'I have no place to go to,' says he. What an idea to be sure! He's a funny chap."

Lande grew pensive; sadness like a shadow passed across his soul.

Leaving the courtyard, they went along a narrow vaulted corridor which after the bright sunlight outside seemed unusually dark. One saw here nothing but cold, muddy stone and rusty iron. Dirty, ill-clad men of various ages, but all with the same anæmic, bloated faces, lounged about listlessly from door to door. They looked at Lande with unfriendly, hostile eyes, stood against the wall, and then retreated to the obscurity of the damp corridor. In one of the cells somebody began to sing, but the song sounded

more like a curse, so wild was it, and so full of vile words.

"Tkatchof!"

Sidorof's voice echoed cheerily down the corridor.

"Hallo! Tkatchof! You, there! Some one's calling you! Can't you hear?" cried several prisoners, as if glad to be able to shout for some real reason. At the entrance to one of the cells, a grimy, gaunt man appeared in a prison-jacket far too large for him. He had prominent cheek-bones, and he eyed Lande suspiciously.

"I want to see you," said the latter, as he held out his hand and smiled, so as to assure him of his kindly intentions. Tkatchof shook hands in awkward fashion, yet as if the visit did not at all surprise him. "I wanted to speak to you about something," said Lande.

Tkatchof looked at him with greater suspicion, as he bit his thin, dry lips and stepped unwillingly aside.

"This is where I live—here!" he said in a husky voice.

Lande followed him into his cell, a vaulted room, so small, damp and stuffy that it seemed amazing to think that it was the abode of a full-grown man and not of some little hunted animal.

After pausing to reflect Tkatchof knit his brows and then pushed a stool towards Lande.

"Please sit down," he said in a vague tone, Lande did so, and looked tenderly at the other.

"What is it that you want from me?" asked Tkatchof; and, as his eyebrows worked uneasily beneath this glance, his face had not a harsh, but a pitiful expression such as that of a sickly child.

"I want nothing," replied Lande kindly. "I only heard about you, and so I came."

"But for what reason?" asked Tkatchof suspiciously.

"Well, I felt sorry that you had been so upset and unfortunate, and I thought that it might make it easier for you if I came to see you."

"Pity? I don't want your pity," replied Tkatchof gruffly, turning towards the window as with lean, grimy fingers he gripped the edge of the table.

Lande gently took hold of his hand.

"Why do you say that? It's not true. Your life's been embittered by misfortune, and if you stole, it was only because you've known so little of human sympathy and love. I have come to you without any afterthought, but with an open heart and a sincere desire to help you if I can. So, why say anything to wound me?"

Tkatchof glanced shyly at Lande's hand that in this gentle trustful way was holding his own grimy one, and all at once he blushed.

"I don't want anybody," he replied sullenly, as he drew back his hand. "That's all nonsense!"

"Why?" asked Lande, with a pained look on his face.

Turning towards him Tkatchof smiled contemptuously.

"Your question, simple as it is, puts me in rather a silly position," he replied, with a certain pompous bitterness of tone. "After all, why should I have anything to do with you?" He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the window where pigeons were cooing, though through the barred window-pane they could not be seen.

"There! I feed them. They're my friends," he said after a pause, as a nervous smile flickered on his pinched lips.

"The pigeons? Ah! I see!"

Lande smiled also. "Of course they're friends. It's not true that there must be eternal hatred and destruction. There's no necessity, there can't be any necessity for this. On the contrary we must all try to protect one another, and be friends, brothers. You know I think everything's all wrong at present; it's not as it ought to be. To put an end to this, to make things better in the world, that is what we've got to do. I believe that——"

"I don't understand your fine phrases," broke in Tkatchof, obviously wishing to be rude.

Lande smiled sadly.

"I'm afraid I can't express my meaning in any better way. Don't you really understand me? Oh! I believe

that you do. I wanted to say that evil and hatred don't exist of themselves, but they are the result of the work of forming the world. They must be conquered."

"Ah! yes," sneered Tkatchof, "what an easy task!"

"No, not easy; hard, fearfully hard. But not impossible. No hate nor wrath is so strong that it cannot be overcome."

"Why do you tell me all this?" asked Tkatchof interrupting.

"Because," replied Lande, grasping the other's hand for fear that he might go, "because it seems to me that you have ceased to believe that such things were possible. I am sure that you think that Evil is everlasting and at all times triumphant; you think that one should not fight against it, but yield to it. That would be awful. Yet this is not so. You have simply lost heart; have become embittered by misfortune, and you make even denser the atmosphere of hatred that surrounds you, as if this were the only air in which you had really ever learnt to breathe. Ah! Tkatchof, but what an awful mistake! You feel that it is; you find it difficult to breathe, terribly difficult, eh?"

Tkatchof did not answer, but breathed heavily through his nose.

"One must not requite hate with hate," continued Lande, as his large eyes shone, and the words he uttered came spontaneously as some fervent, soul-inspired song. "Only in this way can it be overcome. Nor does one ever feel such ease, such satisfaction, as when conquering personal hatred, as when refusing to retaliate if assailed by hatred from some other quarter. Does not, then, this feeling show us which way is ours? And to all of us is it not a joy? What tortures would not men endure for its sake! And, though men should treat you badly, even cruelly, external relations with others must necessarily differ and cannot always be equal. Reconciliation is really an easy matter if only——"

"Have you ever known what it is to be hungry?" was Tkatchof's cutting interpolation. "Tell me that, Mr. Lande."

"Oh! why talk like that?" pleaded Lande. "You know that for his ideas man can suffer hunger and pain—even death. The martyrs endured the most horrible torments."

"Ah! but they were martyrs!" said Tkatchof, as he jerked back his head.

"Do you think, then, that the martyrs were in any way remarkable people? No; I and you, and everybody, even the most insignificant of men, is ready to bear all things for an idea, if only it be *his* idea, what *he* personally feels. Isn't that so?"

"Perhaps that's true," said Tkatchof gruffly.

"True! Of course it is!" Lande's face became radiant. "Truth lives in mankind; it is in human beings that this enormous force exists. As this is so, man is able to attain all things. Each of us can! Each of us can battle against every opposing power and conquer.

"What made you steal, Tkatchof?"

Tkatchof trembled, and gradually grew pale, as he glared furiously at Lande.

"What business is it of yours?" he exclaimed hoarsely, as he stretched out his long, grimy neck.

"I know why," said Lande with quivering lips, "and I want to talk to you about it."

The expression on Tkatchof's face was now fearful to behold. Close to him Lande saw the man's eyes, their dark pupils fully dilated, and in their depths a quenchless flame of furious hate. If he so much as winked, thought Lande, the other would either knock him down or spit in his face. But he never winced.

Suddenly Tkatchof looked down.

"You know nothing," he said in a defiant tone.

"Oh! but I do," replied Lande firmly. "Your whole life is known to me; I have heard much about it; and, when speaking yourself in court, you said a good deal which was afterwards repeated to me. Your account of things was so accurate, so vivid, so that one scarcely——"

A look of foolish vanity crossed Tkatchof's face.

"I expect you thought that it's only the likes of you gentlemen students that know how to speak? No,

those days are over. Now . . ." and so he rambled on, never keeping to the point.

"I know," said Lande, "that you've always had a hard life of it, and yet that you never stole, never drank, never smoked. I know, too, that you studied the Gospel, and that you gave up eating meat."

"That's all nonsense!" replied Tkatchof with affected scorn.

"No, no, it's not nonsense! It is a tremendous thing when a man shows such self-discipline. For that it needs enormous will-power, and that will-power you had, Tkatchof. Why does it fail you now?" pleaded Lande, as he caught hold of the other's hand. "Why didn't you fight it out to the end?"

"To what end, pray?" asked Tkatchof, as his features became distorted by a malicious grimace and he snatched away his hands.

"To victory, Tkatchof! A man can conquer all things if he fights for his ideas. Your idea was that all men are as one; that life and feeling are one, and should be good and beautiful. You would have conquered, too, Tkatchof. You've such a strong character. Why, then, did you lose heart? What happened?"

Tkatchof did not answer. Lande was silent also, shaken, indeed exhausted, by violent emotion. His lips and hands trembled; only his eyes beamed as before with love and pity. For some time Tkatchof was silent.

"Here, Mr. Lande," he said at last, looking away, "you said just now that you knew me. That's true enough. You know . . . know about my unfortunate life and how wretched I have been. Yes, but I know all about you, too. You're a good fellow; everybody says that, and I'm sure it's a fact. You're one of the best in this place; perhaps in the whole world there is not a better. I think that you may be a saint, for you have such a simple soul; clear as glass. Therefore I should like to ask you one thing: what were you about while all this was happening to me?"

Lande raised his hand.

"No, first let me finish, please," exclaimed Tkatchof, and there was hatred in his voice. "You were everything to me once, Mr. Lande; everything in my life and that's the truth. I've known you for a long while. At that time you were only a child, and I wasn't grown up, either. Ah! you meant so much to me in those days! Do you remember, Mr. Lande, how I came to you once to get some books? You were just about to start off on a journey, and were packing up your things in the front room. I'd been waiting three years for you, and you, what did you say to me?"

"Tkatchof, Tkatchof, that's right," stammered Lande, but . . . yet. . . ."

Tkatchof's face was like black stone, as clenching his teeth he hissed out:

"You told me that you were going away; that you hadn't time, but that you'd have a talk to me later on! That was all! And there was I, waiting for a word from you that could have changed my whole life! It's this way: either you didn't understand me, didn't see that I was in earnest, or else, though you saw all this, your journey and your private affairs were of more importance to you. That's what it was, Mr. Lande, eh? Or am I mistaken?"

"By God," cried Lande, "I swear that I would have stopped, if at that time I had really understood you. For this you were alone to blame, Tkatchof. You should have been more open with me; you should have knocked vigorously at the door of my soul. You must have seen that I didn't understand you!"

"Must have seen?" replied Tkatchof, as he smiled bitterly. That's just it. I did see; and that's what threw me off the right track once and for all!"

Lande looked aghast.

"Had you really considered that your journey and your interests were of more importance than the coming to you of a man who wanted spiritual comfort and guidance I should probably have said to myself, 'Another humbug, like the rest!' But that was not the case.

I saw that you simply didn't understand me; didn't perceive how troubled I was. . . ."

Lande's fingers twitched nervously.

"Such a thing might happen to anybody. There are times when the soul of a man slumbers. So, at that time, I slumbered. Yet, why did you not rouse me from my sleep?"

Again the other smiled cynically.

"What I thought was this," he replied. "Here's a man, one of the best, a man whose like I shall never meet again in my whole life—well, to have to rouse even his soul within him is a difficult matter. . . ."

"Not always, Tkatchof."

"No, not always. The man in question is an uncommon sort of man. Yet even he needs an occasional shaking-up until he can sympathise with another's grief! What about other men, ordinary men? I expect no amount of shaking would ever serve to rouse them, eh?"

"What do you think?" sneered Tkatchof.

"Yes, yes; one will rouse them in time."

"But to go about knocking at the hearts of others like this—why, life's too short for such a thing!"

Tkatchof stopped, as if in triumph. A light seemed to transfigure Lande's face as he replied:

"Why, Tkatchof, that in itself is a whole life's work. Alone the echo of such knocking is a joy that thrills one, as we feel that, if we cannot reach every heart, we are yet finding our way into the universal heart of humanity, and that our efforts can never die, but that others will knock, as we have done, so that heart after heart will be touched, until, one day. . . ."

"Aha!" laughed Tkatchof, but the laugh may have really masked his inward anguish.

"You think it's ridiculous, eh, Tkatchof?" asked Lande, and there were tears in his eyes. "You don't believe it?"

"What an idea to be sure! To live in a fool's paradise and believe that in suffering one can find joy! And I, when I led the old life, was just as badly off as if I had never knocked! Ha! Ha! If I drank, it was death;

and if I didn't drink, it was death too! You must look about you for some other fool to swallow that!"

His voice sounded harsh and insolent. If Lande had still cherished any hope of making Tkatchof understand him that voice extinguished it.

"Tkatchof," he began timidly, "you must pull yourself together. You must get away from here. You have been too much influenced by these horrible surroundings.

"Where shall I go?" was the other's mocking question.

"Anywhere. To me if you like. I've brought you some money, so, take it and go away from here and forget everything. After a time, when you've got over it. . . ."

"Money?" asked Tkatchof shutting his eyes tightly. Then, in a brutal outburst of fury and despair, "I don't want any money from you! He wants to stop my mouth with money! Get out with you!"

"Tkatchof, Tkatchof, why? Dear Tkatchof, I've . . ." stammered Lande as he grasped the other's hand. But Tkatchof shook him off and hurried out of the cell. Then he suddenly came back and stood in the doorway gazing at Lande as he muttered to himself:

"There's a saint for you! A holy man on stilts! Blockhead!"

With that he marched off along the corridor.

Lande called after him, in despair:

"Tkatchof! Tkatchof!"

But the other, without answering, went away.

V

LATE that evening Shishmariof came to Lande. The latter's decision to give away his money to the poor had roused his enthusiasm. Yet, in a way, it had caused him a certain uneasiness; and, though he knew that what Lande chose to do was no concern of his, he could not help feeling apprehensive. He came hurriedly into the room and, shaking Lande by the hand, while avoiding his gaze, he said:

"Well, here I am!"

Lande at once opened a drawer from which he took out four long packets of notes that rustled in his slender fingers.

"I wanted just to say," began Shishmariof, in a forced voice, as if some one had pushed him from behind. "Perhaps, you won't give all of it away?"

As if he were thinking of something else, Lande replied simply:

"That makes no difference. If one gives any, one must give all." Then, after a pause, he added:

"Lionia, I won't go with you, so you must distribute it yourself. I'll tell you why. Mother is furious with me about this money. I must have a talk to her and soothe her, if I can."

With some hesitation Shishmariof took the notes.

"Ah! you see, your mother's dissatisfied!" he said.

On Lande's face there was a faint smile as he answered earnestly:

"In a case of this kind a mother must not be considered."

Still Shishmariof did not move; feeling evidently more and more uncomfortable.

"I really don't see how by myself I can——" he faltered.

Lande smiled, and, with a gesture of indifference, said:

"Somehow or other! Your heart will tell you what to do. God knows it's not such a difficult task."

"Well, as you wish," was Shishmariof's reluctant consent, as he took up his cap. All at once he felt such pity for Lande that he could almost have wept. The bare, uncomfortable room suggested the solitude of a cloister. Lande looked ill and depressed. Shishmariof could not help wondering why a man who had done such a noble deed should not appear pleased or proud.

"He is a strange fellow," thought Shishmariof, and, though not aware of it himself, this reflection lessened his sympathy for Lande and his generous act.

"Good-bye, my dear fellow," said Lande.

"Vania!"

At the sound of his mother's quavering voice outside the door Lande winced.

"Go, Lionia," he said gently, but firmly.

Still Shishmariof hesitated. The money burned his hand as if it had been stolen.

"You must just leave it," he said, and there was a shade of annoyance in his tone.

"No," replied Lande as he shook his head. "They're in such terrible distress. As for my mother, well—— Anyhow, the money's mine, to do what I like with."

Lande's mother entered. Her care-worn, kindly face showed now extreme agitation and anger. She was breathing hard. Her son hurried towards her, and, clasping her hands, held them to his heart.

"Mother, don't!" he said, with a pleading look. Shishmariof bowed awkwardly.

"Don't what?" she cried, snatching her hands away. The shrill, harsh voice seemed to tell one how much in the past she had screamed and wept.

"You've no right to do this! Do you suppose that your father slaved all his life just for a pack of paupers? Fool that you are!"

"Go, Lionia," said Lande.

His mother sprang forward and placed herself between Shishmariof and the door, though he had never moved from where he stood. Her hair was dishevelled, and her wild eyes expressed greed and fear.

"You've encouraged him to do this!" she screamed,

in a fury. "How dare you? I'll denounce you to the police. It's robbery!"

"I" . . . stammered Shishmariof, feeling surprised and hurt.

"Give up that money!" shouted the old woman, and she snatched the notes from Shishmariof with her claw-like fingers.

"Take it," cried the latter in a fury, as he clenched his fists and turned to Lande.

"It won't do, you see," he said with difficulty.

"So, good-bye. I'll be off."

"Yes, Lionia, go," replied Lande sadly. "Don't be angry with me."

Shishmariof looked as if he wanted to speak, yet he said nothing and went out. There was a dead silence. With her hand thrust deep into her pocket the old woman gripped the bundle of notes, while Lande mournfully watched her. Though shut together in that little room, each felt hopelessly, utterly alone.

"For goodness' sake give up this stupid idea!" said his mother at last.

Lande shook his head. "It's not stupid."

"Whom do you think you'll impress by it, pray?" she continued in a mocking tone. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? To think, that it should come to this!" she whimpered, and, withdrawing her hand from her pocket, she began to cry. Lande did not answer. The room looked dreary in the dusk.

"Some day you'll thank me!" sobbed his mother.

"I don't know that. Listen, mother. If you don't want to give me the money then I won't ask you for it. You keep it for yourself."

"How can you talk like that?" she exclaimed indignantly. "Do you suppose I want it? What's the use of it to me? I am not long for this world. Think first before you speak in that way!"

"This is more what I meant to say, mother," replied Lande, after a pause. "I love you dearly, as you know. But you think that, by withholding this money from me, you will save me from ruin, and I am convinced that what

you are doing means my destruction. Do you really suppose that I should ever keep this money for myself, I should instantly give it away, either to these people, or to others, if I conscientiously felt that I ought to do so. Therefore. . . ."

"You're simply raving mad!" cried his mother angrily.

"How do you suppose that you're going to live?"

"Oh! I should manage somehow. There's no need to worry myself about that," said Lande with conviction.

"Very likely you expect me to go on keeping you?" was her malignant question.

"No; I shall go away. It's difficult for us to be together, for you won't let me lead the life that I want to lead, and I shall only be a worry to you. I would rather live alone."

She stared at him, as all the blood left her cheeks.

"Vania! What's that you say?" she stammered.

Lande sighed gently and, kneeling beside her, kissed her hand still wet with tears. Looking down at his head with its limp, soft hair, she felt as if some great mischance were near.

"Don't cry, mother darling! It is better so!" said Lande in a faint, trembling voice.

VI

Maria Nicolaievna sat at the open window, gazing pensively at the long road, one side of which was bathed in moonlight. The black trees had a petrified look beneath the cold, white stars. The echo of approaching footsteps could be heard clearly as in the silence a man, yet invisible, came nearer and nearer. Strange and mysterious they sounded, bringing, as it were, with them some secret that was theirs alone.

Maria Nicolaievna leaned over the window-sill, and, recognizing the figure in the gloom, called out, "Ivan Ferapontovitch, is that you?"

Lande stopped short, and then, smiling, came up to the window.

"Where are you going?" asked Maria.

"I'm going home—to Semenof. I am living with him at present," said Lande in a faint, tired voice. As he stood close to the window she could clearly see his emaciated face and large eyes. A feeling of pity and of curiosity which Lande always roused in her again possessed Maria's gentle heart.

"Ivan Ferapontovitch," she asked timidly, "is it true that you have quarrelled with your mother and don't go near her?"

