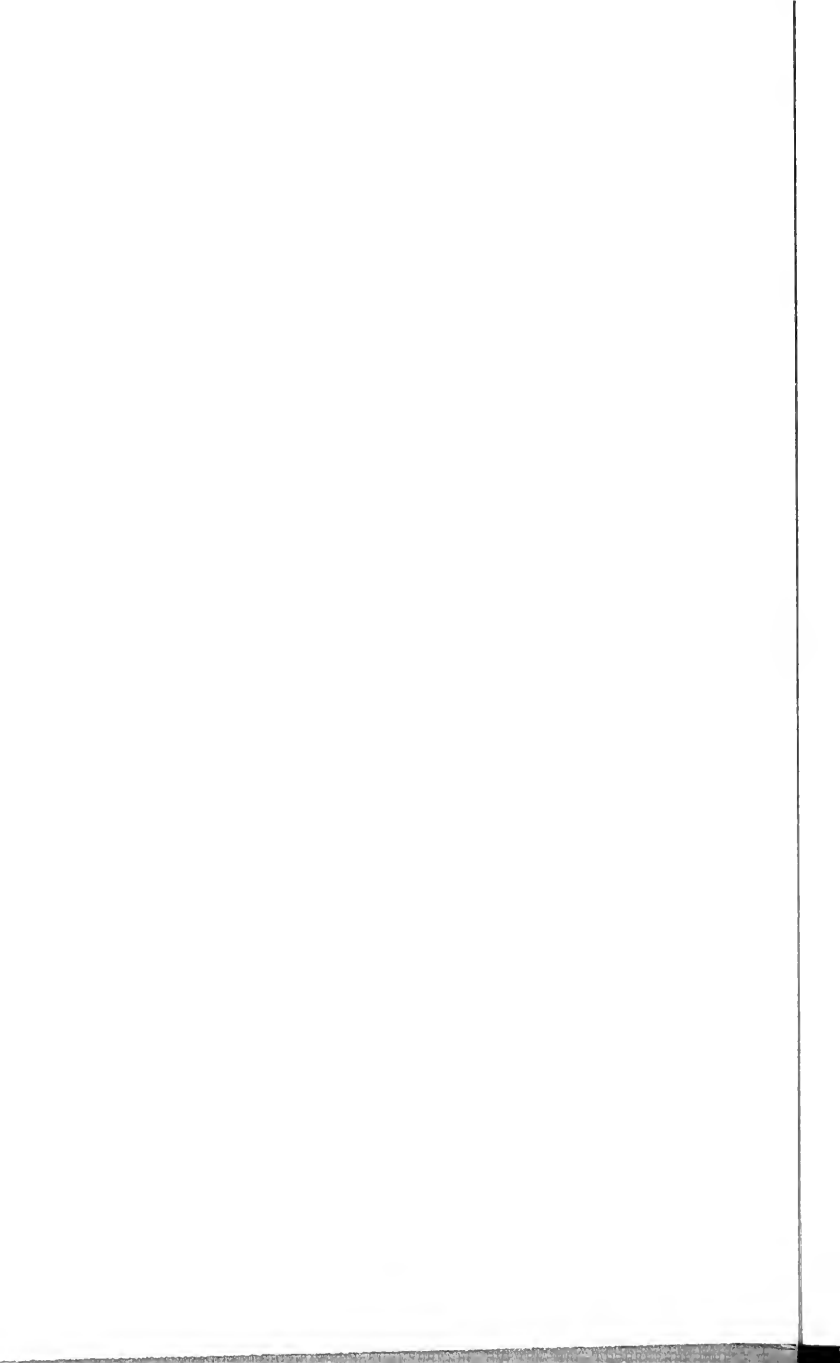


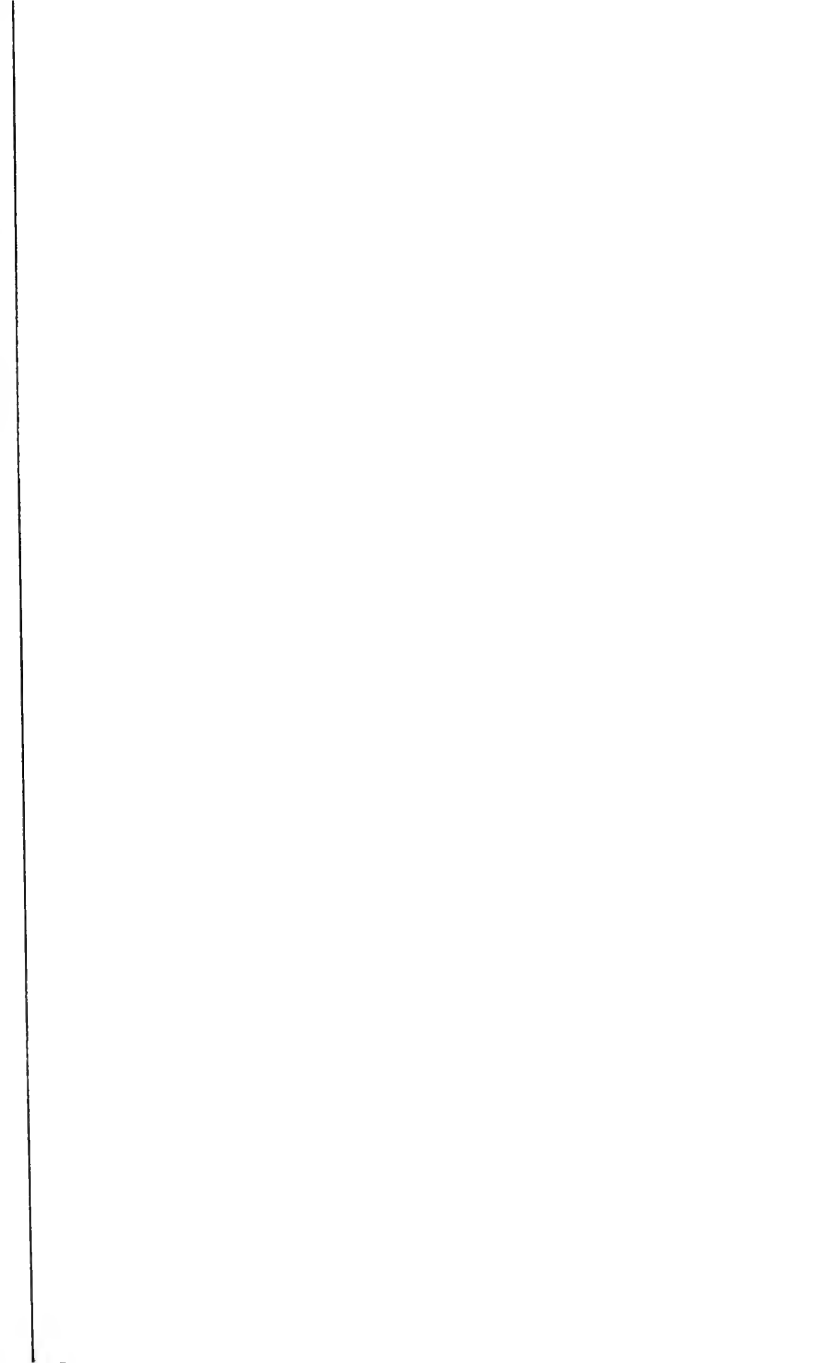
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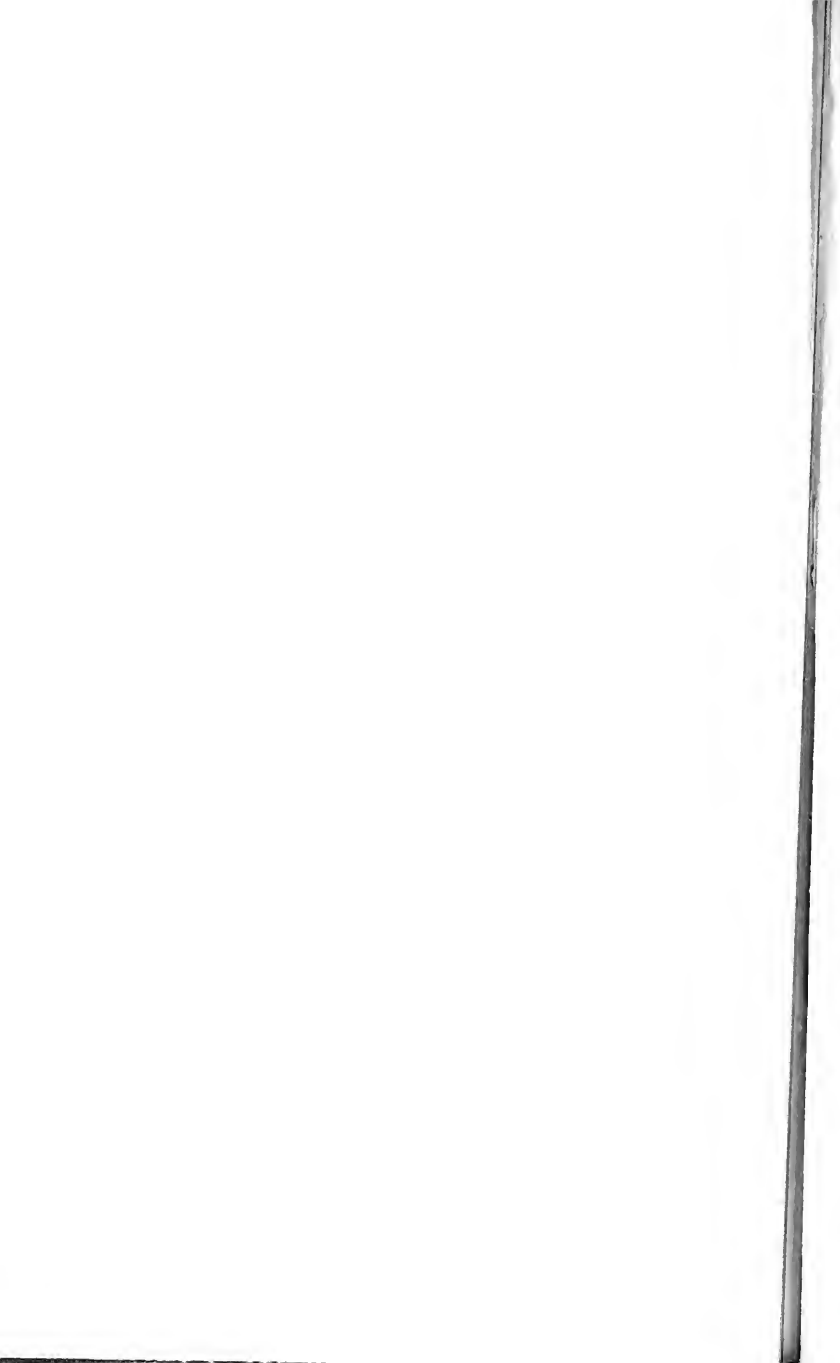


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THE VILLAGE

THIS AUTHORISED TRANSLATION HAS
BEEN MADE FROM THE ORIGINAL
RUSSIAN TEXT BY ISABEL HAPGOOD

THE VILLAGE

By Ivan Bunin

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

DEAR PUBLISHER:—

You have asked me to furnish you with data concerning my life and literary activities. Permit me to repeat what I have already told my French publishers in answer to a similar request.

I am a descendant of an ancient noble family which has given to Russia a considerable number of prominent names, both in the field of statesmanship and in the realm of art. In the latter, two poets are especially well-known, Anna Petrovna Bunina and Vasili Zhookovski, one of the shining lights of Russian Literature, the son of Afanasi Bunin and a Turkish captive, Salma.

All my ancestors had always been connected with the people and with the land; they were landed proprietors. My parents were also land-owners, who possessed estates in Central Asia, in the fertile fringe of the steppes, where the ancient Tsars of Moscow had created settlements of colonists from various Russian territories, to serve as protectors of their Kingdom against the incursions of the Southern Tartars. Thanks to this, it was here that the richest Russian language developed, and from here have come nearly all the greatest Russian writers, with Turgenev and Tolstoy at their head.

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I was born in 1870, in the town of Voronezh, and passed my childhood and youth almost entirely in the country, on my father's estates. As a boy, I was deeply affected by the death of my little sister, and passed through a violent religious crisis, which left, however, no morbid traces whatsoever in my soul.

I also had a passion for painting, which, I believe, has manifested itself in my literary works. I began to write both verse and prose rather early in my life. My first appearance in print was likewise at an early date.

When publishing my books, I nearly always made them up of prose and verse, both original and translated from the English. If classified according to their literary varieties, these books would constitute some four volumes of original poems, approximately two of translations, and six volumes or so of prose.