Alarmed at her own temerity she hastily added, "I'm asking you this because I always feel so sorry for you both, and—I may ask you anything, mayn't I?"

"One can ask me anything, yes," said Lande, as if repeating her words. He evidently had not noticed her trepidation, and continued sadly:

"I have not quarrelled with her, nor with anyone else, ever. I still love my mother; even more now that she is unhappy. I only went away that I might live alone; I had to choose one of two things, either, not to live according to my convictions, or else to go away from home. I think that you would have acted in the same way that I did."

Maria Nicolaievna, as she looked trustfully at him, said, with a smile, "Oh, no, I'm sure that I could never have done that!"

"Do you know," continued Lande, who had not heard her answer, "it is easier to lay down one's life—no, I don't know how to express myself!" and he laughed, but said no more.

"Where have you been?" asked Maria Nicolaievna, after a pause.

"In the monastery," was the reply.

"You said your prayers, I hope?" she asked jokingly.

"No, I just went there. In that place there is such peace. And I prayed, too," he replied gravely, as if ignoring her playful question.

"You believe in God, then?"

Lande looked at her half in surprise.

"It is impossible not to believe in him," he said in a tone of calm conviction.

"Why is it impossible? I, for instance, don't believe in Him." She bent her head slightly, as if listening to her own musical voice.

"Don't say that!" replied Lande fervently. "It is not true. We all of us believe in Him, and so do you."

He stretched out his hand and grasped her dainty little fingers.

"Look upwards, and you'll see that it's impossible not to believe in Him. Look up yonder, to the heavens! Look!"

Maria gazed above at the vast immeasurable firmament with its glittering companies of stars, here brilliant to the view, and there fading, vanishing in the realms of infinite space. It was as though this silence by its cold, mysterious serenity had brought some inscrutable, revolving force to a standstill and now held it in check.

"How awful it looks up there!" said Maria Nicolaievna shuddering. "And when one day that all collapses! Good gracious! It's too horrible to think of such a thing!"

"No, that will not collapse," he replied. "Look at

those boundless, starlit spaces! So small is this earth of ours, such a mere atom, that we get not a glimpse of all that mad tempestuous whirl. Imagine then how small a thing is man! Every moment, every millionth part of a moment, this huge globe is swept along by some terrific force to distances quite inconceivable. Yet we notice nothing, but, tiny as we are, we calmly travel onward as if all these gigantic masses moved out of our way, and as if a hand were safely guiding us. The slightest hostile force could wipe us out of existence, but so sure and free is the development of the history of humanity that it would seem to be the very nucleus of the universe."

"Doesn't it appear to you," he said after a pause, "as if all were frozen and waiting for something to happen on this earth of ours, which one day must occur? When this does take place then everything will suddenly be set in motion; destruction here, creation there; a new light bursting on our vision; new transformations; a new and yet more wondrous life."

The silence became intense as Lande ceased speaking.

"How cold it is!" exclaimed Maria Nicolaievna, trembling. "Good night!"

She withdrew into the dark room, closed the window, and Lande was left on the lonely road, gazing into the fathomless azure spaces overhead.

VII

WRAPPED in a sheet that left exposed to view his lean, bare legs, and looking like some bad imitation of a ghost, Semenof opened the door for Lande. After the calm beauty of the night in its gentle splendour, the scene that now met his eyes seemed at first unendurable. The crude, yellow lamplight, the rickety furniture, the bed-clothes in disorder, and Semenof's thin, sallow countenance and scraggy legs provided a depressingly squalid spectacle.

Semenof sat down on the bed, looking horribly ill. His wrinkled, ashen features, his scanty locks that, soaked with sweat, adhered to his febrile brow, and his emaciated body with its angular shoulder blades, all told in simple, fearful words the story of that appalling malady lurking deep within man, the whole enormity of which has baffled human comprehension. As Lande sat down beside him, Semenof stared at him with feverish eyes, and said hastily, "I'm so glad that you've come. I feel so ill—terrified at something or other. I'm sure I'm going to die soon! I know I am!"

It sounded as if his fretful complaint were not addressed to Lande, but to some one within his own suffering body, asking him to confirm the fears that tortured him. Filled with pity Lande placed both his arms round the other's gaunt shoulders.

"Vassia, my dear old boy!" he said, as he sought to console and convince him by an exposition of his own simple faith. Cowering and motionless, Semenof gazed fixedly at the flame of the lamp. His thin lips were tightly compressed, and as Lande, glancing sideways, observed his glittering eyes, it seemed to him that Semenof were not listening to a single word. He longed to shout in his ear and to shake his shoulder in a desperate effort to gain his attention. Yet, to his horror, he perceived that such solitary suffering had caused Semenof to become deaf and taciturn, like the mute, cold lid of a leaden

coffin, that holds within it some hideous secret known to itself alone.

"Vassia, I am certain that you believe!" cried Lande. "Do you remember how happy and cheerful we were when we spoke together about God, and eternal life, and eternal joy? Why are you silent, Vassia? Say something, do!"

"Listen!" said Semenof suddenly, not in his usual mocking tone. His voice had a piteous, tearful quality in it. "Oh, Lande, I don't want to die! All you say may be true enough, and perhaps I shall get there before you—to our common goal. There may be a God, and all that, but no! I don't want to die! It grieves me to give up life, to lose you, and the sunlight, the grass . . . to go from it all, and perhaps never to set eyes on it again!" . . .

Lande wept, and large tears coursed down his anxious face, as he moved his hands helplessly. Semenof sat up and plucked at his scanty beard. After a moment's meditation he sank back again. His wrinkled features underwent a sudden change, looking yellow and dry as parchment.

"You're a fool, Lande," he said, smiling maliciously. "Do you really believe that all this silly stuff concerning God matters to anyone who is actually about to die? It's all very consoling and pleasant to think of immortality, one has to think of it in order to live. But when death comes, and there seems to be no God either before or behind one, well, such self-delusion is impossible. And where's the good of it? Don't go on please! It only irritates me."

The last words were uttered in a weak, querulous tone, as his jaws rattled continuously.

"Here I suffer. It's very poor fun for me, I can assure you. My life's at an end; all enjoyment, all sense of pleasure, gone! All that is left to me is suffering; the very moment, one would think, when your God would be needed. Otherwise to suffer thus is absurd. But where is He? Where is your God? Why doesn't He reveal Himself? When I lie in my death-agony, and my legs

grow cold, cold—before my very eyes, and I feel perfectly conscious of this . . . why, even then, I shall never be certain if there's really a God. And, if I were certain, what good would it do me ? "

His voice sounded shrill and sibilant, as almost with a shriek it ceased. He was pale, wide eyed, and trembling all over, and a fearful paroxysm of coughing suddenly threatened to shake him to pieces. While Lande supported him with trembling hands, Semenof strove to continue speaking, and his eyes rolled wildly.

" Of what good is your God ? " he gasped, when he had got his breath, while he looked nervously at his blood-stained handkerchief. " To a healthy, living man, I mean ? If He exists at all, only a man recognizes this when all the human vital part of him is dead, when the human being has become a mere corpse. Well, it's time to go to bed. I'll put out the lamp."

Lande did not answer. He had no heart to speak of his faith to one suffering so intensely, and who was only two feet away from him.

Semenof watched him closely and smiling bitterly, continued :

" Do you know what I've been thinking about, Lande ? All men are my brothers and therefore they will come to give me their last brotherly kisses. Well, do you know, that if there's one thing that cheers me it is to feel that thus they might all catch their death ! "

He flung himself back into bed, and stretched himself out rigid, shrunken as some lifeless bird. Lande put out the lamp and lay down, dressed as he was, burying his face in the pillows. That night he got no sleep. He hardly noticed the passing of the hours, since he seemed to stand outside the pale of time. In this restless state he reflected that he himself had not yet got a firm hold of the faith that he professed if the power failed him to reveal it to others. Silent, constant probing of his own soul could alone make that faith clear and steadfast, and prevent it from being shaken by momentary gusts of human sympathy. Vague at first and undefined, this thought printed itself deeply upon his brain and heart.

VIII

WHENEVER Maria Nicolaievna saw Lande, his presence seemed to her refreshingly sympathetic; as if a gentle ray of morning light had gladdened her soul. Whether excited or depressed, or full of vague longing, directly she encountered Lande's kindly, trustful, childlike gaze she became calm. Specially did she experience his feeling of joyous serenity on a certain golden evening about a month after Lande's arrival, as they went out walking together. When they had passed the last cottages on the outskirts of the town they came to broad level spaces of white sand. In the light of the sinking sun their long shadows seemed to race ahead, with feet lifted grotesquely high like black arrows pointing out the way. Seated on a mound at some distance was a man whose figure, illumined by the rays of the setting sun, stood out clearly against the blue sky.

"There's Molotchaief!" said Maria Nicolaievna. The artist, as they could see, was bending over a small easel. Poised on its thin pointed legs it had a droll effect.

"Do you like Molotchaief?" asked Maria Nicolaievna, confident that the answer would be of that calm, kindly sort which Lande alone could give.

Lande smiled.

"I like everybody," he said. "All men, virtually, are the same, and, if you love humanity, you love each and every man."

"But surely there are some better or worse than others?"

"No, I don't believe that there are. We are apt to think so merely because we do not estimate a man by the good qualities which each one, whatever else she may be, possesses, but by his relation to certain individual facts which one views from one's own personal standpoint. Therefore, this is unjust. One must feel profoundly convinced of one's own infallibility to judge others in that way. Yes; each man is possessed of love, benevolence,

delicacy of feeling, integrity and self-sacrifice—all qualities by which alone the human soul can be made rich. Only the circumstances of human beings are unequal, and therefore these good qualities cannot develop in the right direction. Yet no man could find pleasure, merely for its own sake, in being wicked, envious, cruel or covetous."

"Oh! but I take pleasure sometimes in being cruel," replied Maria Nicolaievna pensively.

"Ah," said Lande, "but a certain pain really underlies such pleasure! The most inveterate criminal cannot take a sheer, calm delight in cruelty unless he is insane, and thus no longer a man really. Every man must always love something, pity something, sacrifice himself for something. He will always create a god for himself, because God dwells within his soul. And it is not his fault if life does not lead his natural feeling into the right way. That depends solely on external circumstances, on the direction that his life happens to take. For instance, Molotchaief. He's passionately fond of his art and of the beautiful. I feel certain that he would be ready to make any sacrifice for it. Consequently, latent within him, lies the capacity, the great capacity of loving. By accident, or by some other impulse, his vast love assumes another form, finds another outlet, and this famous artist, who to our thinking has his limitations, becomes a man of noble deeds, a philanthropist—capable of all!"

"Then you believe in mankind?" asked Maria Nicolaievna gently.

"Yes, that I do," was the firm reply.

"What makes you do that?"

"My belief in God," replied Lande. "I believe that the divine spirit which God flung into chaos meaning to create man in His image, dwells within the soul of man, that so God's will may be done, and that His great solitude may thus be lessened. I cannot express it, yet I believe in man as the precursor of futurity, of this I am certain."

Here Lande paused. He smiled nervously, and his shining eyes and restless fingers bore witness to his

intense emotion which had also influenced his companion.

"Yes, but death?" she asked in a tone of vague alarm. "Are you afraid of death?"

"Yes, I'm afraid!"

But her voice sounded so strangely solemn that Maria Nicolaievna was forced to laugh at it. Just then they were slowly nearing a dense plantation of young pine-trees and the echo of Maria's laughter came back from their dark depths.

"No, no, you are not afraid!" Lande laughed gaily also. "It's not possible, either, to be afraid of death itself. Nothing in the world fears death except man, and it is not death that he fears, but the uncertainty of a hereafter. For myself I don't believe that there is such a thing as death."

They approached the glimmering pine wood, fragrant in the dusk with the scent of the first green pines. Here amid their stems it was quite dark and their branches gently swayed about the grassy edge of the road. A bird flew noiselessly from bough to bough, and a twig broke as the wind swept past.

"Then you believe in a life after death?" asked Maria Nicolaievna with childlike, irrelevant curiosity.

"This much I feel," replied Lande calmly, "that I cannot be utterly destroyed. Yet what will happen I know not. Man's thoughts and conceptions are limited; we cannot form any idea of eternal life because it lies outside and beyond our ken. One can but conjecture it."

"Ah! but if it exists then it's strange that we can't——"

"No, not strange at all. Why should it be strange that you cannot explain a great mystery when we cannot explain our own personal feelings and emotions? Love, for instance. Love certainly doesn't seem strange to you, does it?"

"Ah! Love! Well . . . love . . ." and she slowly repeated the word to herself.

"The Eternal and the Infinite, those are the greatest attributes of the Divine Spirit," said Lande. "Man is as yet so far from comprehending these last——"

"Ah!" cried Maria Nicolaievna. "What's that?" She stood still in alarm.

Two men emerged from a hedge and advanced towards them silently in the dusk. They came along in a leisurely way, swinging their arms, but the effect of their approach was vaguely disquieting as some secret threat. Lande calmly looked up.

"Tkatchof!" he cried in surprise.

When only a few paces distant the two men stopped and looked about them on all sides. Their forbidding aspect in the quiet dusk alarmed Maria Nicolaievna.

"Let's run away!" she whispered to Lande, who, as if he did not recognize her voice, looked at her in surprise.

Grimy, and wearing a ragged jacket, Tkatchof stood still while his companion quickly approached Maria. The sight of his bare feet with toes outspread between which pine needles and tender blades of grass emerged, remained for ever fixed in her memory.

"You're good for the price of a drink, eh?" said the fellow insolently, as he held out his hand.

Maria Nicolaievna clutched Lande's arm, leaning closer to him for protection. Tkatchof did not stir.

"Now then, be quick!" persisted the man, in a threatening tone.

Lande awkwardly drew out his purse.

"Here you are," he said, looking gravely at the tramp.

Tkatchof stood aloof, sneering.

"Here! this ain't much," said the other, pocketing the purse. "Let's have that coat of yours. Look sharp. You'd better go on, lady. Not quite proper, eh?" he added mockingly.

Terror-struck and trembling, Maria Nicolaievna turned aside.

Lande smiled sadly and took off his coat. In his old shirt with its badly ironed pleats he looked even thinner and more frail.

"Those trousers are far too good for you," said the tramp, as he looked about him uneasily, and shook the coat in Lande's face. "Off with them, too."

"Do you want them?" asked Lande calmly, as he

sat down on the grass. "You go on, Maria Nicolaievna, God be with you."

Terrified as she was, Maria suddenly felt a mad desire to laugh out aloud. Lande, half-undressed, sat calmly there as the tramp tugged at the leg of his trousers, and Tkatchof, still motionless, watched the proceedings.

"You go on, Maria," repeated Lande.

"Wait a bit, lady, What have you got there?" cried the footpad hurriedly as he made a grab at her dangling watch-chain.

To Maria there was something intensely horrible and revolting in this act. Darting aside, she caught up her dress and rushed along the road. It was as if some large blossom had been suddenly tossed forward by the breeze.

"Where are you going?" cried the tramp as he flung Lande's jacket aside, and promptly gave chase. Maria uttered a piercing scream which rang through the darkling pine wood. This cry Molotchaief heard as he came round a bend of the road. Swift as a flash he dropped his paint-box and easel and ran forward. The tramp saw him first, and cunningly swerved aside, glared at him for an instant, and then cowering in the grass, got away through the brushwood. Maria Nicolaievna ran precipitately against the trunk of a tree. Wild-eyed, with tumbled hair, for a moment she seemed utterly dazed. Never noticing Lande, pale and feeble, on the grass at the side of the road, Molotchaief rushed past Maria, panting, and flung himself upon Tkatchof. The latter had seen him coming. At one moment it looked as if he, too, would make a bolt for it, but he stubbornly stood his ground. Before he could move Molotchaief struck him a terrific blow full in the face. Tkatchof uttered a low groan and threw up his hands as he fell forward in a kneeling posture. A second blow struck the top of his head, knocking him right down in the road, where he lay sprawling.

"Molotchaief! Molotchaief!" cried Lande as, clad merely in his shirt, he rushed forward and seized the other's hand. "Leave him alone!" Then, kneeling

down, he endeavoured to raise Tkatchof whose head on its long, thin neck drooped helplessly.

"You've killed him!" stammered Lande, horrified.

"What if I have? It's no more than he deserved," was Molotchaief's rough rejoinder.

Yet suddenly Tkatchof scrambled to his feet. Blood was streaming from his forehead which was covered with mould, while his nose and the left side of his face had a dull red look shocking to behold.

"Recovering, is he? He'll mind what he's about another time!" Molotchaief's clenched fists still trembled as if he longed to hit the fellow again.

Lande paid no heed, but, taking a handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers that were lying on the grass, he offered it to Tkatchof.

"Here! Wipe off the blood! Oh! my God, what is to be done?" he exclaimed incoherently, in utter distress and amazement.

But Tkatchof neither moved nor took the handkerchief. His left eye had already become swollen, and from his bruised lips and chin blood dripped on to his greasy coat-cuff.

"Don't you bother about him! The best thing I can do is to take him back to where he belongs. Here! Come along with me, and be quick about it!" So saying Molotchaief roughly collared Tkatchof as he gave him a kick so that he slipped forward and fell.

"Don't! Leave him alone!" cried Lande, angrily interposing.

Molotchaief looked at him in fury and astonishment.

"What the devil are you playing the fool for?" he cried. But as he caught sight of Lande in his shirt he paused for a moment and then burst out laughing. Maria Nicolaievna, unaware until now of their approach, glanced in amazement at Molotchaief, and then at Lande. Blushing deeply, she instantly looked away and walked on.

"Well, of all the fools I ever" . . . exclaimed Molotchaief as he laughed aloud.

Then Tkatchof's black, gory features became distorted by a grin as he, too, laughed sardonically, and at the

same time spat blood. Broken and disfigured as he was, such laughter seemed revolting. Lande looked up at them with the same calm, sad smile.

"For God's sake, go and dress yourself!" cried Molotchaief, as he went on to join Maria. Lande did not heed him. Tkatchof was not laughing now, but turned and walked away. Lande called to him.

"Tkatchof," he said, as he touched his arm, "you meant to do that. I saw it in your eyes. Oh! why, Tkatchof, why?"

Tkatchof scowled at him as if he had not understood but were thinking of something quite different.

"Have you ever seen a real man?" he asked huskily. "There! Look at him!" and he pointed to Molotchaief. "That's a strong chap if you like! But you? Why, you're just a lump of dirt! Not worth a damn!"

"That may be," said Lande, "yet why is it that you hate me so? Is it really because I am so much inferior to him?"

"It's because I believed in you for so many years," replied Tkatchof. "And now, this is the result!" So saying, he struck his bruised cheek. "I see now what a fool I was to believe all that silly humbug. But my life? What about that? Done for! And, instead of a man, I'm just—. Well, now you understand what I mean, eh? As for him, I'll pay him out yet!" He shook his black fist vindictively. "He shall remember me though I swing for it. Wait a bit." Turning swiftly on his heel he walked away, and Lande thought he could hear him muttering to himself. However, he did not look round, and soon disappeared in the dusk. Lande gazed despairingly at his retreating figure, and then having put on his clothes, he hastened to rejoin Maria and her companion.

"He's in a desperate mood now, but when he gets calmer I'll go and see him," such was his vague consolation.