The attention of the critics was very quickly attracted to me. Later on my books were more than once granted the highest award within the gift of the Russian Academy of Sciences—the prize bearing Pushkin's name. In 1909 that Academy elected me one of the twelve Honorary Academicians, who correspond to the French Immortals, and of whom Lyof Tolstoy was one at that time.

For a long time, however, I did not enjoy any wide popularity, owing to many reasons: for years, after my first stories had appeared in print, I wrote and published almost nothing but verse; I took no part in politics and, in my works, never touched upon questions connected with politics; I belonged to no particu-

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lar literary school, called myself neither decadent, nor symbolist, nor romantic, nor naturalist, donned no mask of any kind, and hung out no flamboyant flag. Yet, during these last stormy decades in Russia, the fate of a Russian writer has frequently depended upon such questions as: Is he an opponent of the existing form of Government? Has he come from "the people"? Has he been in prison, in exile? Or, does he take part in the literary hubbub, in the "literary revolution," which—merely in imitation of Western Europe—went on during those years in Russia, together with a rapid development of public life in the towns, of new critics and readers from among the young bourgeoisie and the youthful proletariat, who were as ignorant in the understanding of art as they were avid of imaginary novelties and all kinds of sensations. Besides, I mixed very little in literary society. I lived a great deal in the country, and traveled extensively both in Russia and abroad: in Italy, in Sicily, in Turkey, in the Balkans, in Greece, in Syria, in Palestine, in Egypt, in Algeria, in Tunisia, in the tropics. I strove "to view the face of the earth and leave thereon the impress of my soul," to quote Saadi, and I have been interested in philosophic, religious, ethical and historical problems.

Twelve years ago I published my novel "The Village." This was the first of a whole series of works which depicted the Russian character without adornment, the Russian soul, its peculiar complexity, its depths, both bright and dark, though almost invariably tragic. On the part of the Russian critics and

among the Russian intellectuals, where "the people" had nearly always been idealized, owing to numerous Russian conditions *sui generis*, and, of late, merely because of the ignorance of the people, or for political reasons,—these "merciless" works of mine called forth passionate controversies and, as a final result, brought me what is called success, success strengthened still further by my subsequent works.

During those years I felt my hand growing firmer every hour; I felt that the powers which had accumulated and matured in me, passionately and boldly, demanded an outlet. Just then the World War broke out and afterwards the Russian Revolution came. I was not among those who were taken unawares by these events, for whom their extent and beastliness were a complete surprise; yet the reality has surpassed all my expectations.

What the Russian Revolution turned into very soon, none will comprehend who has not seen it. This spectacle was utterly unbearable to any one who had not ceased to be a man in the image and likeness of God, and all who had a chance to flee, fled from Russia. Flight was sought by the vast majority of the most prominent Russian writers, primarily, because in Russia there awaited them either senseless death at the hands of the first chance miscreant, drunk with licentiousness and impunity, with rapine, with wine, with blood, with cocaine; or an ignominious existence as a slave in the darkness, teeming with lice, in rags, amid epidemic diseases, exposed to cold, to hunger, to the primitive torments of the stomach, and absorbed in

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that single, degrading concern, under the eternal threat of being thrown out of his mendicant's den into the street, of being sent to the barracks to clean up the soldiers' filth, of being—without any reason whatever,—arrested, beaten, abused, of seeing one's own mother, sister or wife violated—and yet having to preserve utter silence, for in Russia they cut out tongues for the slightest word of freedom.

I left Moscow in May, 1918, lived in the South of Russia (which passed back and forth from the hands of the "Whites" into those of the "Reds") and then emigrated in February, 1919, after having drained to the dregs the cup of unspeakable suffering and vain hopes. For too long I had believed that the eyes of the Christian world would be opened, that it would be horrified at its own heartlessness, and would extend to us a helping hand in the name of God, of humanity and of its own safety.

Some critics have called me cruel and gloomy. I do not think that this definition is fair and accurate. But of course, I have derived much honey and still more bitterness from my wanderings throughout the world, and my observations of human life. I had felt a vague fear for the fate of Russia, when I was depicting her. Is it my fault that reality, the reality in which Russia has been living for more than five years now, has justified my apprehensions beyond all measure; that those pictures of mine which had once upon a time appeared black, and wide of the truth, even in the eyes of Russian people, have become *prophetic*, as some call them now? "Woe unto thee, Babylon!"—

those terrible words of the Apocalypse kept persistently ringing in my soul when I wrote "The Brothers" and conceived "The Gentleman from San Francisco," only a few months before the War, when I had a presentiment of all its horror, and of the abysses which have since been laid bare in our present-day civilization. Is it my fault, that here again my presentiments have not deceived me?

However, does it mean that my soul is filled only with darkness and despair? Not at all. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!"

IVAN BUNIN.

PART ONE



THE great-grandfather of the Krasoffs, known by the manor-house servants under the nickname of "The Gipsy," was hunted with wolf-hounds by Cavalry Captain Durnovo. The Gipsy had lured his lord-and-master's mistress away from him. Durnovo gave orders that The Gipsy should be taken out into the fields and placed on a hillock. Then he himself went out there with a pack of hounds and shouted "Tallyho! Go for him!" The Gipsy, who was sitting there in a state of stupor, started to run. But there is no use in running away from wolf-hounds.

The grandfather of the Krasoffs, for some reason or other, was given a letter of enfranchisement. He went off with his family to the town—and soon distinguished himself by becoming a famous thief. He hired a tiny hovel in the Black Suburb for his wife and set her to weaving lace for sale, while he, in company with a petty burgher named Byelokopytoff, roamed about the province robbing churches. At the end of a couple of years he was caught. But at his trial he bore himself in such fashion that his replies to the judges were current for a long time thereafter. He stood before them, it appears, in a velveteen kaftan, with a silver watch and goat-hide boots, making in-

solent play with his cheek-bones and his eyes and, in the most respectful manner, confessing every one of his innumerable crimes, even the most insignificant: "Yes, sir. Just so, sir."

The father of the Krasoffs was a petty huckster. He roved about the county, lived for a time in Durnovka, set up a pot-house and a little shop, failed, took to drink, returned to the town, and soon died. After serving for a while in shops his sons, Tikhon and Kuzma, who were almost of an age, also took to peddling. They drove about in a peasant cart which had a carved front and a roofed, shop-like arrangement in the middle, and shouted in doleful tones: "Wo-omen, here's merchandise! Wo-omen, here's merchandise!"

The merchandise consisted of small mirrors, cheap soap, rings, thread, kerchiefs, needles, cracknels—these in the covered shop. The open-body cart contained everything they gathered in: dead cats, eggs, heavy linen, crash, rags. But one day, after having thus travelled about for the space of several years, the brothers came near cutting each other's throats—in a dispute over the division of the profits, rumour averred—and separated to avoid a catastrophe. Kuzma hired himself to a drover. Tikhon took over a small post-ing-house on the metalled highway of Vorgol, five versts¹ from Durnovka, and opened a dram-shop and a tiny "popular" shop.—"I deal in small wears tea shugar tubako sigars and so furth."

¹ A verst is two-thirds of a mile.—TRANS.

II

BY the time Tikhon Ilitch was about forty years of age his beard resembled silver with patterns of black enamel. But he was handsome and tall, with a fine figure, as before. He was austere and swarthy of face, slightly pock-marked, with broad, lean shoulders; authoritative and abrupt of speech, quick and supple in his movements. Only—his eyebrows had begun to come closer together and his eyes to flash more frequently and more sharply than before. Business demanded it!

Indefatigably he followed up the rural police on those dull autumnal days when taxes are collected and forced sale follows forced sale. Unweariedly he bought standing grain on the stalk from the landed proprietors and took land from them and from the peasants, in small parcels, not scorning even half a meadow. He lived for a long time with his dumb cook—"A dumb woman can't betray anything with her chatter!"—and had by her one child, whom she overlay and crushed in her sleep, after which he married an elderly waiting-maid of old Princess Schakhovoy. And on marrying and receiving the dowry he "finished off" the last scion of the impoverished Durnovo family, a fat, affable young nobleman, bald at twenty-five, but possessed of a magnificent chestnut beard. And the peasants fairly grunted with pride when Tikhon took possession of the

Durnovo estate—for almost the whole of Durnovka consisted of Krasoffs!

They *sb*-ed and *ob*-ed, also, over the way in which he had cunningly contrived not to ruin himself. He bargained and bought, went to the estate almost every day, kept watch with the eye of a vulture over every hand's breadth of the land. They uttered admiring exclamations and said: "Yes, there's nothing to be done with us devils by kindness, you know! There's a master for you! You couldn't have one more just!"

And Tikhon Ilitch dealt with them in the same spirit. When he was in an amiable mood he read them their lesson thus: "It's all right to live—but not to squander. I shall pluck you if I get the chance! I shall bring you back. But I shall be just. I'm a Russian man, brother." When in an evil mood, he would say curtly, with eyes blazing: "Pigs! There is not a juster man in the world than I am!" "Pigs, all right—but that's not me," the peasant would think, averting his eyes from that gaze. And he would mumble submissively: "Oh, Lord, don't we know it?" "Yes, you know it, but you have forgotten. I don't want your property gratis, but bear this in mind: I won't give you a scrap of what's mine! There's that brother of mine: he's a rascal, a toper, but I would help him if he came and implored me. I call God as my witness that I would help him! But coddle him—! No, take note of that: I do no coddling. I'm no brainless Little Russian, brother!"

And Nastasya Petrovna, who walked like a duck, with her toes turned inward, and waddled, thanks to her

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incessant pregnancies which always ended up with dead girl-babies—Nastasya Petrovna, a yellow, puffy woman with scanty whitish-blond hair, would groan and back him up: “Okh, you are a simpleton, in my opinion! Why do you bother with him, with that stupid man? Is he a fit associate for you? You just knock some sense into him; ’twill do him no harm. Look at the way he’s straddling with his legs—as if he were a bo-khar of emir!”¹ She was “terribly fond” of pigs and fowls, and Tikhon Ilitch began to fatten sucking pigs, turkey chicks, hens, and geese. But his ruling passion was amassing grain. In autumn, alongside his house, which stood with one side turned toward the highway and the other toward the posting-station, the creaking of wheels arose in a groan; the wagon trains turned in from above and below. And in the farmyard horse-traders, peddlers, chicken-vendors, cracknel peddlers, scythe-vendors, and pilgrims passed the night. Every moment a pulley was squeaking—now on the door of the dram-shop, where Nastasya Petrovna bustled about; now on the approach to the shop, a dark, dirty place, reeking of soap, herrings, rank tobacco, ginger-bread flavoured with peppermint, horse-collars, and kerosene. And incessantly there rang out in the dram-shop:

“U-ukh! Your vodka is strong, Petrovna! It has knocked me in the head, devil take it!”

“’Twill make your mouth water, my dear man!”

¹ This muddling of “Emir of Bukhara” is only one example of the ignorant combinations and locutions used by the peasant characters.—TRANS.

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"Is there snuff in your vodka?"

"Well, now, you fool yourself!"

In the shop the crowd was even more dense.

"Ilitch, weigh me out a pound of ham."

"This year, brother, I'm so well stocked with ham—
so well stocked, thank God!"

"What's the price?"

"'Tis cheap!"

"Hey, proprietor, have you good tar?"

"Better tar than your grandfather had at his wedding, my good man!"¹

"What's the price?"

And it seemed as if, at the Krasoffs', there were never any other conversation than that about the prices of things: What's the price of ham, what's the price of boards, what's the price of groats, what's the price of tar?

III

THE abandonment of his hope of having children and the closing of the dram-shops by the government were great events. Tikhon visibly aged when there no longer remained any doubt that he was not to become a father. At first he jested about it: "No sir, I'll get my way. Without children a man is not a man. He's only so-so—a sort of spot

¹A play on words, "tar" in the second sentence meaning "liquor."—TRANS.

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missed in the sowing." But later on he was assailed by terror. What did it mean? one overlay her child, the other bore only dead children.

And the period of Nastasya Petrovna's last pregnancy had been a difficult time. Tikhon Ilitch suffered and raged: Nastasya Petrovna prayed in secret, wept in secret, and was a pitiful sight when, of a night by the light of the shrine-lamp, she slipped out of bed, assuming that her husband was asleep, and began with difficulty to kneel down, touch her brow to the floor as she whispered her prayers, gaze with anguish at the holy pictures, and rise from her knees painfully, like an old woman. Hitherto, before going to bed, she had donned slippers and dressing-gown, said her prayers indifferently, and, as she prayed, taken pleasure in running over the list of her acquaintances and abusing them. Now there stood before the holy picture a simple peasant woman in a short cotton petticoat, white woolen stockings, and a chemise which did not cover her neck and arms, fat like those of an old person.

Tikhon Ilitch had never, from his childhood, liked shrine-lamps, although he had never been willing to confess it, even to himself; nor did he like their uncertain churchly light. All his life there had remained impressed upon his mind that November night when, in the tiny lop-sided hut in the Black Suburb, a shrine-lamp had also burned, peaceful and sweetly-sad, the shadows of its chains barely moving, while everything around was deathly silent; and on the bench below the holy pictures his father lay motionless with eyes closed, his sharp nose raised, his big purplish-waxen hands

crossed on his breast; while by his side, just beyond the tiny window curtained with its red rag, the conscripts marched past with wildly mournful songs and shouts, their accordions squealing discordantly.—Now the shrine-lamp burned uninterruptedly, and Tikhon Ilitch felt as if Nastasya Petrovna were carrying on some sort of secret affair with uncanny powers.

A number of book-hawkers from the Vladimir government halted by the posting-house to bait their horses—with the result that there made its appearance in the house a “New Complete Oracle and Magician, which foretells the future in answer to questions; with Supplement setting forth the easiest methods of telling fortunes by cards, beans, and coffee.” And of an evening Nastasya Petrovna would put on her spectacles, mould a little ball of wax, and set to rolling it over the circles of the “Oracle.” And Tikhon Ilitch would look on, with sidelong glances. But all the answers turned out to be either insulting, menacing, or senseless.

“Does my husband love me?” Nastasya Petrovna would inquire.

And the “Oracle” replied: “He loves you as a dog loves a stick.”

“How many children shall I have?”

“You are fated to die: the field must be cleared of weeds.”

Then Tikhon Ilitch would say: “Give it here. I’ll have a try.” And he would propound the question: “Ought I to start a law-suit with a person whose name I won’t mention?”

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But he, likewise, got nonsense for an answer: "Count the teeth in your mouth."

One day Tikhon Ilitch, when he glanced into the kitchen, saw his wife beside the cradle in which lay the cook's baby. A speckled chicken which was wandering along the window ledge, pecking and catching flies, tapped the glass with its beak; but she sat there on the sleeping-board and, while she rocked the cradle, sang in a pitiful quaver:

"Where lieth my little child?
Where is his tiny bed?
He is in the lofty chamber,
In the painted cradle gay.

Let no one come there to us,
Or knock at the chamber door!
He hath fallen asleep, he resteth
Beneath the canopy dark,
Covered with flowered silk. . . ."

And Tikhon Ilitch's face underwent such a change at that moment that Nastasya Petrovna, as she glanced at him, experienced no confusion, felt no fear, but only fell a-weeping and, brushing away her tears, said softly: "Take me away, for Christ's dear sake, to the Holy Man."

And Tikhon Ilitch took her to Zadonsk. But as he went he was thinking in his heart that God would certainly chastise him because, in the bustle and cares of life, he went to church only for the service on Easter Day, and otherwise lived as if he were a Tatar. Sacrilegious thoughts also wormed their way into his head.

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He kept comparing himself to the parents of the Saints, who likewise had long remained childless. This was not clever—but he had long since come to perceive that there dwelt within him some one who was more stupid than himself. Before his departure he had received a letter from Mount Athos: “Most God-loving Benefactor, Tikhon Ilitch! Peace be unto you, and salvation, the blessing of the Lord and the honourable Protection of the All-Sung Mother of God, from her earthly portion, the holy Mount Athos! I have had the happiness of hearing about your good works, and that with love you apportion your mite for the building and adornment of God’s temples and monastic cells. With the years my hovel has reached such a dilapidated condition. . . .” And Tikhon Ilitch sent a ten-ruble bank-note to be used for repairing the hovel. The time was long past when he had believed, with ingenuous pride, that rumours concerning him had actually reached as far as Mount Athos, and he knew well enough that far too many hovels on Mount Athos had become dilapidated. Nevertheless, he sent the money.

But even that proved of no avail.

The government monopoly of the liquor trade acted as salt on a raw wound. When the hope of children failed him utterly, the thought occurred ever more frequently to Tikhon Ilitch: “What’s the object of all this convict hard labour, anyway? devil take it!” And his hands began to tremble with rage, his brows to contract and arch themselves, his upper lip to quiver—

especially when he uttered the phrase which was incessantly in his mouth: "Bear in mind—!" He continued, as before, to affect youthfulness—wore dandy-fied soft boots and an embroidered shirt fastened at one side, Russian style, under a double-breasted short coat. But his beard grew ever whiter, more sparse, more tangled.

And that summer, as if with malicious intent, turned out to be hot and dry. The rye was absolutely ruined. It became a pleasure to whine to the buyers. "I'm closing down my business—shutting up shop!" Tikhon Ilitch said with satisfaction, referring to his liquor trade. He enunciated every word clearly. "The Minister has a fancy for going into trade on his own account, to be sure!"

"Okh, just look at you!" groaned Nastasya Petrovna. "You're calling down bad luck. You'll be chased off to a place so far that even the crows don't drag their bones there!"

"Don't you worry, ma'am," Tikhon Ilitch interrupted her brusquely, with a frown. "No, ma'am! You can't gag every mouth with a kerchief!" And again, enunciating even more sharply, he addressed the customer: "And the rye, sir, is a joy to behold! Bear that in mind—a joy to everybody! By night, sir, if you'll believe it—by night, sir, even then it can be seen. You step out on the threshold and gaze at the fields by the light of the moon: it's as sparse as the hair on a bald head. You go out and stare: the fields are shining-naked!"

IV

DURING the Fast of St. Peter Tikhon Ilitch spent four days in the town at the Fair and got still more out of tune, thanks to his worries, the heat, and sleepless nights. Ordinarily he set out for the Fair with great gusto. At twilight the carts were greased and heaped with hay. Behind one, that in which the manager of his farm rode, were hitched the horses or cows destined for sale; in the other, in which the master himself was to ride, were placed cushions and a peasant overcoat. Making a late start, they journeyed squeaking all night long until daybreak. First of all they indulged in friendly discussion and smoking. The men told each other frightful old tales of merchants murdered on the road and at halting places for the night. Then Tikhon Ilitch disposed himself for sleep; and it was extremely pleasant to hear through his dreams the voices of those whom they met, to feel the vigorous swaying of the cart, as if it were constantly descending a hill, and his cheeks slipping deep into a pillow while his cap fell off and the night chill cooled his head. It was agreeable, too, to wake up before sunrise in the rosy, dewy morning, in the midst of the dull-green grain, and to see, far away in the blue lowlands, the town shining as a cheerful white spot, and the gleam of its churches; to yawn mightily, cross himself at the faint sound of the bells, and take

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the reins from the hands of the half-slumbering old man, who sat relaxed like a child in the morning chill and was as white as chalk in the light of the dawn.

But on this occasion Tikhon Ilitch sent off the carts with his head man and drove himself in a runabout. The night was warm and bright; there was a rosy tone in the moonlight. He drove fast, but became extremely weary. The lights on the Fair buildings, the jail and the hospital, were visible from the steppe at a distance of ten versts as one approached the town, and it seemed as if one would never reach them—those distant, sleepy lights. And at the posting-house on the Ststchepnoy Square it was so hot, and the fleas bit so viciously, and voices rang out so frequently at the entrance-gate, and the carts rattled so as they drove into the stone-paved courtyard, and the cocks began to screech and the pigeons to start their rumbling coo so early, and the sky to grow white beyond the open windows, that he never closed an eye. He slept little the second night, too, which he tried to pass at the Fair in his cart. The horses neighed, lights blazed in the stalls, people walked and talked all around him; and at dawn, when his eyelids were fairly sticking together with sleep, the bells on the jail and the hospital began to ring. And right over his head the horrible bellow of a cow boomed out. "Might as well be a criminal condemned to hard labour in prison!" was a thought which recurred incessantly during those days and nights. "Struggling—getting all snarled up—and going to destruction over trifles, absurdities!"

The Fair, scattered over the town pasture land for

a whole verst, was, as usual, noisy and muddled. Brooms, scythes, wooden tubs with handles, shovels, wheels lay about in heaps. A dull, discordant roar hung over it all—the neighing of horses, the shrilling of children’s whistles, the polkas and marches thundered out by the orchestrions of the merry-go-rounds. An idle, chattering throng of peasant men and women surged about in waves from morning till night on the dusty, dung-strewn alleyways among the carts and stalls, the horses and the cows, the amusement sheds and the eating booths, whence were wafted fetid odours of frying grease. As always, there was a huge throng of horse-dealers, who injected a terrible irritability into all discussion and barter. Blind men and paupers, beggars, cripples on crutches and in carts, filed past in endless bands, chanting their snuffing ballads. The troika team of the rural police chief moved slowly through the crowd, its bells jingling, restrained by a coachman in a sleeveless velveteen coat and a hat adorned with peacock feathers.

Tikhon Ilitch had many customers. But nothing beyond empty chaffer resulted. Gipsies came, blue-black of face; Jews from the south-west, grey of countenance, red-haired, covered with dust, in long, wide coats of canvas and boots down at the heel; sun-browned members of the gentry class of small estates, in sleeveless peasant over-jackets and caps; the commissary of rural police and the village policeman; the wealthy merchant Safonoff, an old man wearing a sort of overcoat affected by the lower classes, fat, clean-shaven, and smoking a cigar. The handsome hussar officer, Prince

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Bakhtin, came also, accompanied by his wife in an English walking suit, and Khvostoff, the decrepit hero of the Sevastopol campaign, tall, bony, with large features and a dark, wrinkled face, wearing a long uniform coat, sagging trousers, broad-toed boots, and a big uniform cap with a yellow band beneath which his dyed locks, of a dead dark-brown shade, were combed forward on his temples.

All these people gave themselves the air of being expert judges, talked fluently about colours, paces, discoursed about the horses they owned. The petty landed gentry lied and boasted. Bakhtin did not condescend to speak to Tikhon Ilitch, although the latter rose respectfully at his approach and said: "'Tis a suitable horse for Your Illustrious Highness, sir." Bakhtin merely fell back a pace as he inspected the horse, smiled gravely into his moustache, which he wore with side-supplements, and exchanged brief suggestions with his wife as he wriggled his leg in his cherry-coloured cavalry breeches.

But Khvostoff, shuffling up to the horse and casting a sidelong fiery glance at it, came to a halt in such a posture that it seemed as if he were on the point of falling down, elevated his crutch, and for the tenth time demanded in a dull, absolutely expressionless voice: "How much do you ask for him?"

And Tikhon Ilitch was obliged to answer them all. Out of sheer boredom he bought a little book entitled "Oi, Schmul and Rivke: Collection of fashionable farces, puns, and stories, from the wanderings of our worthy Hebrews"—and, as he sat in his cart, he dipped

into it frequently. But no sooner did he begin to read: "Iveryboady knows, zhentelmen, zat vee, ze Zhews, iss ferightfully foand of beezness," than some one hailed him. And Tikhon Ilitch raised his eyes and answered, although with an effort and with clenched jaws.

He grew extremely thin, sunburned, yet pallid, flew into bad tempers, and was conscious of being bored to death and of feeling weak all over. He got his stomach so badly out of order that he had cramps. He was compelled to resort to the hospital; and there he waited two hours for his turn, seated in a resounding corridor, inhaling the repulsive odour of carbolic acid and feeling as if he were not Tikhon Ilitch and a person of consequence, but rather as if he were waiting humbly in the ante-room of his master or of some official. And when the doctor—who resembled a deacon, a red-faced, bright-eyed man in a bob-tailed coat, redolent of soap, with a sniff—applied his cold ear to his chest, he made haste to say that his belly-ache was almost gone, and did not refuse a dose of castor oil simply because he was too timid to do so. When he returned to the Fair ground he gulped down a glass of vodka flavoured with pepper and salt, and began once more to eat sausage, sour black rye bread made of second-rate flour, and to drink tea, raw vodka, and sour cabbage soup—and he was still unable to quench his thirst. His acquaintances advised him to refresh himself with beer, and he went for some. The lame kvas-dealer shouted: "Here's your fine kvas, the sort that makes your nose sting! A kopek a glass—prime lemonade!" And Tikhon Ilitch bade the kvas-peddler halt. "He-ere's

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your ices!" chanted in a tenor voice a bald, perspiring vendor, a paunch-bellied old man in a red shirt. And Tikhon Ilitch ate, with the little bone spoon, ices which were hardly more than snow, and which made his head ache cruelly.

Dusty, ground to powder by feet, wheels, and hoofs, littered and covered with dung, the pasture was already being deserted—the Fair was dispersing. But Tikhon Ilitch, as if with deliberate intent to spite some one or other, persisted in keeping his unsold horses there in the heat, and sat on and on in his cart. It seemed as if he were overwhelmed not so much by illness as by the spectacle of the great poverty, the vast wretchedness which, from time immemorial, had reigned over this town and its whole county. Lord God, what a country! Black-loam soil over three feet deep! But—what of that? Never did five years pass without a famine. The town was famous throughout all Russia as a grain mart—but not more than a hundred persons in the whole town ate their fill of the grain. And the Fair? Beggars, idiots, blind men, cripples—a whole regiment of them—and such monstrosities as it made one frightened and sick at the stomach to behold!