"This is where I heard you scream," the artist was eagerly explaining to Maria, as he proceeded to pick up his paint-box and easel that were lying in the road. "I had seen you already, and wanted to catch you up, but

I lost my palette knife, and it took me a long while to find it. However, thank goodness I still got here in time!"

As Lande came up behind, Maria hardly looked round. He smiled kindly at her, but she instantly turned away, finding it difficult to repress another fit of nervous laughter. At that actual moment Lande appeared to her simply contemptible and absurd. Molotchaief scornfully surveyed him as he exclaimed, "Ah! Here comes the hero!"

"I am not a hero!" replied Lande with a touch of indignation unusual for him.

"That's pretty clear," laughed the other mockingly. As they walked home together Molotchaief continued to jeer at Lande while he boasted of his own tremendous muscular strength. Lande only smiled mournfully, while Maria Nicolaievna glanced sideways at Molotchaief with singular physical curiosity, as her pink nostrils, sensitive as those of a thoroughbred, expanded and quivered. Interesting as he was to her, she yet felt for him a certain repulsion.

IX

It was still dark, and the moon had not yet risen as Lande neared home. His thoughts, strangely cold and keen, were continually of Tkatchof.

"When he laughed at me it was more painful to him than to me. I saw that. That's a dreadful thing, but who is to blame? I or he? I don't know. One must fight, yes; but how can one fight in the dark?"

Lande walked on in the quiet dusk, gazing at the ground, although his eyes saw nothing.

"Ah! Daddy!" cried a child's voice despairingly; and then the dark deserted street rang with wild screams.

"Daddy! Daddy! I won't do it again!" was the child's helpless cry, as if it were trying to defend itself.

"You won't, won't you? You won't, won't you?" growled a rasping bass voice repeatedly, and between each repetition of these words it was as though something dreadful were being done.

Some one was standing beneath a window to listen. Dim in the dusk, Lande recognized the figure of a girl with pale features and large shining eyes. It was Semenof's sister.

"Is that you, Sonia?" he said, as he grasped her thin little hand.

"What is the matter?"

"Listen! He's beating him to death!" she replied in a girlish voice, as she gazed up at the window, craning her neck in a wild, eager movement of curiosity.

Roused from his reverie, Lande instantly understood all, as, uttering a groan, he dashed through the little yard, knocking his knee in the darkness against a post. Running upstairs, in a trice he reached the door of the room, which he flung open. A large lamp was burning there, which shed a golden glow upon numerous sacred pictures hung up in one corner of the room. In the middle of it, facing the door, stood Firsof, coatless. The little metal buttons of his waistcoat shone. Bending

forward in a strange, almost a libidinous attitude, he was beating with a leather strap a small red rump wedged tightly between his bony knees.

"You won't do it again, eh?" he kept repeating, as he viciously belaboured the tender pink flesh. Infuriated at the sight, and half dazed, Lande gave Firsof a violent push, so that he nearly fell, and, to save himself, clutched at the table, thus releasing the child and dropping the strap. Something rattled and was broken to pieces on the floor. Lande put his arms round the child that was sobbing violently, and turned to Firsof with wide, angry eyes. "Stop it, Firsof!" he cried vehemently.

For a moment Firsof stared at him, not recognizing him, and then turned very red as the wicked light in his eyes went out. Clutching his head convulsively, he murmured:

"Ah! It's you, Ivan Ferapontovitch! Excuse me . . . er . . . I . . ."

"Again, Firsof, again? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Doesn't the sinfulness of it shock you?" said Lande as he pushed the child towards Sonia, who stood silent in the doorway.

Firsof's long yellow face turned a fiery red. "Excuse me, Ivan Ferapontovitch," he said hoarsely, "you do not know . . . I had good reason for——"

"Reason? What reason could there be?" was Lande's indignant rejoinder. "Nothing could possibly justify such monstrous cruelty."

Firsof, advancing, raised his trembling, bony hand. "Yes, there could!" he cried, as he displayed the yellow stumps of his decayed teeth and glared at Lande. "Do you know what this little beast has been doing? Do you know, I say?" he shouted exultantly.

"What?"

"I'll show you, and you can admire it for yourself!" said Firsof, as with his lean finger he pointed at the sacred pictures.

Lande failed to notice anything at first except a paint-box, a brush, and a glass of greenish, turbid water.

"Well, what is it?" he repeated.

"Look here." Firsof caught hold of Lande's arm and dragged him towards the sacred pictures.

Two of the scenes from Holy Writ had been foolishly daubed with paint after the manner of a child. The faces of the women had been embellished with beards and moustaches.

"Oh! I see!" was Lande's placid comment.

The boy still sobbed.

"Don't cry! We won't let him do it any more," said Sonia mechanically, her eyes still fixed on Lande.

"But he's only a little child, Firsof," said Lande as he took the boy's hand and sought to soothe him.

"I know that!" snorted Firsof. "If he hadn't been a child, I daresay I should have thrashed him to death."

"How can you talk like that?" Lande made a gesture of impatience.

"Yes, certainly; I'd have thrashed him to death!" shouted Firsof stubbornly, as he rapped the table with his knuckles.

"Come, come, Firsof," expostulated Lande, taking the other's hand. "Don't talk like that! Such a trifling matter, too!"

At this Firsof fired up, apparently expecting such a remark.

"A trifling matter, indeed!" he drawled.

"Yes. How can one possibly say it's a serious one? Don't you realize that your offence is far greater than your poor boy's?"

"Aha! So you think it's a trifling matter, do you?" repeated Firsof. Then he suddenly shrieked in the previous tone of sham fury:

"A trifling matter, is it?" And he stamped his foot. "Get out with you! Get out, you blasphemous little devil! Get out!" he yelled.

"Firsof! What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Lande aghast.

"Get out!" roared Firsof, purposely deaf to all remonstrance. Foaming at the mouth, and stamping his feet, he worked himself up into a state of absolute frenzy.

For the second time in his life it seemed to Lande that

it is not man himself that screams thus, but some cunning demon within him. Filled though he was with disgust, he would not let this influence him, but resolved to withdraw.

"I am going," he said hurriedly. "You're not yourself to-day. I'll come and see you to-morrow. But I had better take Seriosha with me, or else you might——"

Choking with rage, Firsof glared at him, but said nothing. Lande turned to Sonia.

"We'll take him home with us, Sonia," he said.

Sonia glanced swiftly at him and nodded assent. Then with an effort she lifted the sturdy little boy and went to the door.

"We're going, Firsof," said Lande again, "and we'll take Seriosha with us."

"Good luck go with you!" cried Firsof, as he stood there rooted to the spot, staring at the sacred pictures.

"We're only taking charge of him because you're so upset," added Lande kindly.

"All right! All right!" replied Firsof, as he nodded his head. "Mind you bring him back, and then we shall see what happens."

For an instant Lande's sad eyes were turned to the speaker, who, however, would not meet their steadfast gaze, but who looked away, at the sacred pictures, the walls and the floor.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" exclaimed Lande sharply. "You've never behaved to me like this before."

"Perhaps not! Perhaps not!" muttered Firsof. "I daresay you think you're always in the right. But I wouldn't advise you to be so cocksure. There are others as good as you, though they mayn't shove themselves forward quite so much. Yes, that there are; and—as for that little brute, you'll see if I don't——"

"But he's your son!" cried Lande, and he struck his breast with his fist.

"It's no business of yours to teach me my duty towards my son. Do you hear? It's not for you to say what's right, nor for me, either. God knows best as to that. My

son, indeed! I know all about my son. My son doesn't come before my God!" he cried. "Here! Look, look!" And he began to finger the pictures nervously, as he dropped something on the floor, muttering incoherently.

Lande looked at him in amazement, and then, shrugging his shoulders, walked to the door.

"I had better go now," he said. "My presence only irritates you."

Sonia stood waiting on the stairs, with the boy in her arms.

"Let us go. It's impossible to speak to the father. He's nearly mad!" He took the child in his arms and pressed its little soft cheek against his own. Sonia followed, gazing with a certain strange rapture at Lande's neck as mechanically she wiped her hand still wet with the child's tears.

X

On the following day Firsof, in frock-coat and high collar, looking dry and straight as a stick, entered Semenof's room. Lande sat near the window, busily engaged in some copying work which Semenof had got for him. The latter lay in bed, smoking.

"Ah! Firsof!" cried Lande, jumping up to greet him, and making a blot on the neatly written page as he did so. Semenof noticed the blot at a distance, but said nothing.

Firsof looked coldly at Lande and did not offer to shake hands.

"I have come to fetch my son," he said, in a dry, official tone.

"Seriosha's been in the garden a long while. . . ."

"Sonia took him out for a walk," added Semenof unconcernedly.

"Thank you," replied Firsof, bowing to Semenof in the same formal manner.

Then he turned to go.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Lande sadly.

"Nothing." Firsof shrugged his shoulders, vastly pleased with himself.

"Don't go on like this," remonstrated Lande.

"It's such an idiotic pose!" said Semenof angrily.

Firsof swung round sharply, and his wooden figure became suddenly pliant.

"I don't know who is the idiot!" he retorted sharply. "But, under the circumstances, I should like to explain myself."

So saying, he placed his hat and stick on a chair and sat down brusquely beside them.

"Somewhat necessary, I should say," snorted Semenof. "Jackass!"

"Hush, Vassia!" said Lande.

Firsof pretended not to have heard, and turned to Lande.

"I find myself obliged to go back some little way," he began pompously, pleased at the opportunity of delivering the speech that had evidently been prepared.

"You, Ivan Ferapontovitch, at one time had considerable influence over me. That I must admit. In fact, I do honestly admit it. I might even go so far as to say that we were friends."

A dull red hue overspread his flabby cheeks, and for a moment he appeared to halt in his speech, as if afraid that Lande might contradict him.

"I always liked you, Firsof," said the latter.

A subtle, self-complacent smile crossed Firsof's face, but his tone at once became insolent and overbearing.

"My first superficial impression of you and your actions was what allured me, and, being young at the time, I could not see their real meaning."

"I don't think I knew you before you were grown up," replied Lande simply.

"Well, well, be that as it may," and again Firsof's face turned a muddy red. "Of course, I . . . er . . . meant to say that when you, as a youth, went about visiting the sick and the poor, sharing everything with them and all the rest of it, I thought that I had met with a real, true Christian. Your speeches strengthened my belief, also. I felt great sympathy for you; that I must admit. It was your eloquence that made you the centre of so much youthful enthusiasm; in fact, by many you were idolized. Even I, a man—I may say this without boasting—a man of principle and sound integrity, for a long while could not grasp the real significance of your words and conduct."

"And what, according to you, was their real significance?" asked Lande eagerly.

"Surely you yourself know that?" Firsof's face assumed a sly expression.

"No, I don't!"

"Well, if you must know, it was this. As you never attended mass, nor took any part whatever in the services of the Church, your object was to point out, indeed to emphasize the fact, that the real Christian religion lay

outside the pale of the Church. Yes, that's what your object was! And you managed to lead astray many who gave up going to church, and, in fact, began to criticize its doctrines!"

"Many, yes; but not myself. Of course you didn't like it, but I wasn't one of your silly student-admirers, and you couldn't hoodwink me. More likely is it that I may be able to lead you back to the right path!"

"My God!" sighed Lande, "what *are* you talking about?"

Semenof tossed restlessly in his bed, hardly able to contain himself.

"Yes, yes," repeated Firsof consequentially. "You couldn't hoodwink me."

"And still I don't know what you're driving at!" exclaimed Lande, in bewilderment.

"Then I'll tell you," shouted Firsof. His grey whiskers bristled ferociously. He was evidently in a fix, and the fact wounded his vanity. "Allow me to ask you this plain question: 'Are you a Christian, or are you not?'"

Semenof snorted.

"I really don't know. Hadn't we better discuss this some other time, eh?" was Lande's gentle effort to turn the conversation, as he felt sorry for Firsof.

But the latter insisted.

"Do you believe in the holy Orthodox Church?"

"What a question to ask me, Firsof? Why? If you particularly want to know, I don't believe in the Church at all, and——"

"I thought as much!" interrupted Firsof, rubbing his hands in glee. "This speech, coupled with many others, and notably with your having disowned your mother——"

"That's not true! I have never disowned my mother. I merely decided to live apart from her.

"What's the use of wasting words on that fool?" exclaimed Semenof suddenly, as he sat up in bed, livid with rage. "Why do you let every lout interfere like this?"

"I quite understand," hissed Firsof between his teeth, as he took up his cap to go. "I have no further questions to ask, although there are one or two things which I should like to have said with a view to their being of benefit to you. However—no matter! I now know what I have to do and you may be sure that I shall act in accordance with my duty and my conscience, I can safely say that!

Firsof got up triumphant.

"Oh you old dung-bag!" cried Semenof furiously. He strove to rise, but shaken by a terrible paroxysm of coughing, fell back, with his face on the pillows. One gaunt foot which protruded from the coverlet trembled convulsively.

With malicious satisfaction Firsof watched him.

"Aha!" he muttered superciliously between his gleaming teeth. Then, turning to Lande:

"I have only this much to tell you: what you do is, all of it, mere hypocrisy and falsehood. You have not got the real true faith, though you may be able to impose upon those whom you consider your inferiors by—in short, you are a servant of Antichrist—and——"

"Go to the devil!" shrieked Semenof, mad with rage. "Get out with you!"

Firsof gave him a disdainful look, and, putting on his cap, opened the door.

"A half-dead dog like that!" he said venomously. "The least he could do would be to hold his tongue when God had struck him down!"

Lande stood there, pale and confused, smiling feebly. Semenof looked at him, and then, as if ashamed of his outburst, with trembling hands began to dress himself.

"Why all this hate and fury? Good God! What have I done?"

"Simply don't take any notice," was Semenof's quiet reply.

But Lande did not listen to him. His one overmastering desire was at once, without delay, to quench the flame of hate which all unwittingly he had lighted,

and which burned his heart beyond endurance. Without a moment's reflection he rushed out of the room.

"Where are you going?" cried Semenof, who disapproved of such conduct on Lande's part, as being unnecessary, and, in his opinion, humiliating.

"I shall be back directly," cried Lande, as he ran down stairs to Firsof's house

"Firsof! Open the door!" he cried. "There's some mistake! Open the door, and I'll explain everything. Let me in!"

Not a sound. Lande looked round mournfully, and bit his lip to daunt his pain. Just then, from the garden came Sonia, slim and graceful, wearing a thin white handkerchief over her head to protect her from the sun.

"Vania," she said earnestly as she looked at him with her large, thoughtful eyes, "you had better go back. You're only humiliating yourself."

"Sonetchka," he replied, "how can I? It's awful! Why is he so furious with me?"

"He's a blackguard," replied Sonia with emphasis. "He's hated you for a long while, because you are better than he is."

"Oh, what nonsense, Sonia!" protested Lande.

"It's the truth!" she persisted, as she plucked the handkerchief from her head.

"Well, perhaps it is. But, Sonia, it's not a question of who is the better. That's not the important point."

On the steps stood Semenof, half-dressed, unkempt, and the colour of saffron.

"Lande," he cried, "come back at once! Do you hear me? If not, I'll thrash you, by God I will!"

In his voice love and pity could plainly be heard, and also a certain frank astonishment.

XI

THAT evening a light was burning in Firsof's little house. By the dim yellow light he sat bolt upright at the table writing out a denunciation of Lande addressed to the Bishop. The noise of the pen was like that of a mouse scratching, and the air was sultry and oppressive, charged with the intense hate that filled Firsof's soul. The white moon shone through the window and gave radiance to the cool, azure night. It would have been easy to read by moonlight on the boulevard where everything had a pale blue lustre as of delicate enamel. The shadows of promenaders lay in sharply defined outlines on the smooth, shining earth.

Quitting the crowd, Lande and Semenof, the former in his old tunic and the latter in a student's cloak closely buttoned up, walked to the cliff, where they sat down on the bench.

"And I tell you," said Semenof, waving his stick, "that men in their search for so-called happiness have worried themselves quite enough. It's high time that they stopped."

"No," replied Lande, sadly but firmly, "that is despair; and despair is a sin; it shows that one has let one's courage sink. We do not know what is God's will, and thus we cannot detach ourselves from Him of our own accord. Whatever happens we are bound to obey the will of the Power that sent us here. And, as I think, we ought not to give way to bitterness or to despair. We must strive to do, as best we may, that which we cannot leave undone. That is what life means for us. That is the best creed for mankind."

Semenof waved his stick contemptuously, and by his black shadow this gesture was repeated.

"And what is going to show us the best way to do such things?" he asked.

"Our heart," replied Lande with conviction. "Our conscience."

"Oh, my friend, men's consciences are not all alike!"

"There is no need to think about that, Vassia. It is only necessary for a man to believe sincerely that what he does is right and for the best."

"All very fine, my dear fellow," replied Semenof chuckling, "but there's not much use in that so far as I can see."

From the dark background of houses and trees that stood out clearly in the moonlight they saw figures approaching. Shishmariof and Molotchaief came up to them, with Maria Nicolaievna and Sonia, the latter clinging to her companion with that almost passionate devotion which very young girls invariably feel for one that is older than themselves and who has beauty.

As with some hesitation she shook hands with Lande, Maria Nicolaievna involuntarily smiled as she recollected his appearance on the evening of their adventure with Tkatchof. Turning away, she placed her soft plump arm round Sonia. Molotchaief stood, tall and handsome, at the edge of the cliff, as if riveted thereto by the moon's cold silvern light, and little Shishmariof was talking volubly to Lande.

"I say, Vania, this is really too much!" he said, chafing his hands nervously. "Are you really quite unable to distinguish one kind of man from another?" This Firsof is an absolute swine, a canting humbug and a spy. He belongs to the Real Russian League, and yet you associate with him. Sonia tells me that you almost implored him to forgive you."

"He is not such a bad fellow," was Lande's quiet answer.

"But he's always up to some blackguardly trick."

"He doesn't really know what he's doing," replied Lande, "nor how much he harms himself by it. One ought to try and explain this to him and show him sympathy, I think."

"What damned nonsense!" cried Semenof, as he spat angrily.

"Don't be cross with me, my boy," said Lande gently

to Semenof. "I know that I am always upsetting you, but, really, I. . . ."

"If you want to know," interrupted Shishmario excitedly, "sympathy of that sort is merely absurd. Love should be given to those who merit our love, or at least our pity, but he who only deserves contempt ought to be despised and exterminated, just as one exterminates disease-producing germs so as to purify the air which we all breathe. This famous love of one's neighbour, indiscriminate, nonsensical as it is, has only served to foster a lot that is harmful and that ought most certainly to have been destroyed."

"There are many people, whom we—that is, you and I, consider harmful. But I don't believe that among men there can be harmful ones."

"It's impossible for you not to believe it," rejoined Shishmariof hotly, as he adjusted the sleeve of his short tunic.

Sonia drew a deep breath, as she watched Lande intently.

"No, I don't believe it," said Lande, shaking his head. For though there may be wicked men, they are not harmful men. If it were not for their badness the best qualities of the human spirit, self-forgetfulness, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and pure affection could never be revealed or evolved. But these qualities must be made manifest as, without them, life would mean merely senseless vegetation."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Shishmariof. "At that rate one might say that a stink was useful because it taught one to appreciate fresh air!"

"Yes, perhaps," replied Lande smiling. "Only the two things are very different. So much goes to make a man. He is too full of beauty and strength for such a comparison to be possible."

"When shall you have finished arguing, gentlemen?" interposed Molotchaief. It seems to me that you'll go on fighting like this as long as you live. I vote we go for a row on the river. Let each of us live as he likes!"

"You have uttered a profound truth," replied Semenof,

as he waved his hand. "Yet, in accordance with this wise remark, I shall not go on the river, but home to bed."

"And I can't come, either," said Shishmariof, "as I've got some more reading to get through."

Lande smiled.

"You'll have to go without us, Maria Nicolaievna, for I must get back, too. I don't feel very well."

With this they separated. As they drew out into the centre of the stream, amid cooler, more spacious surroundings, they breathed with ease. Sonia crouched at the bottom of the boat and gazed at the moon, while Maria looked down at the deep dark water.

"Oh! it frightens me!" she said, leaning back.

Molotchaief laughed jovially, and began to sing. His voice, like a challenge, went echoing across the smooth surface of the stream.

"Here comes the steamer," said Sonia gently. Looking round, they saw something black and immense which rose up close to them out of the darkness. Smoke, as a huge pillar, suddenly ascended, smirching the heaven and the stars. A red light faced them like an avid, fiery eye. They could hear the surge and swirl of the water and the scream of the whistle which rent the air, as in that very moment a monstrous shadow obscured the moon. Tossed by a large wave, through clouds of blinding smoke, the boat rocked violently, and, then, as it rebounded, very nearly capsized. But the shadow fled, and the moon swam upward in the starry skies, as, touched by her light, the eddying water glistened for very joy.

"Wonderful, wasn't it?" exclaimed Molotchaief fascinated by the sight.

"Yes, wonderful," echoed Maria Nicolaievna in her musical voice, as she clasped both hands to her bosom. Then, radiant with youth and life, she added:

"My heart beat so fast! I thought we should have been drowned!"

"I wasn't frightened in the least," remarked Sonia calmly. "It doesn't matter when we die, does it? I wasn't at all afraid."

Molotchaief stared at her in comic amazement. "Good gracious! Another little Lande! One's enough, surely!"

As she looked at him Maria Nicolaievna thought what a strong, handsome fellow he was. She heaved a deep sigh and then joined in his laughter.

"You can't understand Lande," replied Sonia combatively.

"Perhaps I can't," was the contemptuous answer. "What does that matter? Instead, though, I can understand what life and love and beauty mean. Life to us means youth, strength, and beauty, doesn't it, Maria Nicolaievna?"

"Yes," she answered gently.

"Ah!" shouted Molotchaief. The wild, passionate cry rang out across the water, vibrating with the strange delicious joy of life.

XII

It was so dark in the warm humid garden, that its trees and shrubs could no longer be discerned, but they formed one sombre mass where glow-worms flickered like mimic lanterns on the gloomy river of the night.

Molotchaief and Maria Nicolaievna wandered along the path, groping their way as best they could.

"Let us sit down," said Maria Nicolaievna, as they at last reached a bench. Here, too, on all sides the little white sparks were gleaming. Stooping down, Molotchaief took up a glow-worm from the moist warm grass, which shed a bluish phosphorescent light on his broad strong hand. Maria Nicolaievna leant forward, and in the faint gleam their two heads touched.

"It's still shining," said Maria Nicolaievna softly, as if she feared to frighten the little luminous worm. As her sweet breath touched his cheek, Molotchaief, looking up, caught a glimpse of her delicate profile. Close to them something fell gently on to the grass, as a bough rustled overhead. They both sighed and looked round. Molotchaief carefully shook the glow-worm off his hand, and now all was darkness, while even stronger became the odour of the warm, moist turf.

Molotchaief gently put his arm round her soft, trembling body and drew it closer to his. As she leaned backwards, her hair drooped across his shoulder. By some invincible might they seemed fused and welded. Yet suddenly Maria Nicolaievna slipped like a snake from Molotchaief's embrace, and laughed a silvery mocking laugh as she sprang aside, which woke the echoes in the dreaming garden. Molotchaief rose to his feet in amazement.

"Maria Nicolaievna! What is it? Why are you laughing?"

"What?" she asked, feigning curiosity; and to him her voice sounded mocking.

"What's the joke?"

Again her merry laugh rang out.

"Ah!" he cried hoarsely, as, lowering his head like a bull, he lurched towards her. He seemed to become oblivious of all save the fact that she by her wily and mocking laughter was luring him on. In the heat of his passion he felt that she burned for him with like ardour, and that she was only afraid, as she teased and defied him.

To his instinctive desire was now added sensuous hate; a lust for brutal vengeance at once lascivious and cruel.

"No! No! No!" cried the girl, as she lightly struck his hand with a twig, splashing it with drops of dew.

"Let's go home. This evening you're too —— dangerous!" she said, still trembling, and yet enjoying her triumph, as she mockingly caught hold of his arm.

And they departed. She glanced up laughingly at his face and mocked him for being thus helpless, while he, awkward, lustful, and brutish, walked tamely, timidly beside her, restraining his fierce longing to crush her in his arms, fling her down on the sward and by the might of his passion accomplish her destruction.

XIII

This was the day on which Semenof left for Yalta by the afternoon train. According to the doctors, whom he did not believe, though he wanted to do so, it was there that his life might be saved. All his friends came to bid him good-bye. He was feeling very ill indeed. He had lost all joy in life. A vague, gnawing pain blunted all his sensations and impressions. It was like a thick veil, making everything dim and indistinct. This journey roused in him no interest whatever. The physical part of him seemed dead already, while his spirit had sunk down into the fathomless depths of his own misery. That all his friends had come to bid him good-bye neither pleased nor vexed him. It did not interest him in the least. Only for Lande did he feel concern, and this strange solicitude which he showed towards him appeared to the others most remarkable ; a smile, as it were, on the face of a corpse.

"Well, Lande, so you'll live on here, eh ? " he asked huskily. "And what about food ? "

"I shall get some, somehow," said Lande smiling. "Behold the birds of the air ; they sow not——"

"Silly fool ! " cried Semenof irritably. "You're not a bird. If nobody feeds you, you'll die of hunger." "It's really too absurd ! If I were God Almighty, do you know what I'd do with you ? Shove you in a madhouse ! "

Lande laughed merrily.

"My dear Vassia, you're the best fellow that I have ever met."

"And you're the biggest fool ! " replied Semenof, waving his hand petulantly. After a pause, he added :

"Shishmariof promised to get you some teaching."

"Ah ! That'll be very nice," said Lande.

Just then Shishmariof and Molotchaief came in together.

"So you're off ? " asked the latter carelessly.

"Of course ! " was Semenof's snappish reply.

"I've already got one pupil for Lande," said Shishmariof.

"There, you see!" said Semenof to Lande.

"It's time to start," added Shishmariof, as he looked at his watch.

While Semenof went out of the room for a moment Molotchaief asked impassively:

"Where's he going? To Yalta? How will he make a living?"

"As a private tutor," replied Shishmariof, shrugging his shoulders. "Students often do that sort of thing."

"Private tutor?" repeated Molotchaief in astonishment, and for a moment there was a faint look of pity on his face.

"How can he go as a private tutor? Why, a puff of wind would blow him away!"

"Nonsense!" replied Shishmariof, looking as if he were going to say something pleasant. "A poor devil like that can't afford to pick and choose. He's not been blown away yet, and he'll have to get along somehow."

At this moment a black, tattered parasol appeared below the window, followed by a second, a bright red one.

"Here come Maria Nicolaievna and Sonia," said Lande.

With Semenof they then entered. Sonia, looking grave, sat down in the corner, facing Lande. Maria Nicolaievna seemed nervous and ill at ease. She stood, laughing, in the middle of the room, and twirled her parasol, yet, though she glanced about her in all directions, she never appeared to see Molotchaief.

When he observed her come in, one of the muscles of his knee began to quiver. He got up and walked to the window, as he glanced furtively at her from time to time.

The cab now arrived. One could hear it rattle and the horses snort.

"Well, I must go," said Semenof listlessly.

Lande was about to lift the trunk, but Molotchaief called out, "Here! what are you doing?" and picked

up the trunk as if it were a feather, pleased to be able to show how strong he was. Maria Nicolaievna glanced at him for a moment as she turned to look at Semenof, who already sat huddled up in the carriage in his faded green cloak with its tarnished buttons, and his cap pulled right down over his ears.

"Well, good-bye!" he said sadly, as the horse started.

"*Au revoir! Au revoir!*" cried a chorus of bright young voices.

"Hi! Stop!" The driver pulled up. "So you, Lande, are ——. Oh! Well, it's not my business! As you please! Good-bye!" And he drove away. They could see his bent figure being jolted along the street; it had almost a sinister appearance in all that warmth and brightness, as if only on that the blessed sun would not shine. Sonia wept silently.

I will go back with you, Maria Nicolaievna," said Molotchaief. His commanding tone alarmed her, and she replied:

"I am going to stop here, with Sonia," though, till then, she had not thought of doing so.

Molotchaief reddened, and again that animal desire for revenge came over him.

"Good!" exclaimed Lande with evident pleasure. "It is just with you that I wanted to have a talk."

The glance that Molotchaief gave Lande was full of jealousy and anger as he replied curtly, "As you please! Good-bye! Come along, Shishmariof!"

In Semenof's cool, empty room, Maria Nicolaievna sat down near the window that faced the garden, with Sonia beside her, while Lande stood close by.

"What was it that you had to tell me?" asked Maria Nicolaievna smiling.

"You're so young, and beautiful, and good," said he, smiling in his turn, "that's why it was with you that I wanted to talk."

She laughed merrily.

"As if I really was!" she exclaimed.

"Of course you are! And what a grand thing that is!"

"What is?"

"Why, that beautiful young women exist. I always think that God only bestowed feminine beauty and youth and tenderness upon men so that they should not entirely despair of attaining happiness and love while their terribly grievous and joyless work in this life endures."

Sonia watched him intently, and at the sound of his voice, the colour came into her pale cheeks.

"So that, when this work is accomplished, women will no longer be needed?" asked Maria Nicolaievna pensively.

"Not at all? Why should that be?" replied Lande with enthusiasm. "They will remain as splendid as ever they were, but all of us, and all things, will then be just as splendid and youthful and kindly. All will then be bright and joyous; but at present women are but as a sunbeam that comes to cheer us, a ray of that most glorious future."

After a pause he added:

"Perhaps I am wrong, but I always feel sorry when a young, happy girl gives herself to some eager, brutal man. Though I feel glad that she should be happy, at the same time I am sorry for her. It is as if some one should take possession of a radiant little flame that shone upon us all, bear it hence, and put it out. It is not any base motive that causes me to have this feeling. It only grieves me that there are far too few of us men who possess such little flames."

"But it cannot be otherwise," she replied softly, as she bent her head, thinking that Lande alluded to her.

"No, no, of course not. Only I am sorry that youth and beauty cannot be of universal benefit. Yet men think that would be harmful. I don't know—perhaps——"

Maria Nicolaievna, as she turned her eyes to Lande, felt, as never before, a strange passionate longing for life and love; to love her fellow-creatures; to get all that she could from this pleasant, shining world; to yield up her youth, her beauty, and her strong, splendid body. It was a sudden thrill that, passing, left behind it calm, tender sympathy for this gentle, delicate man with the glorious eyes who stood beside her. As she

saw their frank, happy expression, she longed to be one with him.

"I have never felt such strange joy in living as now," she said.

"Ah! you must always have that feeling," said Lande. "It is indeed a joy to be conscious of so much beauty, and to know that it gives to others such delight."

"Lande, where are you?" cried Shishmariof from outside.

Lande hurriedly left the room, and the girls could hear Shishmariof say urgently: "We came back to let you know that the mother of that pupil wants to see you at once."

"I'll come at once," said Lande mechanically, almost mournfully.

Maria Nicolaievna sighed deeply as she put her arm round Sonia's slender neck and drew her closer.

"Maria," cried Sonia solemnly, "you must marry Vania!"

A faint blush overspread the girl's features as she tenderly kissed Sonia's brow.

Lande came back.

"I am sorry, but I have to go," he said.

Maria rose and arranged her hair as she again gazed at Lande.

"I'll come with you," she said. Outside, on the steps, next to Shishmariof, she caught sight of Molotchaief's handsome face. He looked somewhat pale as he stared grimly at her, and she turned away in annoyance.

"How could I behave like that yesterday!" she thought.

Left by herself, Sonia sat for a long time motionless, gazing at the garden trees until they faded from her sight. Then, rising, she sighed hysterically, rolled up the sleeve of her dress, and bit her pale, thin arm as hard as she could. On the tender skin two curved rows of red spots were visible. Sonia watched how swiftly the blood filled these marks, which formed a little crimson crown.

XIV

LATE that evening, as with bowed head Lande walked homeward after seeing his pupil, he thought to himself:

"Fifteen roubles. . . . Five will be quite enough for me. I must send ten to Vassia. . . . Only I'm afraid that he'll be angry. Ah! well, I must write and tell him that I've got two lessons!"

This idea cheered him.

It had now grown quite dark, so that the outlines of objects were blurred and dim. At the open window, which looked like a black spot, sat Lande's mother. He recognized her while at a distance, and his heart smote him. This was the first time that he had seen her since she had told him that she did not wish to know anything about him until he had changed his ridiculous views concerning life. As she shrieked this at him he had not been able to look her in the face, but went away, deeply distressed; nor, since then, had he ventured to visit her lest he should again hear that strange, discordant voice.

Yet now, as he saw her sitting there at the window, bent and forlorn, his heart was filled with tender pity, and hastening towards her, he silently embraced her. She said not a word, but only wept tears of joy as she kissed his head.

"Mother, dearest mother!" he whispered, pressing his lips to her trembling hand.

"My own darling boy! You won't go away any more, will you? You won't forsake your old mother?" she asked.

"No, I'll not leave you. I won't go away," he murmured tenderly.

Slowly, imperceptibly, night came on. Lande still stood by the window-sill. In the whole world this was all that seemed lacking to him, this tranquil love and endearment.

From the other side of the ditch a tall, dark figure advanced.

"Ivan Ferapontovitch, is that you?"

Lande, recognizing Molotchaief, said hurriedly:

"I'll be back in a moment, mother," as he went out to Molotchaief.

"What is it?" he asked.

Molotchaief was breathing hard, and he looked confused.

"I should like to have a word with you. Hadn't we better walk on?"

"Yes, certainly."

So they went along the dark, deserted road. Molotchaief still seemed breathless and excited.

"I wanted to say . . . so you've made it up with your mother?"

Lande smiled.

"I had never quarrelled with her."

"Oh, of course; I quite forgot that you never quarrel with anybody, never upset anybody," sneered Molotchaief, "but I may as well tell you that you've upset *me*!"

"Really?" asked Lande with concern.

"None of your nonsense, please!" he shouted roughly, as he stood still. "You know very well what I mean."

"Don't shout at me like that," said Lande. "Indeed I had no intention of. . . ."

"I'll tell you what," cried Molotchaief, furious now, as he flourished the handle of his riding-whip in Lande's face, "if you cross my path I'll simply fling you aside like some old rag!"

Choking with rage, he turned sharply on his heel and hurried away.

"What does it all mean?" said Lande to himself sadly.

XV

It was a special gala night in the Municipal Gardens, and Maria Nicolaievna went there with Lande. For the last fortnight she had been his constant companion, as in his presence she felt calm and happy; sure, too, that her affection for him was simple and sincere. Lande always spoke in the same gentle, kindly way, never giving any hint of passion or desire. Nor did she at any time talk to him of love, though deep in her heart she cherished what as yet was but a golden dream.

She had not met Molotchaief for a long time. He had at first sought to draw her into conversation by a blunt reference to that night of rapture. When, however, she shrank from him in alarm, he threatened to go away; in fact, he did leave the town for a short time. To her this was a relief. Yet, as soon as she heard of his return, she became pleasurably anxious and eager.

"What is it?" she asked herself. "Am I really so bad? I love Lande, that good, pure man. Not that animal!"

Despite her repugnance, she still thought of Molotchaief with curiosity and interest. She had a presentiment that he would come to the Gardens that night.

"He'll come! I know he will," she thought. "I must go, I must go."

Yet she did not go, but waited, deceiving herself.

"After all, what is he to me? I'm only afraid of him—afraid of his brutality." Thus she sought to justify herself, while yet aware that she lied.

The music of the band ceased, and behind the motionless trees there was silence, broken only by the shuffling feet of promenaders on the gravel-walks.

"Do you know that Sonia is going to undertake a pilgrimage on foot?" said Lande.

"Impossible!" cried Maria Nicolaievna. "Where is she going?"

"It's over a hundred versts away. She's chosen her

travelling companion, a simple old woman, and now she wants to start. She asked me for my advice."

"And you advised her to go?"

"No. She asked me in such a way that I saw at once that there was no need for her to go. I said nothing," replied Lande gravely.

"She's in love with you," observed Maria Nicolaievna, and, though she did not notice it, it displeased her to say this.

"No," affirmed Lande calmly. "I daresay that you really think that she is in love with me. I know what you mean. But this is not so. She is not in love with me, but with—how shall I express it?—with what is great. Sonia is a wonderful girl. She has a great heart, and yet so little love. There are people like that, and they are always unhappy. In their hearts they would like to hold something enormous—the whole world. They are ready to do deeds of heroism, to suffer martyrdom; and yet they lack that love which prompts them to cherish the small things that lie close to their hand."

While Maria Nicolaievna listened to Lande her eyes were steadily fixed upon the lighted entrance of the gardens. Suddenly she saw Molotchaief appear, who, not noticing her, turned aside into another alley. Yet she did not move.

"Molotchaief, here they are!" cried Shishmariof, and then they both approached.

Silently Molotchaief pressed the girl's soft little hand, while his companion addressed Lande with great vigour. At first she paid no attention, but after a while she heard Lande say:

"It seems to me that human beings in their chase for happiness all try to push their way through one door, like those shut up in a burning house. Each thinks he can save himself by fighting his way out quicker than anybody else; but in the horrible crush all perish."

"The struggle for existence!" exclaimed Shishmariof.

"There ought to be no struggle," replied Lande firmly. "It is impossible to get out over a pile of corpses. One

must keep calm, stand still, not mutually hinder each other, but make room for one another."

"Like the two Frenchmen who politely gave way to each other, and who both fell into the mire," sneered Molotchaief. "It's all nothing but sentimentality. Since we have our life, we must just live it. It's not my fault if some one is weaker than myself."

He paused for a moment, and then added:

"I push him into the mud, stamp on his head, and walk over him."

Lande shook his head sadly.

"Let us have done with all these tears and lamentations. That's not life!" said Molotchaief.

"And if somebody stamps on your head, what then?" asked Maria Nicolaievna coldly.

Molotchaief turned quickly round.

"Let him. But I'll soon see to that." Then, smiling, he hesitatingly added:

"Maria Nicolaievna, I have something to say to you. I want to tell you something—about him," indicating Lande with a nod of his head.

The latter looked up in surprise.

"Tell it me here," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"No, not before him. You seem to be afraid of me," he said in an undertone.