V

ON a hot, sunny morning Tikhon Ilitch started homeward through the big Old Town. First he drove through the town and the bazaar, past the cathedral, across the shallow little river,

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which reeked with the sourly fetid odour of the tan-yards, and beyond the river, up the hill, through the Black Suburb. In the bazaar he and his brother had once worked in Matorin's shop. Now every one in the bazaar bowed low before him. In the Black Suburb his childhood had been passed. There, half-way up the hill, among the mud huts embedded in the ground, with their black and decaying roofs, in the midst of dung which lay drying in the sun for use as fuel, amid litter, ashes, and rags, it had been his great delight to race, with shrill shouting and whistling, after the poverty-stricken teacher of the county school—a malicious, depraved old man, long since expelled from his post, who wore felt boots summer and winter, under-drawers, and a short overcoat with a beaver collar which was peeling off. He had been known to the town by the peculiar nickname of “the Dog's Pistol.”

Not a trace was now left of that mud hut in which Tikhon Ilitch had been born and had grown up. On its site stood a small new house of planking, with a rusty sign over the entrance: “Ecclesiastical Tailor Soboleff.” Everything else in the Suburb was precisely as it had always been—pigs and hens in the narrow alleys; tall poles at the gateways, and on each pole a ram's horn; the big pallid faces of the lace-makers peering forth from behind the pots of flowers in the tiny windows; bare-legged little urchins with one suspender over a shoulder, launching a paper snake with a tail of bast fibre; quiet flaxen-haired little

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girls engaged in their favourite play, burying a doll, beside the mound of earth encircling the house.

On the plain at the crest of the hill, he crossed himself before the cemetery, behind the fence of which, among the trees, was the grave which had once been such a source of terror to him—that of the rich miser Zykoff, which had caved in at the very moment when they were filling it. And, after a moment's reflection, he turned the horse in at the gate of the cemetery.

By the side of that large white gate had been wont to sit uninterruptedly, jingling a little bell to which were attached a handle and a small bag, a squint-eyed monk garbed in a black cassock and boots red with age—an extremely powerful, shaggy, and fierce fellow, to judge by appearances; a drunkard, with a remarkable command of abusive language. No monk was there now. In his place sat an old woman, busy knitting a stocking. She looked like the ancient crone of a fairy tale, with spectacles, a beak, and sunken lips. She was one of the widows who lived in the asylum by the cemetery.

“'Morning, my good woman!” Tikhon Ilitch called out pleasantly, as he hitched his horse to a post near the gate. “Can you look after my horse?”

The old woman rose to her feet, made a deep reverence, and mumbled: “Yes, batiushka.”¹

¹“Matushka” and “batiushka” (literally, “Little Mother” and “Little Father”) are the characteristic Russian formula for addressing elderly strangers, regardless of class distinctions.—TRANS.

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Tikhon Ilitch removed his cap, crossed himself once more, rolling his eyes upward as he did so before the holy picture of the Assumption of the Mother of God over the gateway, and added: "Are there many of you nowadays?"

"Twelve old women in all, batiushka."

"Well, and do you squabble often?"

"Yes, often, batiushka."

Tikhon Ilitch walked at a leisurely pace among the trees and the crosses along the alley leading to the ancient wooden church, once painted in ochre. During the Fair he had had his hair cut close and his beard trimmed and shortened, and he was looking much younger. His leanness and sunburn also contributed to the youthfulness of his appearance. The delicate skin shone white on the recently clipped triangles on his temples. The memories of his childhood and youth made him younger; so did his new peaked canvas cap. His face was thoughtful. He glanced from side to side. How brief, how devoid of meaning, was life! And what peace, what repose, was round about, in that sunny stillness within the enclosure of the ancient churchyard! A hot breeze drifted across the crests of the bright trees which pierced the cloudless sky, their foliage made scanty before its season by the torrid heat, their light, transparent shadows cast in waves athwart the stones and monuments. And when it died away the sun once more heated up the flowers and the grass; birds warbled sweetly in the languor; sumptuously-hued butterflies sank motionless upon the hot paths. On one cross Tikhon Ilitch read:

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“What terrible quit-rents
Doth Death collect from men!”

But there was nothing awful about the spot. He strolled on, even noticing with considerable satisfaction that the cemetery was growing; that many new and excellent mausoleums had made their appearance among those ancient stones in the shapes of coffins on legs, heavy cast-iron plates, and huge rough crosses, already in process of decay, which now filled it. “Died in the year 1819, on November 7, at five o’clock in the morning”—it was painful to read such inscriptions: death was repulsive at dawn of a stormy autumnal day, in that old county town! But alongside it a marble angel gleamed white through the trees, as he stood there with eyes fixed upon the blue sky; and beneath it, on the mirror-smooth black granite, were cut in gold letters the words: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” On the iron monument of some Collegiate Assessor, tinted in rainbow hues by foul weather and the hand of time, one could decipher the verses:

“His Tsar he honourably served,
His neighbour cordially loved,
And was revered of men.”

And these verses struck Tikhon Ilitch as hypocritical. But in this place even a lie was touching. For—where is truth? Yonder in the bushes lies a human jawbone, neglected, looking as if it were made of dirty wax—all that remains of a man. But is it all?

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Flowers, ribbons, crosses, coffins, and bones in the earth decay—all is death and corruption. But Tikhon Ilitch walked on further and read: “Thus it is in the resurrection of the dead; it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.”—“Our darling son, thy memory will never die in our hearts to all eternity!”

His brow furrowed even more severely; he removed his cap and made the sign of the cross. He was pale, and still weak from his illness. He recalled his childhood—his youth—Kuzma. He walked to the far corner of the cemetery where all his relatives were buried—father, mother, the sister who had died when a little girl. The inscriptions spoke touchingly and peacefully of rest, repose; of tenderness towards fathers, mothers, husbands and wives; of a love which, apparently, does not exist and never will exist on this earth; of that devotion to one another and submission to God, that fervent faith in a future life, that meeting once more in another and blessed land, in which one believes only here; and of that equality which death alone confers—of those moments when folk bestow the last kiss upon the lips of the dead beggar as on a brother's, compare him with kings and prelates, say over him the loftiest and most solemn words.

And there in a distant corner of the enclosure, among bushes of elder which dozed in the parching heat—there where formerly had been graves, but now were only mounds and hollows, overgrown with grass and white flowers—Tikhon Ilitch saw a fresh little grave, the grave of a child, and on the cross a couplet:

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"Softly, leaves: do not rustle,
Do not wake my Kostya dear."

And as he recalled his own child, crushed in its sleep by the dumb cook, he began to blink back the welling tears.

VI

NO one ever drove on the highway which ran past the cemetery and lost itself among the rolling fields. Now and then some light-footed tramp straggled along it—some young fellow in a faded pink shirt and drawers of parti-coloured patches. But people drove on the country road alongside. Along that country road drove Tikhon Ilitch also. His first encounter was with a dilapidated public carriage which approached at racing speed—provincial cabmen drive wildly!—and in which sat a huntsman, an official of the bank. At his feet lay a spotted setter dog; on his knees rested a gun in its cover; his legs were encased in tall wading-boots, though there had never been any marshes in the county. Next, diving across the dusty hummocks, came a young postman mounted on a bicycle of an ancient model, with an enormous front wheel and a tiny rear one. He frightened the horse, and Tikhon Ilitch gritted his teeth with rage; the rascal ought to be degraded to the ranks of the

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workingmen! The mid-day sun scorched; a hot breeze was blowing; the cloudless sky became slate-coloured. And, as he meditated upon the brevity and senselessness of life, Tikhon Ilitch turned away with ever-increasing irritation from the dust which whirled along the road, and with ever-increasing anxiety cast sidelong glances at the spindling, prematurely drying stalks of the grain.

Throngs of pilgrims armed with long staffs, tortured by fatigue and the heat, tramped on at a peaceful gait. They made low, meek reverences to Tikhon Ilitch; but their obeisances struck him as shams. "Those fellows meek! I'll bet they fight among themselves like cats and dogs at their halting-places!" he muttered. Drunken peasants returning from the Fair—red-headed, black-haired, flaxen-haired, but all alike hideous and tattered, and with about ten crowded into each cart—raised clouds of dust as they whipped up their wretched little horses. As he overtook their rattling carts Tikhon Ilitch shook his head. "Ugh, you roving beggars, may the devil fly away with you."

One of them, in a print shirt torn to ribbons, lay fast asleep and was bumped about like a corpse, stretched supine with his head thrown back, his beard blood-stained, his nose swollen and clotted with dried blood. Another stumbled as he ran after his cap, which had been blown off by the wind; and Tikhon Ilitch, with malicious delight, lashed him with his whip. Then came a cart filled with sieves, shovels, and peasant women. They sat with their backs to the horses, rattling and bumping about. One had a new child's

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cap on her head, worn wrong side before; another was singing with her mouth full of bread; a third flourished her arms and, laughing, shouted after Tikhon Ilitch: "Hey there, uncle, you've lost your linch-pin!" And Tikhon Ilitch reined in his horse, let them catch up with him, and lashed this woman, too, with his whip.

Beyond the toll-gate, where the highway turned off to one side, and where the rattling peasant carts fell to the rear, and silence, the wide space and sultriness of the steppe reigned, he felt once more that, in spite of everything, the chief item in the world was Business. He thought with supreme scorn of the landed proprietors, putting on swagger at the Fair—they, with their wretched troika teams! Ekh, and the poverty on every side! The peasants were utterly ruined, with not a scrap left on their impoverished little farms scattered about the country. A master was needed here—a master!

"But you're not the right master, my good fellow!" he announced to himself with a spiteful grin. "You're a poor, crazy, landless stick yourself!"

Midway of his journey lay Rovnoe, a large village in which the inhabitants were freeholders. A scorching breeze coursed through the deserted streets and across the heat-singed bushes. Fowls were ruffling up their feathers and burying themselves in the ashes at the thresholds. A church of crude hue reared itself starkly, harshly on the bare common. Beyond the church a tiny clayey pond gleamed in the sunlight below a dam of manure, a sheet of thick yellow water in

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which stood a herd of cows, incessantly discharging according to the demands of nature; and there a naked peasant was soaping his head. He, too, had waded into the water up to his waist; on his breast glistened his brass baptismal cross; his neck and face were black with sunburn, his body strikingly white, pallid.

“Unbridle my horse for me,” said Tikhon Ilitch, driving into the pond, which reeked of the cattle.

The peasant tossed his fragment of blue-marbled soap on the shore, black with cow-dung, and, his head all grey, with a modest gesture as though to cover himself, he made haste to comply with the command. The mare bent greedily to the water, but it was so warm and repulsive that she raised her muzzle and turned away. Whistling to her, Tikhon Ilitch waved his cap:

“Well, nice water you have! Do you drink it?”

“Well, then, and is yours sugar-water, I wonder?” retorted the peasant, amiably and gaily. “We’ve been drinking it these thousand years! But what’s water? —’tis bread we’re lacking.”

And Tikhon Ilitch was forced to hold his tongue; for in Durnovka the water was no better, and there was no bread there either. What was more, there would be none.

Beyond Rovnoe the road ran again through fields of rye—but what fields! The grain was spindling, weak, almost wholly lacking in ears, and smothered in corn-flowers. And near Vyselki, not far from Durnovka, clouds of rooks perched on the gnarled, hollow willow-trees with their silvery beaks wide open.

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Nothing was left of Vyselki that day save its name—the rest was only black skeletons of cottages in the midst of rubbish! The rubbish was smoking, with a milky-bluish emanation; there was a rank odour of burning. And the thought of a conflagration from lightning transfixed Tikhon Ilitch. “Calamity!” he said to himself, turning pale. Nothing he owned was insured: everything might be reduced to ashes in an hour.

VII

FROM that Fast of St. Peter, that memorable trip to the Fair, Tikhon Ilitch began to drink frequently—not to the point of downright drunkenness, but to the stage at which his face became passably red. This did not, however, interfere in the slightest degree with his business, and, according to his own account, it did not interfere with his health. “Vodka polishes the blood,” he was wont to remark; and, truth to tell, to all appearances he became more robust than ever. Not infrequently now he called his life that of a galley-slave—the hangman’s noose—a gilded cage. But he strode along his pathway with ever-increasing confidence, paying no attention to the condition of the weather or the road. Commonplace, uneventful days ruled supreme in his house, and several years passed in such monotonous fashion that everything merged together into one long working-day. But certain new, vast events which no one had

looked for came to pass—the war with Japan and the revolution.