Maria Nicolaievna smiled superciliously.

"Let us go. Lande, you'll come on too, won't you?"

"Very well," replied Lande, as he turned again to Shishmariof and resumed his task. As she walked along in front she heard him say:

"Man can never be happy while he rules by force, and only when he rules by love. But it will be a long while yet before that comes to pass."

XVI

One evening, about nine o'clock, Lande joined the others at their usual meeting-place on the cliff. Shishmariof hurried towards him.

"Look here! I've had a letter from Semenof. Really, it's too absurd of you! Why the deuce do you do such crazy things? He tells me that you sent him ten roubles."

"Never mind, Lionia," said Lande simply, as he looked away across the river.

"But I *do* mind!" exclaimed Shishmariof indignantly. Then, as he saw Lande's mournful smile, he turned away, feeling too much annoyed to remonstrate further. "What do I care? Go to the devil, if you like!" he thought to himself.

"What is the matter? Why are you so sad?" asked Maria Nicolaievna tenderly, as she lightly touched the sleeve of his grey tunic.

"My mother is worrying me," he said sorrowfully.

Full of jealous hate, Molotchaief glanced at Maria Nicolaievna's hand as it rested on Lande's arm. Turning away, he lit a cigarette.

"What about?" she asked gently.

"She's always asking me to lead another sort of life; one for which I am not fitted. She keeps urging me to take the money and travel abroad. But I do not want to do this. There is nothing for me there. Men are everywhere alike."

"But the life is different," replied Shishmariof.

"No, the life's the same, because the people are the same. Life, as I think, no longer depends upon the number of railways, universities, or the like. Life is in the man himself; to use it to advantage is the great thing. Even if life abroad should be different, why should I go thither? I should certainly never be able to live in that way."

"Oh! but you could at least see what it was like!" cried Shishmariof with enthusiasm.

"No," smiled Lande, "but I should like to go away somewhere, away from everybody. Not for always, but for a time. I often think that it is necessary for every man at times to retire from the world and to dwell by himself, in a desert, say, or a place of that sort, so that he may spend some time in meditation and self-discipline."

"You ought to have been the first to set the example," said Molotchaief rudely, and his whole face seemed distorted by fury. "That would really have been the most sensible thing to do."

For a while Lande looked gravely at him. Then, sighing, he shrugged his narrow shoulders and said:

"I know that I annoy you. I am sorry."

"And so am I; very sorry," replied Molotchaief in his usual rough tone.

Just at that moment a tall man, leaving the high road, came across the grass. In his hand he carried a large heavy stick, and creeping up behind Molotchaief, he struck him a violent blow on the head. Maria Nicolaievna uttered a piercing scream and rushed to the edge of the cliff, leaning right over it as she buried her face in her hands. Shishmariof dropped his cap and stood there, helpless. Lande sprang forward and seized Sonia by the hand. Her eyes were wide open; they expressed intense, almost savage, curiosity. Not for a moment did Molotchaief lose his nerve. Like lightning he snatched the stick from Tkatchof, who nearly fell down, and then, clenching his teeth, struck him on the face, the head, and the hands. Mad with pain and rage, Tkatchof reeled backwards and sought to ward off the blows with his arms, and one could see that he was bedabbled with blood. The fourth of these fearful blows struck Lande's arm. He had rushed forward to protect Tkatchof, crying: "Don't! Don't hit him any more!"

For a moment Molotchaief glared at him furiously as he lowered the stick. Then, raising it suddenly, he struck another sharp blow, which, with a sickening sound, hit Lande on the cheek.

Lande staggered and turned a ghastly white; there were tears in his eyes.

"Hit me! Yes, do, if you want to," he muttered, as his lips trembled and he kept his eyes fixed on Molotchaief, while never changing his position. It was then that Molotchaief, flinging away the stick, brutally struck Lande twice in the face with his fist, who staggered and fell backwards over the bench with his legs in the air. As he turned sharply round, Molotchaief hurled Tkatchof aside and then strode rapidly away.

There was a general outcry as they all rushed forward to help Lande. Tkatchof raised him up, looking horror-struck, while Maria Nicolaievna kissed his pale, trembling fingers and Shishmariof tried to put his cap on for him, murmuring incoherently all the while. Sonia embraced him with her frail little arms, and they all tottered about at the edge of the cliff, like birds scared by the sound of a gun.

"Good heavens! What an awful thing!" exclaimed Maria Nicolaievna.

"Ivan Ferapontovitch! Forgive . . . forgive me!" stammered Tkatchof.

Lande turned his swollen face towards them and tried to smile as he feebly grasped their hands. His eyes were half closed, his nose and mouth were bleeding, while mud and grass were sticking to his forehead.

"It's all right," he said, as with difficulty he moved his puffed lips. "He did not mean to hit me. I know he'll feel sorry for it afterwards. I shall go and see him."

Clasping her thin hands, Sonia stepped backwards and exclaimed ecstatically:

"Vania, what a saint you are!"

"Don't talk such nonsense, Sonia!" replied Lande, with a feeble gesture. Then, rising, he walked forward with outstretched arms, and they all saw that Molotchaief was standing at ten paces distant with his hands in his pockets, sniggering sheepishly as he looked at Lande.

Maria endeavoured to prevent Lande from advancing. "You must not do it! You must not do it!" she cried, as she stood in his way. But he gently yet firmly thrust her aside:

" You don't know what you are saying."

As Lande approached him, holding out his hand, Molotchaief turned very red, and there was hatred in his eyes as he said mockingly :

" What a touching comedy, to be sure ! "

Then he turned round sharply and walked away. For a long time Lande watched him, and then, sinking down on the bench, he covered his face with his hands, apparently overcome with grief.

" What on earth do you mean by that ? " cried Shishmariof angrily. " Have you gone stark, staring mad ? "

By this time a crowd had collected in the roadway. There was a good deal of laughter among the spectators. Shishmariof looked round quickly and then hurriedly walked away.

" To the deuce with you ! Silly blockhead ! Saint, indeed ! " he blurted out bitterly.

Tkatchof stood with his arms hanging down as if some one had suddenly splashed him with cold water.

" That kind of thing's not a bit of good," he mockingly exclaimed. For Lande it was intended as an answer and a warning.

XVII

THAT night Lande became feverish. The wounds on his head throbbed violently, causing great pain and dizziness. It was probably some kind of nervous fever, so Shishmariof thought, and Maria Nicolaievna and Sonia resolved to sit up with him all night. Each with a book, they took their places at the table, but they did not read, and only gazed sadly at the flame of the lamp. When the night was well advanced, Sonia left Maria Nicolaievna alone with the sick man. The room was in semi-darkness. To Maria Nicolaievna the lamp's dull circle of light seemed magical, as she sat with her head bent and her hands folded on her lap. Though outwardly motionless, within her brain there raged a veritable tempest of confused, disquieting thoughts. On reflection it seemed to her that all was now at an end. To-morrow the whole town would know that she had spent the night here, and this would give rise to loathsome scandal. For a long while such thoughts distressed her, till at last one single thought took clearer, nobler shape and inspired her. Henceforth she would be always united to Lande—kind, good Lande, the best of all the men that she knew. She turned towards him as he lay there pale and thin, with long white arms stretched out above the coverlet. The lamplight did not reach the bed, so that in the gloom Lande's profile stood out in clear relief, his disfigured cheek being hidden in shade. Kneeling down beside the bed, she laid her beautiful head on his breast and shut her glowing eyes. Lande did not appear surprised. Gently and carefully he took hold of her soft, shapely chin and drew her head nearer to his. Her hot lips were pressed against his. He kissed her tenderly, as one would kiss a child. With ever-increasing ardour she returned his caress, pressing her soft, supple body close to his, submissively, longingly. All at once she opened her questioning eyes and looked at Lande's face. Its cold, frightened expression shocked her. It was indeed intolerably repulsive.

"Not like that! No! No!" he murmured, smiling helplessly.

In a moment it flashed across her brain that she had made an atrocious mistake. She sighed faintly and hastily rose, covering her face with her hands. Lande sat up in confusion.

"Maria Nicolaievna, is there any need . . . for . . . that? I love you . . . only . . . not like that!" he stammered, holding out his trembling hands.

She moved away towards the table and sat down, still screening her face with her hands, smiling hysterically. Then she got up as if to go, sat down again, moved about restlessly, and glanced from time to time at the sick man, mortified, ashamed, and feeling a certain hatred for Lande himself.

"It was nothing. A mistake! It was only in fun. I don't know how I . . ."

So she stammered on, conscious that she was drifting farther and farther away from him.

Sonia, hearing a slight noise, now came in and stood in the doorway, gravely watching them.

"Maria, what is the matter?" she asked sternly.

"Nothing, nothing, Sonetchka," faltered Maria Nicolaievna. "It's time for me to go."

Then she went out, knocking her shoulder awkwardly against the door. She flitted like a phantom through the cold, deserted streets in the wind and the gloom. Sonia carefully shut the door behind her and then approached Lande's bed.

"Sonia, dear one, that's my fault! What shall I do? I ought to have known!" And he clasped her hands.

Sonia clenched her teeth tightly so that the cheek-bones of her puny face became more prominent, and in her eyes there was a malicious gleam:

"It's not your fault," she said with emphasis. "They're all alike; animals, beasts. She's just such another."

"Sonia, what's that you say?" cried Lande.

"I hate them all!" exclaimed Sonia vindictively.

"How commonplace and filthy they all are! No better than the dogs!"

Lande stared at her, aghast, and to him it did not seem that Sonia stood there, but rather some evil little goblin.

XVIII

THE fight on the cliff provoked a good deal of gossip in the town, and Maria Nicolaievna's name was coupled with Lande's in the most flagrant manner. Wherever she went she encountered the same offensive curiosity or ill-concealed contempt. As the result of such treatment she began to feel hatred for Lande. Yet when he came to see her for the first time, she had a faint hope that all might pass like some horrible dream, and that her life might be bright and happy as before.

Lande entered quietly, his face swathed in a large white bandage.

"Good morning," he said in his calm voice.

Maria Nicolaievna got up in confusion, but did not reply to his greeting.

"I have come to tell you. . . ." He paused, as if unable to continue, and then, with a sudden outburst, he exclaimed:

"Oh! Maria Nicolaievna, if you only knew how fond I am of you! To me you are like some bright, glorious angel!"

Her eyes shone, and she smiled timidly.

"Yet I can never be your husband," he faltered.

Maria Nicolaievna winced as if she had been struck in the face.

"What do you mean? Is this to insult me?" she asked haughtily.

"No; you know that I would never insult you. I am simply saying just what I feel. I love you; but not in that way. Is there no other love but that sort of love? And is it absolutely necessary? For me it is impossible!"

"I am not asking for your love. Please, go away." Lande was holding her hand mechanically; and that in itself disgusted her. She snatched it away angrily.

"Leave me alone!"

"Forgive me," said Lande, "I did not mean. . . ."

But Maria Nicolaievna cut him short by making a

hasty exit from the room, having first adjusted her hair, dropping, as she did so, several hair-pins on the floor. She gave him one withering glance as she passed.

Lande waited there alone in the dusk, and after a while a maid brought him a note. She had round, stupid eyes, and stared at him in alarm.

The note was as follows :

" For God's sake, leave me in peace. Perhaps I am bad and horrid, but you only worry me. I hate you—loathe you, as I do vermin."

Lande went out into the dark street. Suddenly some one accosted him. It was Tkatchof.

" Ivan Ferapontovitch ! I must speak to you. I have been waiting about for the last three days, hoping to see you ! "

Lande stood still.

" Good evening," he said cordially. " Why didn't you call on me ? I should have been so pleased."

Tkatchof smiled confusedly as he grasped Lande's hand.

" Perhaps I might have called . . . but there are other people at your place, and I wanted to have a talk to you by yourself."

" Oh ! I am so glad that at last you've come, Tkatchof," exclaimed Lande. " Come back with me and we'll have some tea."

" Very well," said Tkatchof in a low voice.

They had but a little way to go and they walked along in silence. Lande lit the lamp, prepared the tea, and seated himself opposite Tkatchof, looking affectionately into his eyes.

" If you only knew how pleased I am that you've come to see me," he said smiling.

" I wanted to come a long time ago," said the other, looking down in confusion. " Ever since that evening —you know, in the wood ! "

" Ah, yes ! "

" And when he struck you, then, all in a moment, like a flash, I seemed to understand that the truth was not on my side but on yours. There's nobody like you, Ivan

Ferapontovitch!" he said with evident emotion, as he partially rose from his seat.

Lande beamed at him.

"How kind of you to say that, Tkatchof!"

Tkatchof sighed deeply, as if preparing to sustain the weight of some huge burden.

"That's my opinion, Ivan Ferapontovitch, only I don't know how to express myself properly."

"Go on! Tell me all. You'll say it all right, I'm sure," said Lande encouragingly, as he stroked the other's hand.

"Well, I came on purpose to tell you, and speak I must. You remember all that I said to you in the prison? Ah! that was because I had grown utterly desperate. I had been the victim of so much cruel injustice that I had lost all faith in mankind. I believed that things must be thus, and that men were all villains, all beasts of prey. I had got to hate mankind and myself and life. But then it was you who opened my eyes. In you I saw what a real man is, and what a man can be. I remembered, too, how for the sake of two righteous men the Lord was willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah—and I thought to myself that a man like this can transform life——"

"Tkatchof!" exclaimed Lande, interrupting.

"No; wait, wait a moment! I know that at present everybody is not able to understand you, but by degrees your influence will be felt, and—— Look you, this is my idea!" he said, bending closer towards the other, so that his hot breath warmed Lande's cheek, and his dark, sad eyes seemed to pierce his brain.

"We must announce a new faith to the people!" he whispered excitedly.

"What?" cried Lande in amazement.

"A new faith! Yes, the people are ready, are waiting, longing for it! They'll come to you from all parts of Russia. Yet the news must go forth and be circulated. You'll stand above them all; you'll lead them all, Ivan Ferapontovitch!"

Tkatchof was flushed and trembling with excitement.

"What faith do you mean?" asked Lande sternly. "What can I do?"

"Do? Everything, Ivan Ferapontovitch! As for announcing a new faith, that's only to start the movement; to set things going!"

Lande rose, looking white and austere.

"That's not a right thing to do," he said. "Don't you really see what a fearfully wicked, blasphemous imposture that would be? Truth cannot spring from falsehood. I could never do that! Don't think of such a thing."

Tkatchof's face grew dark. He looked intensely pained. "Ivan Ferapontovitch! You are the one and only person to do it! Are we, then, all to be ruined?"

"No one will be ruined! How can you talk like that? What you propose—it is just that which would cause ruin. You would never succeed, because such a thing ought not to be. There is no need for deceit. The fight must go on, for it is necessary, as some cleansing fire. But each step forward in this fight must be an honest one. Truth is what will lead one to triumph."

"Then—it is not to be?" asked Tkatchof hoarsely. "So . . . I have made a mistake?"

"Forget it, Tkatchof! Forget all about it!"

As he walked down the cold dark street, Tkatchof shouted wildly in the wind:

"Oh! the devil take it all! He might have done it, wretched fool!"

Somewhere in the darkness the night-watchman announced the passing of the hour.

XIX

After a sleepless night Lande rose, feeling weak and ill. All night long he had been thinking of Tkatchof and Maria Nicolaievna.

"How strong they are! And how tremendous is their love of life! They are unhappy now, but that will pass, and their vital forces will remain. Whether fortunate or unfortunate, they will be happy."

That morning he resolved to see Molotchaief. He found him at home, seated on the window-sill, smoking cigarettes. On seeing Lande he got up quickly and turned red. Lande calmly walked straight into the room, and, smiling, held out his hand. For a moment Molotchaief felt a certain kindliness, as if he wanted to grasp the proffered hand, and then Lande's attitude seemed to him almost an affront, for he drew himself up, as, with ironical politeness, he shook hands, saying:

"Delighted! Pray, sit down. And how is your health?"

Lande touched his bandage and said simply:

"Not very good. You knocked me about terribly."

Molotchaief blushed again and appeared suddenly disconcerted. But, recovering himself, he said in the same offensively courteous tone:

"I really am extremely sorry."

With clear, calm eyes, Lande looked into his.

"No, why should you be sorry? You are not sorry in the least. You wished to hurt me."

Molotchaief felt crushed. He was bitterly conscious that it was not Lande, but he himself who looked ridiculous.

"I really came to you to-day," said Lande, with great composure, "to tell you how sorry I am for having caused you to do this. I know that you were jealous of me with regard to Maria Nicolaievna. I had not the least wish to come between you. I certainly love this girl because of her extraordinary vitality, her huge delight in life; but my love for her was quite different from what

she wanted it to be. Now, having found out her mistake, she hates me. Go to her, and I believe that she will give you her affection. And forgive me; and don't bear me any ill-will, for I like you. You are a strong, fine fellow. Now I'll go, for I am sure that my presence is distasteful to you. Good-bye!"

Lande got up and held out his hand. Molotchaief bit his lip, and they shook hands. When Lande had gone the artist again felt a kind of jealous hatred for him.

He walked quickly up and down the room and sought to foment the flame. He seemed to have succeeded, for he managed to laugh at Lande, yet at the same time he felt a certain remorse. Why this was he could not tell; but the feeling was keen and poignant; and by degrees he got the impression that he would never be free from it.

XX

LANDE's life became more and more solitary, and gradually he had a presentiment of something inevitable. For the last few days he had been always alone, though Sonia came constantly to look after him. One night he wrote a long impassioned letter to Semenof full of obstinate questionings concerning truth, human beings and human happiness. To this the sick student replied as follows :

" Pray, leave me in peace. I am dying, and have to think of something more important than you. I am now face to face with the final, supreme question of human existence. How am I going to die ? Do you suppose that a man can talk of human beings, or love, or solitude, when he must die, and die utterly *alone ?* You cannot understand what that really means. There is only one word to express it, horror ! . . . "

" Some day you yourself will discover how silly it all is. And you will hate men for the stupid part that they have led you to play, just as much as I hate them now. If you only knew what a fearful hatred I have for them all ! May you all be cursed ! If I had the power, I would demolish the whole earth. Why have I lived, Lande ? All seems utterly horrible, desolate, and cold. For God's sake, don't worry me any more ! "

" Poor Vassia ! " thought Lande. " How filled he is with horror and hatred ! That is because he is alone—alone with his sufferings and his fears. I must go to him ! I must get some money. But who will help me ? It is no good asking mother. She will give nothing. Anything that I want to do only vexes her and makes her wish to oppose me. Who else is there ? Shishmariof ? But he's got nothing himself. I'll go to Father Paul."

Next day, still with his head bandaged, Lande crossed the large grass-grown square and entered a small, pleasant courtyard. Though it was a grey, windless day, the trees with their golden leaves seemed bathed in sunlight. In the tiny front garden beneath the windows were bright-

hued flowers, and there was an odour of apples, autumn leaves, and incense.

The old priest, rosy and white-haired, was sitting on the veranda in his clean, white cassock. Lande hastened towards him.

"Good day, Father Paul."

"Good day," he replied in friendly fashion. "Please sit down. What can I do for you?"

"I have a favour to ask of you," said Lande. "One of my comrades, named Semenof—perhaps you know him—"

"Yes, I've heard of him," said the priest drily, as with his little shrivelled hand he stroked his beard.

"Well, this Semenof is dying of consumption," said Lande hastily.

"God's will be done!" was the solemn reply. The priest sighed deeply and crossed himself.

"I have received a letter from him, a fearful letter," said Lande, bending forward confidentially. "It is plain that he is in the last state of despair. In his soul there remains nothing but hate and fury. I am convinced that it would be a great comfort to him if I could go to him. He will then feel that he is not alone, and that in itself will suffice. . . . Only I have no money for the journey," he added suddenly, with a child-like smile.

He looked in the priest's face, and all at once the kindly eyes, or what seemed to him kindly eyes, contained in their depths a look at once evil and watchful. Instinctively he stopped. The priest, without speaking, looked at him. In the silence, a golden leaf fell circling to the ground.

"Here is the letter. Will you please read it?"

So saying, Lande produced the letter and gave it to the priest, who sighed again and proceeded to read it calmly, as if it were the tranquil life-story of some saint. Then he sighed again, folded the letter and handed it back.

"Now, you see!" exclaimed Lande, pointing to the letter which he had placed beside him on the bench.

"You will please put that letter away. I cannot have such stuff in my house," said the priest sternly.

Lande did not understand what the priest's words meant, but he took up the letter and put it in his pocket.

"So I came to ask you for some money. It is necessary, as you see, that some one should go to him," he said with simple earnestness.

The old priest sighed.

"Yes, very likely it is. But I shall not give you any money for that purpose. I have it, you understand, but I don't intend to give it."

As if stunned, Lande sprang to his feet in despair.

"Why? You read yourself what he wrote!"

The old priest also got up.

"Yes I've known this Semenof for some time. He's a godless blasphemer, an atheist, an apostate. And I do not counsel you to go to him."

Lande opened his eyes wide.

"You mean that I am to forsake him and let him die in despair?"

"This death is the reward of his deeds," said the old priest, with his hands folded behind his back, and again in his eyes there was an evil gleam.

"But you fear God?" cried Lande. "What's this that you say, little father?"

"It is not your place to teach me," replied the priest.

"But you are a servant of the Church—the Church of Christ?"

"This Mr. Semenof has long since renounced the Church, and it would not be fitting for the Church to run after him, do you understand?"

Lande became desperate.

"Yet . . . without money I cannot travel?"

"You might try and get a free pass. Or you could even go on foot."

"But that's too far!"

The old priest sighed.

"Yes, it's a long way. But, as I understand you, you desire to do a great deed, so that you will surely spare no pains?"

Lande all at once felt chilled in the presence of this

rosy, white-haired old man. He turned away and went towards the gate.

"But I must get there as quickly as possible. He may die before I arrive." And he stood still.

The old priest's reply had in it a touch of malice and scorn. "If God wills it, you will still find him alive."

Lande was silent. Like a white cloud against the golden background the priest stood in the middle of that peaceful courtyard.

"Very well," said Lande, "I must be going. If I cannot get any money, I shall have to go on foot. The money doesn't matter much. But how ashamed of yourself you must feel!" he said solemnly.

The priest raised his skinny little hand.

"That'll do! Just take yourself off."

"Little Father, I did not mean to offend you."

"Get you gone, I say."

With bowed head Lande silently went out. He heard how the old priest came to the gate and fastened the latch.

XXI

In the evening Lande told his mother what he had decided to do.

"More tomfoolery!" she cried angrily. "In God's name, when is it ever going to end?" So saying, she got up and walked out of the room, banging the door after her. Lande sadly watched her go, and then, taking up his cap, he went to Shishmariof. He was alone in his room making tea, and a large book lay spread open before him. On seeing Lande, he rose awkwardly and held out his hand.

"Ah! It's you! Sit down and have some tea."

"No thank you," said Lande. "I've had a letter from Semenof."

"Oh! And what does he say?"

"Here! Read it for yourself."

Shishmariof read the letter carefully through.

"Poor fellow!" he sighed, when he had finished. Then he put his two hands, which stuck out from the short sleeves of his jacket between his knees, and rubbed them together, as if he were cold.

"I want to go to him," said Lande.

"Why?" asked Shishmariof. "What can you do there?"

"I don't know what I can do; but I have a feeling that I must go."

For some time past Shishmariof had been conscious that Lande and he were estranged. Lande's sweet temper he considered a sign of weakness, of inability for conflict. Occasionally he recognized in it something that surprised and amazed him, but he never really gave it a thought, being intentionally indifferent to it as to everything else which did not present itself with absolute clearness and simplicity to his keen, hard intellect.

He now looked seriously at Lande as he continued rubbing his hands, and said:

"I do not understand that. You lay such stress on

this 'feeling,' as if there were something mystic about it. In my opinion your presence there would not help matters in the least. You'll only worry yourself and him, too. Better not go. Why should you ? "

"You ask why ? " replied Lande pensively. "In that question alone there lies a thought that makes for the ruin of mankind. One must never ask. We must act as our heart prompts us to act. That is the force which is higher than ours. If we seek to measure it by our standard we do but cripple our soul."

"What do you want with your soul ? " exclaimed Shishmariof, shrugging his shoulders irritably. "Do leave your soul alone ! There must be some recognized method of discrimination with regard to our actions. If you wish to go, you must first of all be satisfied as to what use there is in your going."

Lande sighed sadly. "I don't know. Perhaps it won't be of any use at all."

"Then where's the object in going ? "

"The object ? That truth which I feel within me, and which calls me," said Lande with fervour.

"More truths ! " sneered Shishmariof.

"That is the supreme truth," replied Lande. "There's none that comes higher than that."

Shishmariof shrugged his shoulders again.

"There is only one higher truth ; it is that which reason, logic gives us," he exclaimed. "We possess nothing that is not obtained by thought."

Lande clapped his hands together.

"What's that you say ? How poor, how miserable life would be if that were really the case ! "

Shishmariof leapt from his seat and swung his arms aloft.

"Miserable, indeed ! In my opinion it's more miserable to lull oneself to sleep with fairy-tales, and to impose limits to one's thoughts."

"Yet Reason is conscious of its own limits," replied Lande gently.

"No, it knows no limits ! " cried Shishmariof in a shrill voice.

"The horizons of Thought are boundless. Though, at the moment we do not know all, there is no reason to suppose that we shall not, some day. Thought is just as limitless as the whole world itself. Just as the bounds of possibility become enlarged, so Thought becomes enlarged; is infinite!"

"Extending to the void?" asked Lande with wide-opened eyes.

"Yes, to the void!" screamed Shishmariof.

"But that is horrible!"

"Very likely it is horrible. I know very well that it is far easier to indulge in the golden dream of an all-embracing spirit, and the rest of it. But, for my part, I prefer the void, the unknown, to a truth which is only so far a truth because it serves to make life easy and pleasant."

Shishmariof was trembling all over with excitement, and his red fingers, thrust into his jacket pockets, were twitching continually.

"I won't quarrel with you," said Lande simply. "You are cleverer than I am; and, besides, it's wrong to quarrel about such a thing. Yet, just because I feel how sublime is the grandeur and strength of the human spirit, I cannot believe that it came from the void, and that in the same way it will return thither, like some mad marsh-fire engendered in a swamp! It burns too brightly; its development is too powerful; it encircles the whole world and gives it light and warmth. No, I feel the force of Truth—and . . . I must go to Semenof, Lionia, I must!"

"That is another matter," replied Shishmariof. "If you desire to go, if you are sorry for him, then by all means go. That's your affair."

He sat down again and went on with his tea, rattling the spoon noisily in the half empty glass. His shoulders were still trembling with excitement.

"I want to go by train, but I haven't any money."

"Well, old chap, I haven't any, either," replied Shishmariof apologetically, as like a debtor he flung both arms apart.

Lande snapped his fingers.

"My God! What shall I do?"

"Wait a bit," said Shishmariof. "Somehow, you may be able to manage it later."

"No," exclaimed Lande in a determined tone, "there's no time to wait. I must go at once."

Shishmariof looked up in surprise and smiled.

"Oh! so you must go at once? How do you mean to go? On foot?"

"On foot, of course. I might get a lift part of the way," replied Lande simply.

For a moment Shishmariof stared at him, as he opened his mouth wide. Then he suddenly became grave.

"Look here, Lande, there's a limit to all these mad fancies," he said.

"It is not a mad fancy," replied Lande. "I have no journey-money, so I must go on foot. Pilgrims can march thousands of versts."

"Pilgrims?" For a moment Shishmariof seemed puzzled. "Yes, but in the first place they are pilgrims; and, in the second place, they don't make their pilgrimages in autumn. You will simply be stranded on the way."

"Perhaps not."

Shishmariof showed some of his previous excitement. "The pilgrims go for their faith's sake, which——"

"And I go for my faith's sake, too," said Lande, smiling.

"Yes, that's all very well, but you must at least make allowance for circumstances."

"Oh! it's so easy to arrange one's life according to circumstances," said Lande, in a tone of gentle remonstrance, as his eyes twinkled. "At that rate, one would at last entirely cease to believe in oneself, and make circumstances the main thing. No; I feel that I ought to go, and in some way or other go I must."

"Yet be convinced of this one thing: that what you're doing won't make the slightest difference."

"That we don't know," replied Lande impressively. "It only appears so."

Shishmariof was silent. He was at a loss to know what else he could say.

"It's such a silly idea. You will certainly never

reach Yalta, nor make things any better. It's silly and impossible."

"Ah!" sighed Lande, "I know that to you it seems silly and impossible and absurd. But still, I mean to go. Don't try to prevent me, old fellow, don't!"

Shishmariof shrugged his shoulders, and muttered: "Deuce take me if I know what to think!" And he went on drinking his tea. For a while there was silence.

Lande rose.

"Well, I'm going. Good-bye, and *au revoir!*"

"Sit here a little longer."

"No, my dear boy, I can't. I must get a few things ready." He shook the other's hand warmly, and Shishmariof suddenly had a strange foreboding, a presentiment of ill.

"Then you're really going?" he asked, wanting to laugh, and yet with a choke in his voice.

Lande was a head taller than he, and looked down on him affectionately.

"Yes, going!" And he nodded.

Shishmariof wanted to say something else, but had a curious sensation as if his throat were closed. They were standing in the little passage, lit only by a slender ray of light which came through the crack in the door, when suddenly Lande recollected Tkatchof.

"Do you remember that man on whose account Molotchaief hit me?" he asked. "He came to see me not long ago."

And Lande gave an account of his interview with Tkatchof; a short, simple account which, however, appealed powerfully to Shishmariof's imagination. He seized Lande's hand impulsively, exclaiming:

"The idea is simply tremendous! What did you say to him?"

"It grieved me much," replied Lande, "to shatter his dream."

"Then you refused?"

Lande smiled. "How could I consent to pose as a prophet when I am not one?"

Shishmariof rubbed his hands together, and after a moment's reflection, said gloomily :

" No, of course not."

He accompanied Lande to the steps, in the dim light, for the moon was hidden by a cloud.

" Farewell ! " Lande called out, as he departed in the gloom.

" Farewell ! " came the answering valediction.

For a long while Shishmariof remained standing on the steps, and then, returning to his room, he sat down at the table. The lamp only served to illumine this, and the corners of the room were quite dark. Shishmariof moved the book closer to him ; yet, though the letters danced before his eyes, they made no impression upon his brain. He felt strangely excited. He sat down and then got up again, as if some terrible thing had happened, something that greatly distressed him. Lande's figure was ever present in his thoughts and his imagination. In his ears the sound of his voice still lingered, while dim and nebulous his form seemed to rise up before his eyes. All at once he laughed a weird, unnatural laugh.

XXII

On a raw night in early autumn when the air was keen, Lande quietly left home. He wore an old black cassock which he had bought from a monk, and carried a bag on his back. The whole town was silent and empty. An impenetrable veil of white clouds covered the sky where neither moon nor stars could be seen. Slowly, slowly the dark houses with their blank windows and the cheerless trees receded in the gloom. Soon Lande had reached the open country. The wind tossed the skirts of his cassock apart and wailed drearily in his ears. Before him, bleak and vast, lay the boundless steppe, where the slow-moving clouds seemed at a greater height, and on the slopes, grey, withered grasses waved. The huge sense of space and freedom filled Lande's breast, and, strangely enough, at the same time he felt clearly conscious of the fact that he would never reach Yalta. Yet this did not daunt nor discourage him, but, on the contrary, he felt in a careless, light-hearted mood as if thereby he had got on to the right path that should finally lead him to his goal.

Yet this was merely a presage, not a clearly defined thought. In his mind he saw only the image of the sick, suffering man to whom he was going. He never gave a thought as to what would become of himself.

With light, springy step he trod the broad highway, gazing around him with joy and wonder, and listening enraptured to every sound borne to him from the desolate steppe by the wind.

For five days Lande walked on through various hamlets, sleeping at night-time in huts where peasants eyed him with disfavour, and would barely grant him an entrance. Few spoke to him, for few could understand what he said to them, though to all he spoke in clear, simple fashion. Some old peasant-woman, with shrivelled cheeks propped against her hand, would ask him whence he came, and if he were not from the Convent of the Holy Seraphim.

But the male peasants looked askance at him and were dumb. On the fifth day a hulking peasant with wicked eyes and a black beard that might have been lopped with an axe, shouted at him :

" You clear off at once, or else we'll put the police on your track ! There are too many of you fellows loafing about ! "

To Lande this ignorantly hostile attitude on the part of the village folk was lamentable in the extreme.

With eager eyes he observed the life in these hamlets through which he passed, yet it affected him in the same way as the sight of the large herds of cattle that gazed at him with wide, mysterious eyes as he passed. For the men as for the beasts he felt affection and sympathy. Yet he knew instinctively that he was at a distance from them, that they had no need for him ; and this saddened him. Only when, vast and spacious, the lonely steppe lay open to his view, and the sun, as it were, shone for him alone in all the world, did Lande feel glad of heart. Yet this was at rare intervals, for on every side he perceived men, countless as ants, all busily at work.

When he at last got on to the road through the forest, and walked beneath the shadow of the calm, stately trees, a transport of joy seized him. For the first time in his life he had a sense of unspeakable relief, since here no anxious, gloomy faces met his view. All day long he followed forest paths overgrown and scarcely recognizable. and all day long beside him stood only the tall, pensive trees. Birds fluttered silently past him, apparently unaware of the wanderer's presence. Here and there brushwood crackled, as if some one, yet not a mortal, were passing through the forest.

Then gradually it grew lighter ; and there was a moist odour, a sense of some strange, incomprehensible force. Something glittered among the trees. It was a river, broad, deep, and cool. Reeds grew on either bank, waving their sharp green blades like daggers above the stream that, in placid grandeur, floated on. Opposite, like a dense wall, lay another forest, dark and green as this, and some of its silent trees stretched gnarled boughs across the water.

Here there was solitude, a solitude that seemed unending, as Lande sat musing by the bank. Then noiselessly a boat approached. This, like the tree-stems, was green and moist, and wild-looking. Kneeling as he rowed in it was a wet, wrinkled peasant. He in no sense disturbed the tranquillity of forest and stream; indeed, he seemed a part of it, so that the eye glanced unarrested at him as at the waving reeds, the water and the sky.

"Little grandfather!" cried Lande, as he rose.

Across the water came the echo faint and strange:

"O—a—a—a!"

"Here!" cried the peasant, as he steered for the bank.

"E—e—e!" rang the echo through the forest.

While the peasant rowed and rowed, Lande sat in the bow of the boat and watched his reflection like a long black streak in the water.

"Are you going far?" asked the man in a hollow voice.

"Yes, far," replied Lande.

The man looked at him with his sharp little eyes.

"Oh!" he said, as he ceased rowing and stared at the water.

"They say that in Siberia there's much more room," he suddenly began, as if Lande's answer were related to his own dull thoughts. "That's how folk go roaming about to find some place where it's better. But what's the good? One tries to find the right, but there isn't any right in this world. If you live here, or if you live there, it's all the same. Like me, say, in the forest. All things come from God, and you yourself go back to God, too. And nobody but He will help you. . . . We know nothing, but just grope about in the dark. There's no such thing as right, I say, no such thing. Here or there, the world's the same everywhere!"

In the man's dull, monotonous voice could be heard the hidden yearning of a soul oppressed.

"This right you speak of lies in man himself, not in the world," replied Lande sadly. "We must love one another and feel pity for each other. The rest will come of itself."

The man laughed grimly.

"Ha! Ha! Come of itself, eh? Yes; but how are we going to live to-day? Tell us that, first. Love one another! Ha! ha! How can we love one another when sometimes we're ready to cut each other's throats for a morsel of bread?"

After a pause he added: "It's all very fine for the grand folk to talk! The nobility and the priests! But their notion of right is this!" And he shook his bony fist at Lande. "That's about it! There's no justice in this world, and maybe men have to suffer as they do so that one day justice may come. That's about it, eh?"

"Yes! Yes!" cried Lande, as he joyfully nodded. "Everything in this world, all noble work, all knowledge, all thought—everything is carried on through suffering. If there were no suffering, the soul would come to a standstill, would die."

The boat touched the shore, and Lande slowly got out. For a moment they both looked at each other without speaking. It was as if some mighty bond had bound them. Each longed to speak some word that should bring the other closer, yet neither could find it, nor rightly utter that which burned within his heart.

"Farewell, grandfather," said Lande sadly.

The peasant muttered something inaudible and pushed off from the shore, gliding over the water again, wet and gnarled as some floating tree-stump.

For a long while Lande watched him till he disappeared round a bend of the river, as the long silvery streak melted into the broad mirror of the stream. Towards evening Lande lost his way. But, seeing an old, disused hut, he resolved to stay there over night. It was a bitterly cold night. Chilled, overtired as he was, he slept but little.

Towards morning the mist that all night long had wrapped the tall trees like a dense white veil, began to rise, and turned grey. There was a strange thrill in the air. Simultaneously all things as by mutual agreement awoke swiftly and with ease. A bird twittered softly, as though it had something to ask. From a wet bough a raven slowly flew straight into the mist, as its dew-laden wings brushed

against the dry branches in passing. The forest grasses shivered, and the leaves stirred, as all around became suddenly brighter.

All at once the mist began to disperse, becoming broken up into slender, waving columns that swiftly and silently rose or fell amid the stems of the trees.

Lande crept out of the hut, chilled to the bones. His features looked grey and pinched. As he gazed round, all things in this undulating mist for a moment seemed to him to have become strangely altered.

Yet ever brighter grew the morning as the mists melted, and on all sides the vast murmur rose of a great forest's life. Touched with roseate fire, the tree-tops pointed upwards to the dark blue dome of heaven. Profoundly impressed by this all-pervading warmth and light, Lande felt loth to go. He sat down on the ground, and motionless, with keen, joyous eyes regarded all. Then, as day came on, he lounged beneath a tree which scattered over him frail golden leaves, while he eagerly observed the life of the forest that to him was new and full of strange mystery.

Slowly, dimly, he seemed to apprehend it.

A deeper sense of calm came over him as his physical strength decreased. He noticed this weakness and tried to eat a little, yet the food stuck in his throat, and after he had eaten he felt more faint. When he stood up he could hardly lift his foot ; his knees trembled strangely, and he was seized with giddiness.