The rumours concerning the war began, of course, with bragging. “The kazaks will soon flay his yellow skin off him, brother!” But it smouldered so very short a time, this pale image of former boasts! A different sort of talk speedily made itself heard.

“We have more land than we can manage!” said Tikhon Ilitch, in the stern tone of an expert—probably for the first time in the whole course of his life not referring to his own land in Durnovka, but to the whole expanse of Russia. “’Tis not war, sir, but downright madness!”

Another thing made itself felt, the sort of thing which has prevailed from time immemorial—the inclination to take the winning side. And the news about the frightful defeats of the Russian army excited his enthusiasm: “Ukh, that’s fine. Curse them, the brutes!” He waxed enthusiastic also over the conquests of the revolution, over the assassinations: “That Minister got a smashing blow!” said Tikhon Ilitch occasionally, in the fire of his ecstasy. “He got such a good one that not even his ashes were left!”

But his uneasiness increased, too. As soon as any discussion connected with the land came up, his wrath awoke. “’Tis all the work of the Jews! Of the Jews, and of those frowzy long-haired fellows, the students!” What irritated Tikhon Ilitch worst of all was, that the son of the deacon in Ulianovka, a student in the Theological Seminary who was hanging around without work and living on his father, called himself a Social-

Democrat. And the whole situation was incomprehensible. Everybody was talking about the revolution, the Revolution, while round about everything was going on the same as ever, in the ordinary everyday fashion: the sun shone, the rye blossomed in the fields, the carts wended their way to the station. The populace were incomprehensible in their taciturnity, in the evasiveness of their talk.

“They’re an underhand lot, the populace! They fairly scare one with their slyness!” said Tikhon Ilitch. And, forgetting the Jews, he added: “Let us assume that not all that music is craft. Changing the government and evening up the shares of land—why, an infant could understand that, sir. And, naturally, ’tis perfectly clear to whom they will pay court—that populace, sir. But, of course, they hold their tongues. And, of course, we must watch, and try to meet their humour, so that they may go on holding their tongues. We must put a spoke in their wheel! If you don’t, look out for yourself: they’ll scent success, they’ll get wind of the fact that they’ve got the breeching under their tail—and they’ll smash things to smithereens, sir!”

When he read or heard that land was to be taken from only such as possessed more than five hundred desyatini¹ he himself became an “agitator.” He even entered into disputes with the Durnovka people. This is the sort of thing that would happen:—

A peasant stood alongside Tikhon Ilitch’s shop; the

¹A desyatina is a unit of land measurement equalling 2.07 acres.—TRANS.

man had bought vodka at the railway station, dried salt fish and cracknels at the shop, and had doffed his cap; but he prolonged his enjoyment, and said:

“No, Tikhon Ilitch, ’tis no use your explaining. It can be taken, at a just price. But not the way you say—that’s no good.”

An odour arose from the pine boards piled up near the granary, opposite the yard. The dried fish and the linden bast on which the cracknels were strung had an irritating smell. The hot locomotive of the freight-train could be heard hissing and getting up steam beyond the trees, behind the buildings of the railway station. Tikhon Ilitch stood bare-headed beside his shop, screwing up his eyes and smiling sily. Smilingly he made reply:

“Bosh! But what if he is not a master, but a tramp?”

“Who? The noble owner, you mean?”

“No—a low-born man.”

“Well, that’s a different matter. ’Tis no sin to take it from such a man, with all his innards to boot!”

“Well now, that’s exactly the point!”

But another rumour reached them: the land would be taken from those who owned less than five hundred desyatini! And immediately his soul was assailed by preoccupation, suspicion, irritability. Everything that was done in the house began to seem abhorrent.

Egorika, the assistant, brought flour-sacks out of the shop and began to shake them. And the man’s head reminded him of the head of the town fool, “Duck-Headed Matty.” The crown of his head ran up to a

point, his hair was harsh and thick—"Now, why is it that fools have such thick hair?"—his forehead was sunken, his face resembled an oblique egg, he had protruding eyes, and his eyelids, with their calf-like lashes, seemed drawn tightly over them; it looked as if there were not enough skin—if he were to close his eyes, his mouth would fly open of necessity, and if he closed his mouth, he would be compelled to open his eyes very wide. And Tikhon Ilitch shouted spitefully: "Babbler! Blockhead! What are you shaking your head at me for?"

The cook brought out a smallish box, opened it, placed it upside down on the ground, and began to thump the bottom with her fist. And, understanding what that meant, Tikhon Ilitch slowly shook his head: "Akh, you housewife, curse you! You're knocking out the cockroaches?"

"There's a regular cloud of them in there!" replied the cook gaily. "When I peeped in—Lord, what a sight!"

And, gritting his teeth, Tikhon Ilitch walked out to the highway and gazed long at the rolling plain, in the direction of Durnovka.

VIII

HIS living-rooms, the kitchen, the shop, and the granary, where formerly his liquor-trade had been carried on, constituted a single mass under one iron roof. On three sides the straw-thatched sheds of the cattle-yard were closely connected with it, and a pleasing quadrangle was thus obtained. The porch and all the windows faced the south. But the view was cut off by the grain-sheds, which stood opposite the windows and across the road. To the right was the railway station, to the left the highway. Beyond the highway was a small grove of birches. And when Tikhon Ilitch felt out of sorts, he went out on the highway. It ran southward in a white winding ribbon from hillock to hillock, ever following the fields in their declivities and rising again toward the horizon from the far-away watch-tower, where the railway, coming from the south-east, intersected it. And if any one of the Durnovka peasants chanced to be driving to Ulianovka—one of the more energetic and clever, that is, such as Yakoff, whom every one called Yakoff Mikititch¹ because he was greedy, and held

¹ When a man or woman begins to get on in the world his admiring neighbours signalize their appreciation by adding to the Christian name the patronymic, as if the clever one were of gentle (noble) birth. In this story, Tikhon soon receives the public acknowledgment of success, having begun as plain "Tikhon." Peasant-fashion, "Nikititch" was transmuted into "Mikititch."—TRANS.

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fast to his little store of grain a second year, and owned three excellent horses—Tikhon Ilitch stopped him.

“You might buy yourself a cheap little cap with a visor, at least!” he shouted to Yakoff, with a grin.

Yakoff, in a peakless cap, hemp-crash shirt, and trousers of heavy striped linen, was sitting barefoot on the side-rail of his springless cart.

“’Morning, Tikhon Ilitch,” he said, staidly.

“’Morning! I tell you, ’tis time you sacrificed your round cap for a jackdaw’s nest!”

Yakoff, grinning shrewdly earthwards, shook his head.

“That—how should it be expressed?—would not be a bad idea. But, you see, my capital, so to speak, will not permit.”

“Oh, stop your babbling. We know all about you Kazan orphans! ¹ You’ve married off your girl, and got a wife for your lad, and you have plenty of money. What more is there left for you to want from the Lord God?”

This flattered Yakoff, but he became more uncommunicative than ever. “O, Lord!” he muttered, with a sigh, in a sort of chuckling tone. “Money—I don’t know the sight of it, so to speak. And my lad—well, what of him? The boy’s no comfort to me. No comfort at all, to speak the plain truth! Young folks are no comfort nowadays!”

Yakoff, like many peasants, was extremely nervous,

¹ Sharpers who pretend to be the poverty-stricken descendants of the Tatar Princes who ruled Kazan before it was conquered, during the rein of Ivan the Terrible.—TRANS.

especially if his family or his affairs were in question. He was remarkably secretive, but on such occasions nervousness overpowered him, although only his disconnected, trembling speech betrayed the fact. So, in order to complete his disquiet, Tikhon Ilitch inquired sympathetically: "So he isn't a comfort? Tell me, pray, is it all because of the woman?"

Yakoff, looking about him, scratched his breast with his finger-nails. "Yes, because of the woman, his wife, his father may go break his back with work."

"Is she jealous?"

"Yes, she is. People set me down as the lover of my daughter-in-law."

"H'm!" ejaculated Tikhon Ilitch sympathetically, although he knew full well that there is never smoke without fire.

But Yakoff's eyes were already wandering: "She complained to her husband; how she complained! And, just think, she wanted to poison me. Sometimes, for example, a fellow catches cold and smokes a bit to relieve his chest. Well, she noticed that—and stuck a cigarette under my pillow. If I hadn't happened to see it—I'd have been done for!"

"What sort of a cigarette?"

"She had pounded up the bones of dead men, and stuffed it with that in place of tobacco."

"That boy of yours is a fool! He ought to teach her a lesson, in Russian style—the damned hussy!"

"What are you thinking of! He climbed on my breast, so to speak. And he wriggled like a serpent.

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I grabbed him by the head, but his head was shaved! I grabbed hold of his stomach. I hated to tear his shirt!"

Tikhon Ilitch shook his head, remained silent for a minute, and at last reached a decision: "Well, and how are things going with you over there? Are you still expecting the rebellion?"

But thereupon Yakoff's secrecy was restored instantaneously. He grinned and waved his hand. "Well!" he muttered volubly. "What would we do with a rebellion? Our folks are peaceable. Yes, a peaceable lot." And he tightened the reins, as though his horse were restive and would not stand.

"Then why did you have a village assembly last Sunday?" Tikhon Ilitch maliciously and abruptly interjected.

"A village assembly, did you say? The plague only knows! They started an awful row, so to speak."

"I know what the row was about! I know!"

"Well, what of it? I'm not making a secret of it. They gabbled, so to speak, said orders had been issued—orders had been issued—that no one was to work any more at the former price."

It was extremely mortifying to reflect that, because of wretched little Durnovka, affairs were escaping from his grasp. And there were only thirty homesteads altogether in that same Durnovka. And it was situated in a devil of a ravine: a broad gorge, with peasant cottages on one side, and on the other the tiny manor. And that manor exchanged glances with the cottages

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and from day to day expected some "order." Ekh, he'd like to apply a few kazaks with their whips to the situation!

IX

BUT the "order" came, at last. One Sunday a rumour began to circulate in Durnovka that the village assembly had worked out a plan for an attack upon the manor. With maliciously merry eyes, a feeling of unusual strength and daring, and a readiness to "break the horns of the devil himself," Tikhon Ilitch shouted orders to have the colt harnessed to the runabout, and within ten minutes he was driving him at high speed along the highway to Durnovka. The sun was setting, after a rainy day, in greyish-red clouds; the boles of the trees in the birch-grove were crimson; the country dirt-road, which stood out as a line of blackish-purple mud amid the fresh greenery, afforded heavy going. Rose-hued foam dripped from the haunches of the colt and from the breeching which jerked about on them. But he was not considering the colt. Slapping him stoutly with the reins, Tikhon Ilitch turned aside from the railway, drove to the right along the road across the fields, and, on coming within sight of Durnovka, was inclined to doubt, for a moment, the correctness of the rumours about a rebellion. Peaceful stillness lay all about, the larks were warbling

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their evening song in peace, the air was simply and peacefully impregnated with an odour of damp earth and with the fragrance of wild flowers. But all of a sudden his glance fell upon the fallow-field alongside the manor, thickly sown with sweet-clover. On that fallow-field, a drove of horses belonging to the peasants was grazing!

So it had begun. And, tugging at the reins, Tikhon Ilitch flew past the drove, past the barns overgrown with burdocks and nettles, past a low-growing cherry-orchard filled with sparrows, past the stables and the cottages of the domestics, and leaped with a bound into the farmyard.

Then something incongruous happened. There, in the twilight, in the middle of the field, sat Tikhon Ilitch in his runabout, overwhelmed with wrath, mortification, and terror. His heart beat violently, his hands trembled, his face burned, his hearing was as acute as that of a wild animal. There he sat, listening to the shouts which were wafted from Durnovka, and recalled how the crowd, which had seemed to him immense, on catching sight of him from afar had swarmed across the gorge to the manor and filled the yard with uproar and abusive words, had massed themselves on the porch and pinioned him against the door. All the weapon he had had was the whip in his hand. And he brandished it, now retreating, now hurling himself in desperation against the crowd. But the harness-maker, a vicious emaciated fellow with a sunken belly and a sharp nose, wearing tall boots and a lavender print shirt, advanced brandishing his stick even more

furiously. On behalf of the whole throng, he screeched that an order had been issued to "make an end of that outfit"—to make an end on one and the same day and hour throughout the entire government. The hired labourers from outside were to be chased out of all the estates and replaced with local labourers—at a ruble a day!—while the owners were to be expelled neck and crop, in any direction, so that they would never be seen again. And Tikhon Ilitch yelled still more frantically, in the endeavour to drown out the harness-maker: "A—a! So that's it! Have you been whetting yourself, you tramp, on the deacon's son? Have you lost your wits?"

But the harness-maker disputatiously caught his words on the fly: "Tramp yourself!" he yelled until he was hoarse, and his face was suffused with blood. "You're an old fool! Haven't I managed to get along all my life without the deacon's son? Don't I know how much land you own? How much is it, you skinflint? Two hundred desyatini? But I—damn it!—own, in all, about as much ground as is covered by your porch! And why? Who are you? Who are you, anyway, I ask you? What's your brew—any better sort than the rest of us?"

"Come to your senses, Mitka!" shouted Tikhon Ilitch helplessly at last; and, conscious that his wits were getting muddled, he made a dash through the crowd to his runabout. "I'll pay you off for this!"

But no one was afraid of his threats, and unanimous laughter, yells, and whistling followed him. Then he had made the round of the manor-estate, his heart

sinking within him, and listened. He drove out upon the road to the cross-roads and halted with his face to the darkening west, toward the railway station, holding himself in readiness to whip up his horse at any moment. It was very quiet, warm, damp, and dark. The land, which rose toward the horizon, where a faint reddish gleam still smouldered, was as black as the nethermost abyss.

“Sta-and still, you carrion!” Tikhon Ilitch whispered through set teeth to his restive horse. “Sta-and still!”

And, from afar, first shouts, then songs, were wafted to him. And among all the voices the voice of Vanka Krasny, who had already been twice in the mines of the Donetz Basin, was distinguishable above the rest. And then, suddenly, a dark-fiery column rose above the manor-house: the peasants had shaken off all the immature fruit in the orchard and set fire to the watchman’s hut. A pistol which the gardener, a petty burgher, had left behind him in the hut began to discharge itself, out of the fire.

It became known, later on, that in truth a remarkable thing had taken place. On one and the same day, the peasants had risen through almost the entire county. The inns in the town were crowded for a long time thereafter with land-owners who had sought protection of the authorities. Afterwards, Tikhon Ilitch recalled with shame that he also had sought it—with shame, because the whole uprising had been limited to the Durnovka people’s shouting for a while, doing a lot of damage, and then quieting down. The

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harness-maker began, before long, to present himself in the shop at Vorgol as though nothing whatever had happened, and doffed his cap on the threshold as if he did not perceive that Tikhon Ilitch's face darkened at his appearance. Nevertheless, rumours were still in circulation to the effect that the Durnovka folk intended to murder Tikhon Ilitch. And he, afraid to be caught out after dark on the road from Durnovka, fumbled in his pocket for his bulldog revolver, which weighed down the pocket of his full trousers in an annoying manner, and registered a vow that he would burn Durnovka to the ground some fine night, or poison the water in the Durnovka wells. Then even these rumours died away. But Tikhon Ilitch began to think seriously of ridding himself of Durnovka. "Real money is the money in your pocket, not the money you're going to inherit from your grandmother!" Moreover, the peasants had become impudent in their manner to him, and they seemed peculiarly well-informed. The Durnovka folks knew "all the ins and outs of things," and for that reason alone, if for no other, it was stupid to entrust the oversight and management of affairs at the manor to any of the Durnovka labourers. More than that, Rodka was the village Elder.

That year—the most alarming of all recent years—Tikhon Ilitch reached the age of fifty. But he had not abandoned his dream of becoming a father. And, lo and behold, precisely that was what brought him into collision with Rodka.

X

RODKA, a tall, thin, sullen young fellow from Ulianovka, had gone two years previously to live with Fedot, the brother of Yakoff; he had married, and had buried Fedot, who had died from over-drinking at the wedding; and he had then gone away to do his military service. But the bride, a young woman with fine figure, an extremely white, soft skin faintly tinged with crimson, and eyelashes for ever downcast, began to work for daily wages at the farm. And those eyelashes perturbed Tikhon Ilitch terribly. The peasant women of Durnovka wear "horns" on their heads: immediately after the wedding they coil their braided hair on the crown of the head and cover it with a kerchief, which produces a queer effect, similar to the horns of a cow. They wear dark-blue skirts of the antique pattern, trimmed with galloon, a white apron not unlike a sarafan¹ in shape, and bast-slippers. But the Bride—that name stuck to her—was beautiful in that garb. And one evening in the dark barn, where the Bride was alone and finishing the clearing up of the rye-ears, Tikhon Ilitch, after casting a precautionary glance around him, entered, went up to her, and said hastily: "You shall

¹ A straight, loose gown, falling from the armpits, worn by unmarried girls.—TRANS.

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have pretty shoes and silk kerchiefs. I shall not begrudge a twenty-five-ruble banknote!"

But the Bride remained silent as death.

"Do you hear what I say?" cried Tikhon Ilitch, in a whisper.

But the Bride seemed turned to stone, and with bowed head went on wielding her rake.

So he accomplished nothing at all. All of a sudden, Rodka appeared—ahead of his time, and minus an eye. That was soon after the rebellion of the Durnovka peasants, and Tikhon Ilitch immediately hired him and his wife for the Durnovka farm, on the ground that "nowadays it won't do to be without a soldier on the place." About St. Ilya's Day, while Rodka had gone off to the town, the Bride was scrubbing the floors in the house. Picking his way among the puddles, Tikhon Ilitch entered the room, cast a glance at the Bride, who was bending over the floor—at her white calves bespattered with dirty water—at the whole of her plump body as it flattened out before him. And, suddenly turning the key in the door, he strode up to the Bride. She straightened up hastily, raised her flushed, agitated face and, clutching in her hand the dripping floor-rag, screamed at him in a strange tone: "I'll give you a soaking, young fellow!"

An odour of hot soapsuds, heated body, perspiration, pervaded the air. Seizing the Bride by the hand, he squeezed it in a brutal grip, shaking it and making her drop the rag. Tikhon Ilitch grasped the Bride by the waist with his right arm—pressed her to him with such force that her bones cracked—and bore

her off into another room where there was a bed. And the Bride, with head thrown back and eyes staring wide open, no longer struggled, no longer resisted.

After that incident it was painful to the point of torment to see his wife, to see Rodka; to know that Rodka slept with the Bride, that he beat her ferociously every day and every night. But before long the situation became alarming as well. Inscrutable are the ways by which a jealous man arrives at the truth. And Rodka found out. Lean, one-eyed, long-armed, and strong as an ape, with a small closely-cropped black head which he always carried bent forward as he shot sidelong glances from his deep-set eyes, he became downright terrifying. During his service as a soldier he had acquired a stock of Little Russian words and an accent. And if the Bride ventured to make any reply to his curt, harsh speeches, he calmly picked up his leather-strap knout, approached her with a vicious grin, and calmly inquired, accenting the "re": "What's that you're *re*marking?" Thereupon he gave her such a flogging that everything turned black before her eyes.

On one occasion Tikhon Ilitch himself happened upon a thrashing of this sort and, unable to restrain his indignation, shouted: "What are you doing, you damned rascal?" But Rodka quietly seated himself on the bench and merely looked at him. "What's that you're *re*marking?" he inquired. And Tikhon Ilitch made haste to retreat, slamming the door behind him.

Wild thoughts began to dart through his mind. Should he poison his wife?—with stove-gas, for ex-

ample?—or should he arrange matters so that Rodka would be crushed by a falling roof or earth? But one month passed, then another—and hope, that hope which had inspired in him these intoxicating thoughts, was cruelly deceived. The Bride was not pregnant. Every one in Durnovka was convinced that it was Rodka's fault. Tikhon Ilitch himself was convinced of it, and cherished strong hopes. But one day in September, when Rodka was absent at the railway station, Tikhon Ilitch presented himself and fairly groaned aloud at the sight of the face of the Bride, all its feminine beauty distorted with terror.

“Are you done for again?” he cried, as he ran up the steps of the porch.

The Bride's lips turned white, her nose became waxen in hue, and her eyes opened very wide; yet again, it appeared, she was not with child. She expected to receive a deadly blow on the head, and involuntarily recoiled from it. But Tikhon Ilitch controlled himself, merely uttering a groan of pain and rage.

A moment later he took his departure—and from that day forth Rodka had no reason for jealousy. Conscious of that fact, Rodka began to feel timid in the presence of Tikhon Ilitch. And the latter now harboured, secretly, only one desire: to drive Rodka out of his sight, and that as speedily as possible. But whom could he find to take his place?

XI

ACCIDENT came to the rescue of Tikhon Ilitch. Quite unexpectedly he became reconciled to his brother, and persuaded him to undertake the management of Durnovka.

He had learned from an acquaintance in the town that Kuzma had ceased to drink and for a long time had been serving as clerk with a landed proprietor named Kasatkin. And, what was most amazing of all, he had become "an author." Yes, it was said that he had printed a whole little volume of his verses, and on the cover was the inscription: "For sale by the Author."

"Oh, come no-ow!" drawled Tikhon Ilitch when he heard this. "He's the same old Kuzma, and that's all right! But let me ask one thing: Did he really print it so—'The Works of Kuzma Krasoff'?"

"Give you my word he did," replied the acquaintance, being fully persuaded, nevertheless—as were many others in the town—that Kuzma "skinned" his verses from books and newspapers.

Thereupon Tikhon Ilitch, without quitting his seat at the table of Daeff's eating-house, wrote a brief, peremptory letter to his brother: 'twas high time for old men to make peace, to repent. And there, in that same eating-house, the reconciliation took place—swiftly, almost without the utterance of a word.

And on the following day came the business talk.

It was morning; the eating-house was still almost empty. The sun shone through the dusty windows, lighted up the small tables covered with greyish-red tablecloths, the floor newly washed with bran and emitting an odour of the stable, and the waiters in their white shirts and white trousers. In a cage a canary was singing in all possible modulations, but like a mechanical bird which had been wound up rather than a live one. Next door, the bells of St. Michael Archangel's church were ringing for the Liturgy, and the dense, sonorous peal shook the walls and boomed quivering overhead. With nervous, serious countenance, Tikhon Ilitch seated himself at a table, ordered at first only tea for two, but became impatient and reached for the bill-of-fare—a novelty which had excited the mirth of all Daeff's patrons. On the card was printed: "A small carafe of vodka, with snack, 25 kopeks. With tasty snack, 40 kopeks." Tikhon Ilitch ordered the carafe of vodka at forty kopeks. He tossed off two glasses with avidity and was on the point of drinking a third, when a long-familiar voice resounded in his ear: "Well, good morning once more."

Kuzma was garbed in the same fashion as his brother. He was shorter of stature, with larger bones, more withered, and a trifle broader of shoulder. He had the large thin face with prominent cheek-bones of a shrewd old peasant shopkeeper, grey overhanging eyebrows, and large greenish eyes. His manner of beginning was not simple:

"First of all, I must expound to you, Tikhon Ilitch," he began, as soon as Tikhon Ilitch had poured him a cup of tea, "I must expound to you what sort of a man I am, so that you may know"—he chuckled—"with whom you are dealing." He had a way of enunciating his words very distinctly, elevating his brows, unfastening and fastening the upper button of his short coat while he talked. So, having buttoned it, he continued: "I, you see, am an anarchist. . . ."

Tikhon Ilitch raised his eyebrows.

"Don't be afraid. I don't meddle with politics. But you can't give a man orders how he is to think. It won't harm you in the least. I shall manage the estate faithfully, but I tell you straight from the shoulder that I will not skin the people."

"Anyway, that can't be done at the present time," sighed Tikhon Ilitch.

"Well, times are the same as they always were. It is still possible to fleece people. I'll do my managing properly, but my leisure I shall devote to self-development. That is to say, to reading."

"Okh, bear in mind: Too much poking in books is bad for the poke!" said Tikhon Ilitch, shaking his head, and making a grimace. "However, that's no affair of ours."

"Well, that's not the way I look at it," retorted Kuzma. "I, brother—how shall I put it to you?—I'm a strange Russian type."

"I'm a Russian man myself, bear that in mind," interposed Tikhon Ilitch.

"But another sort. I don't mean to say that I'm bet-

ter than you, but—I'm different. Now here are you, I see, priding yourself on being a Russian, while I, brother, okh! am very far from being a Slavophil! It's not proper to jabber much, but one thing I will say: for God's sake, don't brag of being a Russian! We're an uncivilized people and an extremely unreliable one—neither candle for God nor oven-fork for the devil. But we will discuss this as time goes on."

Tikhon Ilitch contracted his brows, drummed on the table with his fingers. "That's right, probably," he said, and slowly filled his glass. "We're a savage lot. A crack-brained race."

"Well, and that's precisely the point. I have, I may say, roamed about the world a good bit. Well, and what then? Absolutely nowhere have I seen more tiresome and lazy types. And those who are not lazy"—here Kuzma shot a sidelong look at his brother—"have no sense at all. They toil and strive and acquire a nest for themselves; but where's the sense in it, after all?"

"What do you mean by that? What's sense?" asked Tikhon Ilitch.