" I am ill," thought Lande, yet without fear or surprise, but as if he had expected this. " Very likely I caught cold in the night. I must stay here."

Gradually he felt strangely happy. " Why am I glad ? " he asked himself, smiling. " Because I must stop here ! Or is it for some other reason ? . . . I don't know. . . . But oh ! how delightfully calm and happy I feel ! "

He lay there all day long, having no clear thoughts, but merely musing peacefully, surrounded by such a wealth of light, and life and colour that his very eyes for sheer longing throbbed and burned.

Ceaselessly the sweet voices of the woodland sounded

overhead, yet he saw nothing except silent birds with green plumage. About noon a lean, shaggy bear came out of the wood and looked earnestly at Lande with its little black eyes. Sitting up on its hind legs it stretched out its neck, sighed, and then gazed again at Lande. A bird swayed gently on the green branches above him.

"Oh, God, how beautiful!" he murmured, as tears rose to his eyes.

The bear made a curious sobbing noise, and again stretched out its neck.

"You dear thing!" cried Lande, feeling a sudden impulse to pet the beast and stroke its brown, matted fur. Yet he feared that this might frighten it. That the bear might attack him never entered his mind. So bland and serene was his mood that to realize anything horrible seemed impossible.

"Shall I give it some bread?" he thought, and laughed at the idea.

Once more the bear heaved a long, drawn-out sigh, looked about with its bright black eyes, and then trotted back into the forest. Lande felt sorry, and yet glad, as he watched it disappearing amid the trees.

"Here would be a good place to die," he said to himself.

The thought of death and the clear consciousness of its nearness now took possession of his soul. He remembered Semenof, but merely for a moment, the thought being fused and lost in the rich splendour of the day. It was as though he were going to some one other and mightier than he.

XXIII

RAIN fell in torrents, and in the forest there were perpetual noises. At times it seemed as if some one were sobbing behind a bush, weeping in a faint, silvery voice; yet soon one could clearly hear that it was only the music of the rain.

Lande lay in the wet, dark hut, where at times it seemed as if beneath him yawned a fathomless abyss. With difficulty he lifted his hot, trembling hand as he touched the rain-drenched branches from which chilly drops fell on to his face. His head burned, yet feverlike a frost racked his limbs, and he writhed helplessly on the ground in his dripping cassock, vainly endeavouring to get warmth. Sparks glittered before his eyes; countless golden circles revolved in the gloom.

"I am dying," thought Lande. "Yea, Lord, Thy will be done."

Cold and in agony, he wept. His tears fell unseen on the wet ground and dripped into his mouth between his chattering teeth.

"Lord! Lord!" he exclaimed gently, and here, in the forest and the darkness, this solitary call sounded so strange that for a moment it seemed to him as if there were perfect silence so that his cry might be heard.

Then the rain fell in torrents and the water gurgled as before. Lande now became unconscious, as in a high fever he lay huddled up on the ground with his knees in a pool of water.

Out of the darkness emerged the head of a large hare with long ears thrown back, and red eyes that stared at Lande. There was something horrible, something mocking about this silent head. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, it nodded at him. Suddenly a yellow light shone over everything, as if at his back there burned an invisible flame. Lande caught a sidelong glimpse of himself, filthy and disgusting, in a pool of water, with the black cassock clinging to his limbs, and at his heart he felt

horrible fear. With a wild, mad scream he sat up, and in so doing knocked his head against the branches. Icy rain-drops fell on him in streams, yet he remained unconscious. A long procession of familiar faces with shining eyes passed him and were lost in the distance. Advancing towards him they bowed to him and then passed on, being succeeded by others. The light behind Lande shone no longer now, but from himself a radiance, faint yet clear, appeared to emanate.

It was well with him now, and he had peace.

Then the same lurid light reappeared; again his black body could be discerned coiled up on the ground like a crushed worm; again the hare's head slowly, almost imperceptibly, nodded.

It was not thought, not delirious fancy, nor mental emotion, but only the dazzling light of a wondrous perception, that then penetrated Lande's heated brain. In that same instant his whole life was snapped in two. It was as if the radiant, forceful, wondrous part of him were now slowly ebbing away and passing into everything around him, while he himself lay in the grip of a final, unconquerable pain that drove into him its cruel claws and with frightful force pinned him to earth.

"A—a—a!" cried Lande. The sound of his feeble voice floated out into the dark.

XXIV

WHEN going home, certain peasant folk from Riasau, carpenters, found in the wood, at a long distance from any human dwelling-place, the body of a man.

The corpse lay in a hut roughly constructed of dry branches. The limbs were contracted and the hands convulsively clenched, while the long, thin neck seemed partially dislocated. The body was clothed in a black cassock, and for some reason or other one foot was exposed to view. An overpowering odour of corruption blended strangely and fearfully with the delicate smell of the dry bracken growing in that place.

One of the peasants, burly and red-bearded, touched the foot of the corpse with the tip of his boot. The dead foot hardly moved.

"Died here, I expect," was the peasant's remark, as he scratched the nape of his neck, and for a while stood still. Then, with an expression on his face of fear and of fury for which he himself could not account, he caught hold of the projecting foot and dragged the body out of the hut. The head swayed and bumped up and down as the hands flopped heavily and trailed along the ground. All at once there was such a frightfully nauseous, penetrating stench that the peasants staggered backwards.

"What the devil!" cried the red-bearded man in amazement, as if that had been totally unexpected.

The men stood and surveyed the corpse.

There it lay, forlorn and cold, on the earth, gazing upwards with dull, lidless eyes at the distant sky, and its lips, now sealed for ever, without words spoke of some dreadful secret. At the breast the black stuff was torn, disclosing the dull yellow flesh beneath. Faded leaves and dry mud adhered to it, as if mother earth had already taken the dead man into her grey arms and were drawing him slowly, yet irresistibly, down to herself.

For a long while the peasants stood looking at the corpse, as if they could not decide what ought to be

done. At last an old grave-faced peasant sighed, and removing his cap, crossed himself. Once he crossed himself, and after a while said, "May heaven be your portion!" Then twice he made the sign of the Cross. All the others immediately pulled off their caps, as if by so doing they were ridding themselves of a heavy burden, and waved their fingers through the air. Then, in single file, they went away without looking back.

For a long while the golden forest, and the sunlight, the grass, and the lofty heaven, seemed to them shrouded in some invisible veil, fettered by some grievous silence. Yet in reality all things were overflowing with joy in the gladsome light and beauty of the landscape, radiant even in decay.

The peasant, who walked last, glanced stealthily round; and he could just discern in the distance, behind a golden brown bush, the dim outline of a shrunken, rigid foot.

The spot was one where all the year round ferns grew in great abundance.

NINA

NINA

I

NINA usually spent the whole evening at the old Ivolgins. She always felt happy and at home there, for the Ivolgins' house was bright and cosy; and she, young, buoyant, and full of hope, could be happy anywhere. All the time her talk was of the wonderful life that she meant to lead, and of the gladness that was to be hers. At eleven o'clock she went home, and old Ivolgin accompanied her.

It was dark and damp out of doors. From the river that was hidden by huts and sheds came a humid, fitful breeze, and one could hear the willows wailing at the water's edge. On the river there was a muffled sound of something that cracked, and slid, and suddenly dispersed with a strange, resonant, gurgling noise.

"The ice is breaking up," said Ivolgin, striving to face the wind that flung back the folds of his cloak, shook Nina's dress, and spattered their faces with icy drops.

"And now the spring is coming," replied Nina loudly, merrily as ever.

It really almost seemed as if, out of the darkness that covered the river, something floated to them on the moist, warm air, something mighty and immense.

"You will soon be home now," said Ivolgin, just to cheer his companion, for the girl, young, happy, charming as she was, always roused in his old heart a sense of warmth and joy and sorrow.

"Yes, thank goodness, very soon," cried Nina. Her merry voice in the wind sounded trembling and sweet. Passing along a dark, wet street, they reached an open square. Here the air was cold and bleak as a draught from a vault. On the church wall lay half-thawed snow that gleamed faintly in the grey mist. Behind the

church, fenced in by gaunt, bare trees which rattled like black bones, stood a large angular house built of brick. Its two lighted windows were like yellow eyes that glared wrathfully upon the general gloom without.

"Ah! some one has come," said Nina eagerly.

They went to the gateway, looked over at the dark farmyard that gave out a warm, damp smell of manure, and stopped at the school-room door. Nina held out her hand and Ivolgin in friendly fashion clasped her soft little hand in his, and said: "Good night, my pretty one."

Then, pulling his cap closer about his ears and thumping the ground with his stick, he hurried off, glancing once more at the window that for a moment lit up his bent form as it vanished in the mist.

Nina ran up the steps and tapped at a dark window. Some one came out from the gateway, splashing through the puddles and stood at the bottom of the steps.

"Is that you, Matthew?" asked Nina. "Have you got the key? Who is it that has come?"

"It is I," replied a dark figure in a hoarse voice.

"Have you got the key?"

"Here it is."

Matthew went up the creaking steps, and, pushing past Nina, opened the door which rattled somewhat on its hinges. There was a smell of bread.

"Who is it that has come?" asked Nina a second time.

Matthew was silent for a moment.

"The Magistrate with the Doctor and the Commissioner of Police. At Tarasovka a corpse has been found."

Nina groped her way to the class-room to look for matches.

"Where *can* I have put them?" she muttered.

Matthew stood in the darkness and was silent. At last Nina found the matches and lit the lamp. A faint ghostly light fell on the rows of desks and benches that resembled coffins in the cold, bare room.

"I have to get the post-chaise ready, Miss, to fetch witnesses from Tarasovka."

"Now? To-night?" asked Nina, in surprise.

Matthew nodded his head and sighed.

"You had better go across to the priest's, Miss. These gentry are full up. With all their row you will never be able to sleep."

"That won't matter," replied Nina. "Have they had such a lot to drink, then?"

"Ah! I should just think they had!" said Matthew, half-irritably and half-enviously. He sighed again.

"They've been at it all the evening. . . . You ought really to go to the priest's. They mean to make a night of it."

"That won't matter," said Nina once more.

Matthew, disapproving, was silent. "Well, I'm off," he said at last.

Nina went with him to the door which she bolted, and then passed through the school-room to her own room taking the lamp with her. At once she heard sounds of drunken laughter, of the clinking of glasses and of the moving of chairs. The noise came through the door which shut off her room from that used by "officials and travellers." It was locked and covered with a curtain, but tobacco-fumes and a hot, heavy odour came through it into Nina's room. She opened a window, looked suspiciously at the door, and, with her ear close against it, listened.

"Ha! Ha! It's all very well. We know you! Expect you've been there already," shouted some one with brutal vehemence.

"Shut up!" cried another with a wild, drunken laugh.

"No, sirs, I swear to God. . . ."

For some reason or other Nina suddenly felt as if she had been insulted, although she had understood nothing. Bewildered and irresolute, she moved to the table.

"I had better have stayed the night at the Ivolgins'," she thought, in fear and disgust.

On the other side of the wall she heard shouts and the noise of falling furniture; at times it seemed as if they were fighting like wild beasts in a cage. Nina strove not to listen. She sat down at the table and gazed thoughtfully at the lamp-light.

"Education, so they say, makes man moral. Our peasants would never roar like that. . . . They must know that I am here! No, a vile man becomes by education yet more vile. . . . It is as if all that he does were done intentionally."

Then she recollected that in April she would be free to go.

"I wish that it could be soon. . . . I am so tired."

Unconsciously her face wore a jaded, weary expression. Yet bright, glad thoughts came back to her—visions of faces she loved from the wide, joyous world that lay before. Smiling, she gave them welcome with her dark, thoughtful eyes.

Suddenly there came a sharp rap at the door. Nina started and looked round.

"Please . . . Miss," said a voice so loudly that it seemed as if it were in the room, "could you . . . please, Miss, let us have a candle? Our lamp is going out."

Nina smiled confusedly, as if the speaker could see her, and stammered out, "Er—yes, yes!"

She got up, and, fumbling in the cupboard, produced a candle with which she went to the door. The bolt was on her side. She thrust it back, and, opening the door very slightly, put her hand through the aperture.

"Here! Will you please take this?"

"A thousand thanks, Miss! So much obliged!" said with unnatural politeness the same thick, drunken voice. To Nina it was as if the speaker had made her a bow; but he did not take the candle. Nina, holding this still, moved it again in front of the door. She thought she heard a chuckle, and suddenly felt as if, close to her hand, something was being stealthily attempted. Before she could be certain a fat, moist hand grasped the candle, and pressed Nina's finger-tips with brutal gallantry close to the greasy tallow.

"Thank you, thank you, Miss!" said the same voice, hastily, and in a more repulsively polite tone than ever.

"Don't mention it!" replied Nina mechanically, as she withdrew her hand.

There was suddenly silence in the adjoining room; and, after that, a dull, suppressed murmuring.

Feeling reassured, Nina sat down on the bed, yawned, and began to undress. She took off her boots, her dress, and her stays, remaining in her chemise and long black stockings with pale blue garters. The tight-fitting black stockings made her feet look so dainty and childish, and her soft, delicately moulded arms were lustrous in the lamplight. She arranged her hair for the night, removing the hair-pins and making a single plait.

"If you please, Miss," said the voice again at the door, "we've made some tea. Won't you have a glass with us?"

The voice was still that of a drunken man, and it sounded unnaturally polite, but the tone was more excited than before, as if the speaker panted between each word.

"No, thank you!" answered Nina, in alarm, seizing the counterpane. The voice was mute, and silence reigned. Only a second it seemed of absolute stillness, and then through the window came a far-off sound of turbulence and commotion from the river. The wind wrenched off a shutter, and howled round the roof, from which a slab of ice fell, breaking like glass.

Nina got gently, almost stealthily, into bed, as if she sought to conceal herself, drawing the coverlet right up to her chin. Her eyes were wide open, fixed in a vacant, horrified stare upon the door, and thoughts whirled in her brain like startled birds.

"I must get away. . . . If only Matthew would come! . . ."

Yet, instead of escaping, she did not dare to move, but convulsively clutched the coverlet and drew it up to her chin, striving to allay her fears.

"Nonsense! Drunken fellows . . . what could they do? They would never dare to come in!"

To her, this seemed simple and conclusive enough, yet at the same moment she felt that something incredibly hideous was about to happen.

At the door all was still.

"Yes . . . but the bolt is not drawn." The words

were uttered in an awful whisper quite close to Nina; almost in her ear. Scarcely audible, and yet having the effect of a piercing scream, they sent a flash of mortal terror through her brain.

"What does that matter?" Another sharp whisper in her ear, and, at the same time a slight noise, as of some one behind the curtain who stealthily, with bated breath, was trying to open the door.

Nina's brain reeled; her soul and body were gripped by wild fear; one keen, agonizing thought of something inconceivably horrible seemed to light up the whole world. As if a hand had struck her, she sprang up, and, half nude, like some beautiful little animal, stood by the bed, at bay. The curtain moved gently. From the gloom behind it a large, shadowy form emerged.

"What—what do you want? Go away at once! I'll scream!" cried Nina, in a trembling voice.

The shadowy form suddenly tottered forward, and a big, red, burly man almost fell into the room. Behind him came a second, and a third.

"Eh . . . we've come to thank you . . . for the candle and . . . well, you see . . . perhaps you're feeling a bit lonely . . . such a pretty girl, too" . . . stammered the man, with a hideous leer, and, by his bloated, bestial eyes, Nina could see that he was drunk. Her voice seemed frozen in her throat; but suddenly she uttered a wild, piercing shriek!

"Help! Help!"

"Be quiet! Hush!" hissed some one in alarm. Thereupon the big, burly man attacked her, and with his whole body crushed her against the wall. Some one, panting, seized her in his rough, sweaty hands and with a suppressed grunt of fury flung her aside. . . .

II

THEN, suddenly, they became sober.

The grey dawn had come; the lamp went out; the room had a close, sickening smell. Pillows lay on the floor, and the coverlet was huddled up at the foot of the bed. Bruised and blue, Nina lay there, crying and screaming, as she tossed from side to side; not beautiful, now, but wretched, awful, even hideous to behold. The tall, pale Commissioner of Police held her down with all his might, closing her mouth with one hand. The Doctor and the Magistrate looked on, moving restlessly up and down. Their hands trembled; their eyes were blood-shot and vacant; their faces in the dawnlight seemed strangely grey.

"Come, now, do listen, little one. . . . It's no good making all this fuss . . . it can't be helped now. . . . Do listen, for goodness' sake! What's done is done!"

So, all speaking at once, the three strove noisily to pacify her; and at last relapsed into craven silence.

Nina, however, the wreck of her former engaging, beautiful self, writhed, disfigured and soiled, in the Commissioner's grasp. Wrenching herself free, she shrieked again, her eyes starting from their sockets.

"What on earth are we to do with her?" muttered the Magistrate, furious and afraid.

From the village yonder came sounds remote, indistinct. Just below the window, loudly, defiantly, a cock crew thrice.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" screamed Nina, who had freed her mouth from the Commissioner's grasp.

His features became distorted with bestial rage as he ruthlessly gripped her face with all his force, crumpling it up in such a way that his fingers were covered with blood and saliva. For a moment they looked both into each other's eyes—a brief, piercing, glance, horrible, inhuman.

"Now . . . scream away, do!" hissed the Commissioner in frenzied triumph.

III

It was a bright, sunny morning. Long, damp shadows still lay in front of the houses and fences, but where the sun shone the puddles glittered, and, here and there, straws that had been trodden into the frozen mud gleamed like gold. The school-yard was empty, and only the mark of wheels in the wet ground were visible. All the furniture in the room " For Officials and Travellers " was displaced, except the sofa that was set exactly in front of the door. One could see empty bottles, dirty glasses, heaps of wet, greasy cigar-ashes and crushed gherkins. It seemed strange to imagine that human beings had been here. On the other side of the door, in Nina's room, all was still and motionless. It was as though the folding-doors, like clenched teeth, were guarding a grim secret.

Until eleven o'clock the school-yard was crowded with boys and girls chasing, pushing, and striking each other, shrill-voiced as a flock of sparrows. But at eleven o'clock a sudden ominous silence ensued. Then some one rushed down the street to proclaim the awful news, and at once there was a stir and commotion, as from every side horror-struck people ran, shouting, to the school-house. Old Ivolgin came, and the fat veteran of the village, and the policeman. The door was opened, and into Nina's mournful room, where all was silent as the grave, noisy folk forced their way, with strange, wild, curious eyes.

There, where all was sad and silent, all things bore mute and harrowing testimony to a mysterious and awful tragedy. The whole room had obviously been hastily and ignorantly set in order by strange hands, the furniture accurately placed, and the bed, as if long disused and superfluous, most carefully made. Nina's clothes lay folded with scrupulous neatness upon a chair, and the room had a strange, faint, indefinable odour.

In a corner of the room, from a peg of the empty clothes-stand, Nina was found hanging, in a white chemise with

spotless pleats that still smelt of soap. Her delicate arms, already slightly discoloured, hung helplessly at her side, and her legs, in black stockings, with sky-blue garters, were unnaturally bent outwards, as if convulsively struggling to touch the ground. The ghastly head, blue and bloated, with its glassy eyes was bent backwards; from livid lips the big, puffy tongue protruded; the agonized expression of the face was inconceivably horrible.