"Just what I say. One must use sense in making one's nest. I'll weave me a nest, says the man, and then I'll live as a man should. In this way and in that."

Here Kuzma tapped his breast and his brow with his finger.

Tikhon Ilitch poured himself out another glass of liquor. Kuzma, having donned a silver-framed pair of eyeglasses, sipped the boiling-hot amber fluid from

his saucer. Tikhon Ilitch gazed at him with beaming eyes; and after turning something over in his mind, he said: "Evidently, brother, that sort of thing is not for the likes of us. If you live in the country, sup your coarse cabbage-soup and wear wretched bast-shoes. Do as your neighbours do!"

"Bast-shoes!" retorted Kuzma tartly. "We've been wearing them a couple of thousand years, brother—the thrice-accursed things! For two thousand years we've been living with our mouths agape. We're doing the devil's work. And who is to blame? What I have to say about it is this: 'tis high time to get ashamed of casting shame for everything on our neighbours—blaming our neighbours instead of ourselves! The Tatars oppressed us, you see! We're a young nation, you see! Just as if, over there in Europe, all sorts of Mongols didn't oppress folks a lot, too! As if the Germans were any older than we are! Well, anyhow, that's a special subject."

"Correct!" said Tikhon Ilitch. "Come on, we'd better get down to business."

Kuzma turned his empty glass upside down on the saucer, lighted a cigarette, and resumed his exposition.

"I don't go to church."

"That signifies that you are a molokan?"¹ asked Tikhon Ilitch, and said to himself: "I'm lost! Evidently, I must get rid of Durnovka!"

"A sort of molokan," grinned Kuzma. "And do you

¹ A heretic. Literally, one who drinks milk (moloko) during the Fasts in defiance to the Orthodox Catholic Church.

go to church? If it weren't for fear and necessity, one would forget all about it."

"Well, I'm not the first, neither am I the last," retorted Tikhon Ilitch, again contracting his brows in a scowl. "We are all sinners. But 'tis stated, you know: One sigh buys forgiveness for everything."

Kuzma shook his head.

"You're saying the usual things!" he remarked, severely. "But if you will only pause and reflect, how can that be so? You've been living on and on pig-fashion all your life, and you utter a sigh—and everything is wiped out without leaving a trace! Is there any sense in that, or not?"

The conversation was becoming painful. "That's correct," Tikhon Ilitch said to himself, as he stared at the table with flashing eyes. But, as always, he wanted to dodge thought, and discussion about God and about life; and he said the first thing that came to the tip of his tongue: "I'd be glad enough to go to Paradise, but my sins won't let me."

"There, there, there!" Kuzma caught him up, tapping the table with his finger-nail. "The very thing we love the best, our most pernicious characteristic, is precisely that: words are one thing, deeds are quite another! 'Tis the genuine Russian tune, brother: I live disgustingly, pig-fashion, but nevertheless I am living, and I shall continue to live, pig-fashion! You're a type, brother! A type!—Well, now talk business."

The pealing of the bells had ceased, the canary had quieted down. People had assembled in the eating-

house, and conversation was increasing at the little tables. A waiter opened a window, and chatter from the bazaar also became audible. Somewhere in a shop a quail was uttering his call, very clearly and melodiously. And while the business talk was in progress Kuzma kept listening to it, and from time to time interposed, "That's clever!" in an undertone. And when all had been said he slapped the table with the palm of his hand and said energetically: "Well, all right, so be it—don't let's discuss it!" and thrusting his hand into the side pocket of his short coat, he drew forth a regular heap of papers and paper scraps, sorted out from among them a small book in a grey-marbled binding, and laid it in front of his brother. "There!" said he. "I yield to your request and to my own weakness. 'Tis a wretched little book, casual verses, written long ago. But 'tis done, and it cannot be helped. Here, take it and put it out of sight."

And once more Tikhon Ilitch, who had already become extremely red in the face from the vodka, was agitated by the consciousness that his brother was an author; that upon that grey-marbled cover was printed: "Poems by K. I. Krasoff." He turned the book about in his hands, and said diffidently: "Suppose you read me something. Hey? Pray do, read me three or four verses."

And, with head bent low and in some confusion, holding the book at a distance and gazing severely at it through his glasses, Kuzma read the sort of thing which the self-taught usually write: imitations of Koltzoff and Nikitin, complaints against Fate and misery,

challenges to impending storm-clouds and bad weather. It is true that he himself was conscious that all this was old and false. But behind the alien, incongruous form lay the truth—that which had been violently and painfully experienced at some time or other. And upon his thin cheek-bones patches of pink made their appearance, and his voice trembled from time to time. Tikhon Ilitch's eyes gleamed, too. It was of no importance whether the verses were good or bad—the important point was that they had been composed by his own brother, a poor man, a simple plain fellow who reeked of cheap tobacco and old boots.

“But with us, Kuzma Ilitch,” he said when Kuzma had finished and, removing his eyeglasses, dropped his eyes, “but with us there is only one song.” And he twisted his lips unpleasantly and bitterly: “The only song we know is: ‘What’s the price of pig’s bristles?’”

XII

NEVERTHELESS, after establishing his brother at Durnovka he set about singing that song with more gusto than ever. Before placing Durnovka in his brother's hands, he had picked a quarrel with Rodka over some new harness-straps which had been devoured by the dogs, and had discharged him. Rodka smiled insolently by way of reply and calmly strode off to his cottage to collect his belongings. The Bride, also, listened with apparent compo-

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sure to the dismissal. On breaking with Tikhon Ilitch she had resumed her habit of maintaining silence and never looking him in the eye. But half an hour later, when he had got everything together, Rodka came, accompanied by her, to ask forgiveness. The Bride remained standing on the threshold, pale, her eyes swollen with weeping, and held her peace; Rodka bowed his head, fumbled with his cap, and also made an effort to weep,—it resulted in a repulsive grimace,—but Tikhon Ilitch sat at the table with lowering brows and rattled the balls on his abacus, shaking his head the while. Not one of the three could raise his eyes—especially the Bride, who felt herself the most guilty of them all—and their entreaties were unavailing. Tikhon Ilitch showed mercy on one point only: he did not deduct the price of the straps from their wages.

Now he was on a firm foundation. Having got rid of Rodka and transferred his affairs to his brother's charge, he felt alert, at his ease. "My brother is unreliable, a trifling fellow, apparently, but he'll do for the present!" And returning to Vorgol he bustled about unweariedly through the whole month of October. Nastasya Petrovna was ailing all the time—her feet, hands, and face were swollen and yellow—and Tikhon Ilitch now began to meditate at times on the possibility of her dying, and bore himself with increasing lenience to her weakness, to her uselessness in all affairs connected with the house and the shop. And, as though in harmony with his mood, magnificent weather prevailed during the whole of October. But

suddenly it broke up and was followed by storms and torrents of rain; and in Durnovka something utterly unexpected came to pass.

During October Rodka had been working on the railway line, and the Bride had been sitting, without work, at home, enduring the reproaches of her mother and only occasionally earning fifteen or twenty kopeks in the garden of the manor. But her behaviour was peculiar: at home she said never a word, but only wept, and in the garden she was shrilly merry, shouted with laughter, sang songs with Donka the Goat, an extremely stupid and pretty little girl who resembled an Egyptian. The Goat was living with a petty burgher who had leased the garden, while the Bride, who for some reason or other had struck up a friendship with her, made bold eyes at her brother, an impudent youth, and as she ogled him hinted in song that she was wasting away with love for some one. Whether anything occurred between them was not known, but the whole affair ended in a great catastrophe. When the petty burghers were departing for the town just before the Feast of Our Lady of Kazan they arranged an "evening party" in their watchman's hut, invited the Goat and the Bride, played all night on two peasant pipes, fed their guests with crude delicacies, and gave them tea and vodka for beverages. And at dawn, when their cart was already harnessed, they suddenly, with roars of laughter, flung the intoxicated Bride on the ground, bound her arms, lifted her petticoats, tied them in a knot over her head, and began to fasten them securely there with a cord. The

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Goat started to run away, and made a headlong dive in her fright into the tall, wet steppe-grass. When she peeped out from that shelter, after the cart with the petty burghers had rolled briskly away out of the garden, she espied the Bride, naked to the waist, hanging from a tree. The dawn was dreary and overcast; a fine rain was whispering through the garden. The Goat wept in streams, and her teeth chattered as she untied the Bride from the tree, vowing by the memory of her father and mother that lightning might kill her, the Goat, but never should they discover in the village what had taken place in the garden. Nevertheless, not a week had elapsed before rumours concerning the Bride's disgrace became current in Durnovka.

It was impossible, of course, to verify these rumours: "As for seeing it—why, nobody saw it. Well, and the Goat's tongue was hung in the middle when it came to telling absurd tales." The Bride herself, who had aged five years in that one week, replied to them with such insolent vituperation that even her own mother was terrified by her face at such moments. But the discussions provoked by the rumours did not cease, and every one awaited with immense impatience the arrival of Rodka and his chastisement of his wife. Much agitated—once more jarred out of his rut—Tikhon Ilitch also awaited that impending chastisement, having heard from his own labourers of what had occurred in the garden. Why, that scandal might end in murder! But it ended in such a manner that it is still a matter of doubt which would have startled the Durnovka folks more powerfully—murder, or such a

termination. On the night before the Feast of St. Michael, Rodka, who had returned home "to change his shirt," and who had not laid a finger on the Bride, died suddenly of "stomach trouble"! This became known in Vorgol late in the evening; but Tikhon Ilitch instantly gave orders to harness his horse, and drove at top speed, through the darkness and the rain, to his brother. And after having gulped down, on top of his tea, a whole bottle of fruit brandy, he made confession to him, in his burning excitement, with passionate expressions, and eyes wildly rolling: "'Tis my fault, brother; the sin is mine!"

Having heard him out, Kuzma held his peace for a long time, and for a long time paced up and down the room plucking at his fingers, twisting them, cracking their joints. At last he said: "Just think it over: is there any nation more ferocious than ours? In town, if a petty thief snatches from a hawker's tray a pancake worth a farthing, the whole population of the eating-house section pursues him, and when they catch him they force him to eat soap. The whole town turns out for a fire, or a fight, and how sorry they are that the fire or the fight is so soon ended! Don't shake your head, don't do it: they *are* sorry! And how they revel in it when some one beats his wife to death, or thrashes a small boy within an inch of his life, or jeers at him! That's the most amusing thing in the world."

Tikhon Ilitch inquired: "What's your object in saying that?"

“Just for the sake of talking!” replied Kuzma, angrily, and went on: “Take that half-witted girl, Fesha, who wanders about Durnovka, for example. The young fellows squander their last coppers on her—put her down on the village common and set to work whacking her over her cropped head, at the rate of ten whacks for a farthing! And is that done out of ill-nature? Yes, out of ill-nature, certainly; and also from a sort of stupidity, curse it! Well, and that’s the case with the Bride.”

“Bear in mind,” interrupted Tikhon Ilitch hotly, “that there are always plenty of blackguards and block-heads everywhere.”

“Exactly so. And didn’t you yourself bring that—well, what’s his name?”

“Duck-headed Motya, you mean?” asked Tikhon Ilitch.

“Yes, that’s it. Didn’t you bring him here for your own amusement?”

And Tikhon Ilitch burst out laughing: he had done that very thing. Once, even, Motya had been sent to him by the railway in a sugar-cask. The town was only about an arm’s length distant, and he knew the officials—so they sent the man to him. And the inscription on the cask ran: “With care. A complete Fool.”

“And these same fools are taught vices, for amusement!” Kuzma went on bitterly.—“The yard-gates of poor brides are smeared with tar! Beggars are hunted with dogs! For amusement, pigeons are knocked off

roofs with stones! Yet, as you know, 'tis a great sin to eat those same pigeons. The Holy Spirit Himself assumes the form of a dove, you see!"