Old Ivolgin uttered a wild shriek, and the others with him screamed and chattered incoherently, as if they had lost their reason. A deep, long-drawn sigh seemed to float along the street, subsiding in the dense dark crowd that thronged the stairway. The general horror and disgust knew no bounds, while deeper and deeper grew the thirst for revenge.

IV

On the next day, towards evening, the Commissioner of Police, the Magistrate and the Doctor arrived; not together, but singly. There was yet daylight, but where the lengthening shadows fell, thin, brittle ice sparkled. From the office they went to the desolate-looking school-house in front of which two plain-clothes policemen with a stretcher were posted. In silence the officials entered the school-house. The fat, bloated Doctor was breathing hard, and his hands twitched convulsively like a helpless animal scratching the ground. The gaunt, lanky Commissioner led the way, his face hard as stone, resolute and bold.

The Magistrate walked sideways; his thin white neck moved in jerks beneath his puny, pert face, and fair, upturned moustache.

The Commissioner was the first to enter the room, walking straight up to the corpse, cold and motionless, in its sack-cloth shroud. For the space of a second he looked upon that ghastly head, and then, turning round, said in a dull, hard voice:

"Away with it!"

The two assistants hastily flung down their caps by the door, and carefully, with slippered feet, approached the bed. Their hands trembled; even their backs, bent and rigid, expressed horror and pity. Breathing low, they halted.

"Be quick!" said the Commissioner in the same hollow, determined voice.

The men obeyed. The little black feet quivered, and then rose and sank helplessly. From the coarse canvas-covering a small livid hand fell out, and dangled on the floor.

"Carry her down to the yard on the stretcher!"

The men moved forward, then stopped, and then moved on again, carrying their burden as if it was something extremely heavy and fragile.

As the strangely extended black legs moved down the school-house steps, another sigh, muffled and poignant, swept along the village street alive with a hundred staring eyes.

"Drive those people away!" whispered the cowardly Doctor to the Commissioner.

The latter drew himself up, as in a cold, domineering tone, he shouted: "What are you all staring at? Go away! March!"

The mob moved, grew denser, swayed, and remained stationary.

"Go away! Go away!" cried the policemen, gesticulating timorously, feebly.

Nina had been carried down on the stretcher and placed on the frozen ground. The little head shook slightly, and then lay quite still.

One of the men, a pale, fair fellow, crossed himself in terror. The Commissioner, glancing at him, said mechanically:

"Go and fetch witnesses."

The man's features were contracted as if by a spasm of genuine pity and brainless fear.

V

AFTER the inspection of the corpse the Doctor and the Magistrate sat silently in the office. Starless night lay without, and on the dark plain some one seemed to hover, listening.

"Oh! my God, my God!" groaned the Doctor, as with fat fingers he tried to make a cigarette.

The Magistrate glanced at him and walked up and down the room.

Both were utterly dejected; each felt unable to look the other in the face. Thoughts, recollections, blurred and confused, yet at times sharp as a razor, flashed through their besotted brains. To the Doctor at times it seemed as if all were an error, a mistake that could be rectified; all would pass away, and life would be as jolly and pleasant as before. Then suddenly there came a fiery mist, and the vision of an alluring maid with whom that which they willed to do they did, until the obscuring clouds of drunkenness and obscenity rose and revealed a livid corpse. All life vanished; even the possibility of living; the whole future was engulfed in the black chasm of terror from which escape there was none. Avenging forms arose; familiar faces became strange and hideous; hands were stretched forth to seize; and the heart sank down, down into an abyss of horror and shame.

"Oh! my God, my God!" groaned the Doctor, wailing for mercy. The Magistrate paced the room from one corner to the other, walking faster and faster, as if to escape from something. The boards creaked; it seemed as though a phantom were pursuing him. The Doctor's lamentations irritated him. They were needless now, he thought; the important thing was how to wriggle out of the affair. The thought of that little murdered girl had taken firm root in a dark corner of his brain.

"Oh! my God!" sighed the Doctor. The Magistrate became furious. He turned sharply round, his little eyes, transparent as gelatine, rolling with rage.

"What's the good of all this whining?" he exclaimed; "for God's sake, shut up!"

An evil thought suddenly flashed across his mind.

"You planned the whole thing yourself, and now you blubber like some old woman!" he said viciously, without looking at the Doctor.

The latter understood him and turned a purplish red. His big round face resembled a child's toy balloon. His breath came in short, laboured gasps.

"What? . . . It was *I*? . . . *I* that . . . ?" he stuttered, slowly rising on his short legs.

"Of course, it was you!" retorted the other with a nod and a chuckle.

The little lamp on the table tottered, and its green glass shade rattled piteously. The light fell on broad, firmly planted feet, and fists convulsively clenched. The faces of the two were in the shade; their eyes only gleamed ferociously.

"*I*?" gasped the Doctor, choking with rage.

"Yes, you, you, you!" shouted the Magistrate wildly.

"Who first suggested it?"

"I was only joking; but you went in first."

"And who hit her on the head, pray? Yes, on the head? I did, perhaps?"

"Ah! but who was it that said we had nothing to fear?"

There was a knock at the door. They both started backward in alarm, and were mute. The Commissioner of Police entered. He was wearing a dull grey coat with shining buttons, and his sword. His face looked grey and hard as stone; his eyes had a lustre as of metal. Approaching the table he leant upon it with both hands, and, looking at the wall between them, said:

"We will hold the inquest at once."

Then, as he did not see, but felt, how pale they turned, he bit his lip, and continued;

"We might have had such a nice night of it. This stupid affair has spoilt everything. Ah! well, it doesn't

matter!" He glanced scornfully at both of them, and then, altering his tone, added sternly:

"All the same, we're not going to ruin ourselves just because of a woman. We must get ourselves out of it somehow, eh? I have just heard that two peasants saw the watchman, Matthew Povalny, leaving the schoolhouse that night. Do you hear?"

"Well, what of that?" asked the Doctor huskily. Again a black thought darted into the Magistrate's mind. He uttered a sigh of relief.

"That's what will save us! It's not a case of outrage; merely one of theft. That's simpler, and it won't create so much fuss. I'll manage the watchman. No need to bring it in outrage at all. . . ."

"Oh! . . . I see!" said the Commissioner, leaning over the table, and craning his sinewy neck as if to hear a distant sound. But the Magistrate grasped the grey cloak and whispered something, as his eyes rolled insanely, and saliva spirted from his mouth.

As he proceeded to explain how all the blame should be laid upon the watchman, the fat Doctor became more and more unnerved. Another awful phantom confronted him; one that he felt powerless to face. When the Magistrate had finished speaking, the Doctor sank feebly into a chair, struck the table with his elbow, and covered his face with his fat fingers, exclaiming fretfully:

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! What *are* you going to do now?"

The Commissioner slowly turned to him a face of iron.

"What else is there to be done?" he asked coldly.

"Why, that means prison. . . . An innocent man is sent to prison through us!"

The Magistrate's puny face was lit up by a look of savage glee.

"Well, what do you want, then?" asked the Commissioner, with suppressed ferocity of tone.

"Impossible . . . I can't do it!" The Doctor groaned and pressed his fingers harder against his face.

"What do you mean by 'I can't do it?'"

"No, I can't!" The Doctor shook his head. "I can't," he murmured in a broken, husky voice.

"Ah! but you *could* do what you did!" cried the Magistrate.

"That . . . well . . . how that happened, I don't know. . . . But this . . . no, I can't!" replied the Doctor sadly.

"So you can't do it? But twelve years' penal servitude—you could do that, eh?" asked the Magistrate venomously, as he bent down close to the Doctor's ear. "And how about your wife and child, eh?"

Hurriedly uncovering his fat, red, perspiring features, the Doctor stared at the speaker with dazed, lustreless eyes. His head sank on the table, and he sobbed and moaned:

"My God! My God!" . . . What will be the end of it all? What shall I do?"

His head wobbled to and fro on the edge of the table like a big soft ball.

"What is the meaning of all this humbug?" asked the Commissioner contemptuously, as he moved away from the table. "I fail to understand."

The Doctor sobbed, and then suddenly burst out laughing. The Magistrate in alarm hastened to fetch water, and, as the glass rattled against the other's teeth, he kept repeating:

"For goodness' sake, stop! What's the matter? We had a bit of fun with the girl; we were drunk, and—there it is! Anybody else in our place would have done the same. We never meant to kill her, did we? Here, drink this, go on! Be quiet and don't scream like that! What's done is done, and it can't be mended!"

The Doctor now began to groan and laugh alternately. The Magistrate turned round in terror, and for a moment experienced a most extraordinary sensation. It was as if he and the others had gone mad; his brain seemed on fire. The Commissioner, rushing forward, knocked the

glass out of his hand and, seizing the Doctor by the shoulder, yelled at him furiously;

"Shut up, curse you! If you don't, I'll kill you!"

The Doctor shook as if his head were being torn from his body, and stammered out: "I . . . understand . . . Let me . . . alone . . . ! I'll say . . . nothing!"

VI

ALREADY that evening, invisibly, inaudibly, news of the grave crime had passed from lip to lip, and gradually the spirit of mutiny and revolt grew deeper. Next morning workmen at the cotton factory and on the railway left their work, and in black crowds surged across the fields to the village. "They murdered her themselves, and now they want to hold an inquest!" cried a dull, hard voice; and from these words something huge and sinister as an approaching cloud took shape which grew with lightning speed, and, moving, bore in its wake the bygone shame and oppression of centuries.

It was as if this little murdered maiden had been the embodiment of gaiety and youth and human charm, and that these now were hopelessly extinguished and destroyed.

When, early in the morning, the corpse was carried by police-agents along the street, a huge crowd like a black whirlpool blocked the whole road, dispersing silently at the approach of the roughly made, unpolished coffin that slowly swayed aloft. No one knew what to do; but all gazed mournfully at the yellow lid. Silence prevailed, but yonder, somewhere in the distance, there was a suppressed sound like subterranean rumblings.

The sky grew bright; frost shone on the roofs, the fences, and the ground. A single star gleamed sadly in the east. Slowly forming a circle, the black crowd followed the coffin down the long, silent street. In the sky all was so pure and calm and bright; and all so restless, so brutal on the black earth. The bier was hastily borne to the church, and then, at a slow pace, to the graveyard.

Suddenly a voice was heard, shrill, insistent. Grey-haired Ivolgin ran, bareheaded, after the bier, and, shaking his bony fist, shouted: "Stop! Stop!"

The coffin came to a standstill as of its own accord, swaying to and fro. Ivolgin approached, his grey hair ruffled, his eyes moist, his mouth awry.

"Where are you going?" he gasped, attempting to stop the coffin's progress. "Go back! First murdered, and then the matter hushed up! Lying villains! Go back! We'll see about that!"

A dull murmur, as that of distant breakers, rose from the crowd.

"For these words, Ivolgin, you will have to answer! Do you hear?" cried a police-agent, obstructing the old man's approach. "Go on, you fellows, go on!"

Ivolgin mechanically grasped the other's hand, and his lips moved convulsively.

"Don't lay your hands on me!" exclaimed the police-agent, roughly withdrawing his hand. But Ivolgin seized him by the elbow and murmured something, opening and shutting his mouth like a fish.

"Leave me alone!" shouted the police-agent furiously.

"It was they who killed her! They, themselves!" murmured Ivolgin, at last. "You're doing wrong. . . . You surely know. . . ."

"Know? What do I know?" cried the police-agent angrily. "What is it—what business is it of yours? Here, arrest this man!"

A fair, pale man timidly caught hold of Ivolgin's arm.

"What does this mean, chaps?" cried a voice from the crowd.

"Let him go! Murderers! Stop the funeral, you fellows! Wha . . . a . . . at? Don't let them go on!" Several voices uttered these words wildly and at random, as the crowd suddenly surged forward. The police-agent yelled out something in reply, but his words were lost in the general din. The coffin swayed, and then was swiftly lowered to the ground.

VII

NEXT day at noon the District Governor arrived, having been summoned by telegraph. He was accompanied by the Commissioner of Police. Ever since the early morning the whole village had been astir. The coffin stood in the empty church, the sunlight falling on its yellow lid.

The fat, pompous Governor climbed down from his carriage in clumsy fashion, saying sharply to the Commissioner, but in an undertone: "Call the police-witnesses and have the girl buried at once."

Taking short steps, he himself walked briskly to the church. The space in front of the porch was filled by a silent crowd. The policeman, the sergeant, and the Commissioner, now came, and their heavy, uneven footsteps could be heard on the pavement of the church. Then they went out again, and the yellow coffin-lid appeared in the black doorway, swaying above the crowd.

"Come, now, clear off!" said the Governor sharply as he scowled at the spectators. Silently, automatically, the crowd advanced, thronging the porch. The coffin was brought to a halt.

"Go your ways!" cried the Governor, stepping forward.

"What's the meaning of 'go your ways?'" replied one of the crowd. "First you murder somebody, and then it is, 'go your ways! . . .' A fine thing, indeed!"

Ivolgin, with a small white cross on his grey cloak, firmly and courteously accosted the Governor.

"Allow me, sir," he began, in a low voice, bending closer. "The voice of the people shows that. . . ."

"What do you say?" asked the Governor, turning sharply round and frowning.

"I was saying that we all know who the murderers are . . . we cannot let this awful crime. . . ."

The Governor glanced furtively at the other, and then abruptly turned away.

"If you please, this is no business of yours. Who are you, pray? Be good enough to stand aside." With that he gently pushed Ivolgin aside.

"Take care, sir!" cried Ivolgin, in a threatening voice, as he shook himself free.

The Governor stopped and suddenly grew pale.

"Gently, gently!" he muttered, and then, in a tone of command: "Remove the coffin!"

A long, painful silence ensued. All stood motionless. The coffin still swayed in the church porch.

"Do you know what you are doing, you fellows?" cried the Governor, white with anger. His voice was weak yet shrill. "You'll have to take the consequences! Let the coffin pass. The inquiry has discovered who the culprit is. The law must now take its course, or you'll suffer for it!"

"Law must take its course, indeed! Ha! Ha! Ha!" cried several mockingly. "Artful fellows, eh? No, my friends, there's no such thing as law or justice!"

"Stand back!" shouted the Governor, beside himself with rage. "What does this mean?"

"I'll tell you what it means," cried Ivolgin, again advancing, "you think that, for you, justice does not exist! You lying wretches! You're going to be brought to justice, now!"

The Governor, frowning, drew back a step. The crowd instantly advanced, menacingly.

"Commissioner!" cried the Governor, utterly disconcerted.

The tall, pale Commissioner pushed roughly past him to seize Ivolgin. His face like a mask of steel wore a cold, hard expression as if he understood nothing.

Just as the Commissioner and a policeman had arrested Ivolgin, a big gaunt workman struck the former full in the face with his bony fist. "Murderer!" he cried.

Blood spurted, and there was a gruesome sound of something broken. The Commissioner staggered but kept his feet. His face had suddenly become shapeless. It expressed neither pain nor fear, but only brutish, insensate fury. He yelled, crouched like a cat, and

leapt at the workman. Locked for a moment in a deadly embrace they both staggered and fell, screaming, down the steps of the church porch.

In a moment all was uproar and confusion. Rebellion, as a grim, grey ghost, floated above the mob, and was mirrored in the pallid faces of the fighters.

"Go ahead! Give it to them, boys!" cried a voice, high-pitched and exultant.

The Governor and the Magistrate ran side by side over the muddy ground, splashing through the half-melted snow, their faces bedabbled with slush and mire. They ran, panting, gasping and in tatters, bruised and disfigured, like big hares scurrying across the fields, pursued by the howling, frenzied mob.

VIII

THAT night, along the dark, muddy high-road a huge mass advanced towards the village. Nothing definite was discernible in the gloom, but one could hear the snorting of horses, the trampling of hoofs and the faint jingling of steel. Neither men nor movements were visible, but it was as if some force, dense and threatening, approached.

The troops halted in the square. The streets were silent and deserted; only a couple of restless yard-dogs barked and howled. Here and there lights flickered at windows and immediately went out. A detachment of soldiers, burly, equal-sized phantoms, dismounted and occupied the space in front of the church. Then out of the darkness they brought a box and swiftly carried it across the glimmering wall to the churchyard. All was still. Rest everywhere, until the coming of the grey, restless day. At dawn the main street was again filled by black masses of humanity—men ill-favoured and sinister of mien, who had flocked thither from the factory whose chimneys no longer smoked, standing there like huge candles that had been put out. From the streets adjoining the square, black figures emerged. These gradually became fused and welded, resembling some dark mass that had been poured out upon the snow-covered square.

Pale, anxious faces collected and then separated, glancing round and watching the soldiery with rapt attention. Half the square by the church was occupied by a dense crowd. Some squatted on the wall and on beams beside it—a veritable sea of faces. The other half of the square was, as before, empty and silent. Here, motionless, in one long line the Cossacks were stationed, their stony, inscrutable faces turned towards the mob. They sat there, rigid in their saddles; only the horses kept nodding their heads. In front of them sundry grey forms paced to and fro; strange figures that shone above

the dark ground. These now swung themselves adroitly into their saddles. The word of command rang out, and the long line of cavalry with jingling spurs and clattering hoofs rode straight across the square at the mob.

Shouts of astonishment and alarm now broke the silence, as the crowd, recoiling, separated. Then the whole black mass with wild shrieks clambered on to the wall and the beams. The horses tossed their heads vehemently and dashed forward. A yell rose from the wall, and a storm of hisses. One tall, haggard workman rushed from the church towards the horses, crying:

"This way, boys, this way!"

Others followed him, one by one, shouting:

"Go for them! Let them have it!"

Riot and confusion now became general. Sticks and stones whizzed through the air; on every side were faces purple with fury, and wild, flashing eyes. There was no shouting now, but a dull confused sound, as merciless blows struck living bodies, as horses whinnied, and fighters were felled to the ground. Then a savage yell of triumph resounded, and in the distance, at the end of the square, the Cossacks were seen, no longer in a regular line, but broken up into little groups. On these a steady rain of large round stones was falling.

"We've won!" cried a lanky fellow, laughing triumphantly like a schoolboy.

"Look out, you chaps!" said a voice from the crowd, gently.

Across the square, on the other side, a long grey stripe slowly unravelled itself, and one could see plainly how a hundred feet struck the ground with swift precision. Instantly all was silent; and once more above the square a grim, grey phantom hovered.

"They'll never dare to do that! They only want to frighten us!" murmured voices, nervously, in the crowd.

"Lads! what shall we do now?" cried the workman hoarsely.

Immediately afterwards there was a loud report. The grey men opposite had disappeared in a cloud of bluish smoke.

IX

Towards evening the clouds dispersed and there was a gleam of sunlight. The streets were deserted; only hens wandered calmly across the high-road, and, close to the church, dogs sniffed the ground, slinking along, their tails between their legs. Silence and horror prevailed, while between the earth with its victims and the fair blue sky a Power invisible, deadly, all-oppressing, seemed to hover.

At the police-station, on stretchers, lay rows of rigid bodies, with white eyes staring upwards. In these eyes there was a look, a sad, questioning look of horror and despair.

THE END

PRINTED AT
KNIGHT'S, WEST NORWOOD