XIII

THE samovar had long since grown cold, the candle had guttered down, smoke hung over the room in a dull blue cloud, the slop-basin was filled to the very brim with soggy, reeking cigarette butts. The ventilator—a tin pipe in the upper corner of the window—was open, and once in a while a squeaking and a whirling and a terribly tiresome wailing proceeded from it—just like the one in the District offices, Tikhon Ilitch said to himself. But the smoke was so dense that ten ventilators would have been of no avail. The rain rattled on the roof and Kuzma strode from corner to corner and talked:

"Ye-es! a nice state of things, there's no denying it! Indescribable kindness! If you read history, your hair rises upright in horror: brother pitted against brother, kinsman against kinsman, son against father—treachery and murder, murder and treachery. The Epic legends, too, are a sheer delight: 'he slit his white breast,' 'he let his bowels out on the ground,' 'Ilya did not spare his own daughter; he stepped on her left foot, and pulled her right foot.' And the songs? The same thing, always the same: the stepmother is 'wicked and greedy'; the father-in-law, 'harsh and quarrelsome,' sits on the sleeping-shelf above the stove, 'just like a dog

on a rope'; the mother-in-law, equally wicked, sits on the stove 'just like a bitch on a chain'; the sisters-in-law are invariably 'young dogs and tricksters'; the brothers-in-law are 'malicious scoffers'; the husband is 'either a fool or a drunkard'; the 'old father-in-law bids him beat his wife soundly, until her hide drops off to her heels'; while the wife, having 'scrubbed the floor' for this same old man, 'ladled out the sour cabbage-soup, scraped the threshold clean, and baked turnover-patties,' addresses this sort of a speech to her husband: 'Get up, you disgusting fellow, wake up: here's dish-water, wash yourself; here are your leg-wrappers, wipe yourself; here's a bit of rope, hang yourself.' And our adages, Tikhon Ilitch! Could anything more lewd and filthy be invented? And our proverbs! 'One man who has been soundly thrashed is worth two who have not been.' 'Simplicity is worse than thieving.'"

"So, according to you, the best way for a man to live is like an arrant fool?" inquired Tikhon Ilitch with a sneer.

And Kuzma joyfully snapped up his words: "Well, that's right, that's the idea! There's nothing in the whole world so beggar-bare as we are, and on the other hand there's nobody more insolent on the ground of that same nakedness. What's the vicious way to insult a person? Accuse 'em of poverty! Say: 'You devil! You haven't a morsel to eat.' Here's an illustration: Deniska—well, I mean the son of Syery, he's a cobbler—said to me the other day—"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Tikhon Ilitch. "How's Syery himself getting on?"

"Deniska says he's 'perishing with hunger.'"

"A good-for-nothing peasant!" said Tikhon Ilitch with conviction. "Don't sing any of your songs about him to me."

"I'm not singing!" retorted Kuzma angrily. "But I ought to do it. For his name is Krasoff. However, that's another story. You'd better listen to what I have to say about Deniska. Well, he told me this: 'Sometimes, in a famine year, we foremen would go to the neighbourhood of the cemetery in the Black Suburb; and there those public women were—regular troops of them. And they were hungry, the lean hags, extremely hungry! If you gave one of them half a pound of bread for her work she'd devour it to the last crumb, there under you. It was downright ridiculous! Take note,' cried Kuzma sternly, pausing: "'It was downright ridiculous!'"

"Oh, stop it, for Christ's sake!" Tikhon Ilitch interrupted again. "Give me a chance to say a word about business!"

Kuzma stopped short. "Well, talk away," said he. "Only, what are you going to say? Tell him 'You ought to do thus and so'? Not a bit of it! If you give him money—that's the end of it. Just think it over: they have no fuel, they have nothing to eat, nothing to pay for a funeral. That means, 'tis your most sacred duty to give them some money—well, and something more to boot: a few potatoes, a wagon-load

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or two of straw. And hire the Bride. Send her here as my cook."

And immediately Tikhon Ilitch felt as though a stone had been rolled off his breast. He hastily drew out his purse, plucked out a ten-ruble banknote, joyfully assented also to all the other suggestions. And suddenly he asked once more, in a rapid distressed voice: "But didn't she poison him?"

Kuzma merely shrugged his shoulders by way of reply.

Whether she had poisoned him or not, it was a terrible matter to think about. And Tikhon Ilitch went home as soon as it was light, through the chill, misty morning, when the odour of damp threshing-floors and smoke still hung in the air, while the cocks were crowing sleepily in the haze-wrapped village, and the dogs lay sleeping on the porches, and the old faded-yellow turkey still snoozed roosting on the bough of an apple tree half stripped of its discoloured dead autumn leaves, by the side of a house. In the fields nothing could be seen at a distance of two paces, thanks to the dense white fog driven before the wind. Tikhon Ilitch felt no desire to sleep, but he did feel exhausted, and as usual whipped up his horse, a large brown mare with her tail tied up; she was soaked with the moisture and appeared leaner, more dandified, and blacker because of it. He turned his head away from the wind and raised the cold wet collar of his overcoat on the right side, all glistening like silver under tiny pearls of rain which covered it with a thick veil. He ob-

served, through the cold little drops which hung on his eyelashes, how the sticky black loam was churned up in ever-increasing density by his swiftly-revolving wheels, and how clods of mud, spurting high in a regular fountain, hung in the air and did not disperse; how they already began to adhere to his boots and knees. And he darted a glance at the heaving haunches of his horse; at her ears laid flat back against her head and darkened by the rain. And when, at last, his face streaked with mud, he dashed up to his own house, the first thing that met his eyes was Yakoff's horse at the hitching-bar. Hastily knotting the reins on the fore-carriage, he sprang from the runabout, ran to the open door of the shop—and halted abruptly in terror.

“Elo-ockhead!” Nastasya Petrovna was saying from her place behind the counter, in evident imitation of himself, Tikhon Ilitch, but in an ailing, caressing voice, as she bent lower and lower over the money-drawer and fumbled along the jingling coppers, unable, in the darkness, to find coins for change. “Block-head! Where could you get it any cheaper, at the present time?” And, not finding the change, she straightened up and looked at Yakoff, who stood before her in cap and overcoat, but barefoot. She stared at his slightly elevated face and scraggy beard of indeterminate hue, and added: “But didn't she poison him?”

And Yakoff mumbled in haste: “That's no affair of ours, Petrovna. The devil only knows. It's none of our business. Our business, for example—”

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And Tikhon Ilitch's hands shook all day long as that mumbling answer recurred to his mind. Everybody, *everybody*, thought she had poisoned him!

Fortunately, the secret remained a secret. The Sacrament was administered to Rodka before he died. And the Bride wailed so sincerely as she followed the coffin that it was positively indecent—for, of course, that wailing should not be an expression of the feelings, but the fulfilment of a rite. And little by little Tikhon Ilitch's perturbation subsided. But for a long time still he continued to go about more gloomy than a thunder-cloud.

XIV

HE was immersed to the throat in business—as usual—and he had no one to help him. Nastasya Petrovna was of very little assistance. Tikhon Ilitch never hired any labourers except “summer-workers” who were taken on merely until the cattle were driven home from pasturage, and they were already dispersed. Only the servants by the year remained—the cook, the old watchman nicknamed “Chaff,” and Oska, a lad of seventeen who was both lazy and ugly of disposition, “the Tsar of Heaven's dolt”—a most egregious fool. And how much attention the cattle alone demanded! After the necessary sheep were slaughtered and salted down, twenty remained to be cared for over the winter. There were six black boar-pigs in the sty, eternally sullen and dis-

contented over something or other. In the barns stood three cows, a young bull, and a red calf. In the yard were eleven horses, and in a box-stall stood a grey stallion, a vicious, heavy, full-maned, broad-chested brute—a half-breed, but worth four hundred rubles: his sire had a certificate, and was worth fifteen hundred. And all these required constant and careful oversight. But in his leisure moments Tikhon Ilitch was devoured by melancholy and boredom.

The very sight of Nastasya Petrovna irritated him, and he was constantly urging her to go away for a visit with acquaintances in the town. And at last she made her preparations and went. But after she was gone, somehow, he found things more boresome than ever. After seeing her off, Tikhon Ilitch wandered aimlessly over the fields. Along the highway, gun over shoulder, came the chief of the post-office at Ulianovka, Sakharoff, famed because of his passion for ordering by letter free price-lists—catalogues of guns, seeds, musical instruments—and because of his manner of treating the peasants, which was so savage that they were wont to say: “When you pass in a letter, your hands and feet fairly shake!” Tikhon Ilitch went to the edge of the highway to meet him. Elevating his brows, he gazed at the postmaster and said to himself: “A fool of an old man. He slumps along through the mud like an elephant.” But he called out, in friendly tones:

“Been hunting, Anton Markitch?”

The postmaster halted. Tikhon Ilitch approached

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and gave him a formal greeting. "Had any luck, or not, I say?" he inquired, mockingly.

"Hunting, indeed! Nothing to hunt!" gloomily replied the postmaster, a huge, round-shouldered man with thick grey hairs protruding from his ears and his nostrils, huge eye-sockets, and deeply sunken eyes—a regular gorilla. "I merely strolled out on account of my hæmorrhoids," he said, pronouncing the last word with special care.

"But bear in mind," retorted Tikhon Ilitch with unexpected heat, stretching forth his hand with the fingers outspread, "bear in mind that our countryside has been completely devastated! Not so much as the name of bird or beast is left, sir!"

"The forests have all been cut down," remarked the postmaster.

"I should think they had been cut down, forsooth! Shaved off close to the earth!" Tikhon Ilitch corroborated him. And all of a sudden he added: "'Tis moulting, sir! Everything is moulting, sir!"

Why that word broke loose from his tongue, Tikhon Ilitch himself did not know, but he felt that, nevertheless, it had not been uttered without reason. "Everything's moulting," he said to himself, "exactly like the cattle after a long, hard winter." And after he had parted from the postmaster he stood long on the highway, involuntarily gazing about him. The rain had again begun to patter down; a disagreeable, damp wind was blowing. Darkness was descending over the rolling fields—the fields sown with winter-grain,

the ploughed fields, the stubble-fields, and the light brown groves of young trees.

The gloomy sky descended lower and lower over the earth. The roads, flooded by the rain, gleamed with a leaden sheen. The post-train from Moscow, which was an hour and a half late every day, was due at the station. Only from the signal-bells, the humming sounds, the rumbling, and the odour of coal and samovars in the yards, did Tikhon Ilitch know that it had arrived and departed, for buildings screened the station from view. The odour of samovars now remained, and that aroused a dim longing for comfort, a warm clean room, a family—or the desire to go away somewhere or other.

But this feeling was suddenly replaced by amazement. From the bare Ulianovka forest a man emerged and directed his steps towards the highway—a man in a round-topped hat and only a short roundabout coat. On looking more closely, Tikhon Ilitch recognized Zhikhareff, the son of a wealthy land-owner, who had long since become a thoroughgoing drunkard. His heart contracted with pain. “Well, it makes no difference,” thought Tikhon Ilitch sadly. “’Twill be best to chat a bit with him and, in case of need, give him half a ruble. ’Tis not worth while to anger the vagabond: he’s a spiteful fellow.”

But on this occasion Zhikhareff approached in a decidedly arrogant frame of mind, bristling, but with his head, in its beggar’s hat, thrown back, and chewing between his clenched jaws the mouth end of a

cigarette, long since smoked out and extinct. His face was blue with the cold, puffy with drunkenness; his eyes were red, and his mustache disheveled. He had turned up the collar of his short coat, which was buttoned to the chin, and, with the tips of his fingers thrust into the pockets, he was splashing along in a spirited manner through the mud. His rusty, dilapidated high boots projected below his short trousers, which were tightly strained over his knees.

"A—ah!" he drawled through his teeth, as he chewed his cigarette-butt. "Whom do I see? Tikhon Fomitch¹ is looking over his domains!" And he emitted a hoarse laugh.

"Good-day, Lyeff Lvovitch," replied Tikhon Ilitch. "Are you waiting for the train?"

"Yes, I am—and I never seem to hit it," returned Zhikhareff, shrugging his shoulders. "I've been waiting and waiting, and I got so bored that I've been making the forester a little visit. We've been chattering and smoking. But I've still a whole eternity to wait! Shall we not meet at the station? I believe you are fond of putting something behind your collar yourself?"

"God has been gracious," replied Tikhon Ilitch, in the same tone he had used before. "As for drinking—why shouldn't a man drink a bit? Only, he must pick the proper time."

¹ Probably a deliberate bit of insolence, as he must have known that the patronymic was "Ilitch," not "Fomitch."

"Fudge and nonsense!" said Zhikhareff hoarsely, skipping across a puddle with considerable agility, and he directed his course towards the railway station at a leisurely pace.

His aspect was pitiful, and Tikhon Ilitch gazed long and with disgust at his inadequate trousers, which hung down like bags from beneath his short coat.

XV

DURING the night the rain poured down again, and it was so dark you could not see your hand before your face. Tikhon Ilitch slept badly and gritted his teeth in torture. He had a chill—evidently he had taken cold by standing on the highway in the evening—and the overcoat which he had thrown over himself slid off upon the floor, and immediately he dreamed the same thing he had always dreamed ever since childhood, whenever his back was cold: twilight, narrow alleys, a hurrying throng, firemen galloping along in heavy carts drawn by vicious black truck-horses. Once he woke up, struck a match, looked at the ticking clock—it showed the hour of three—and picked up the overcoat; and, as he fell asleep, the thought of Zhikhareff once more recurred distressingly to his mind. And athwart his slumbers a persistent thought obsessed him: that the shop was being looted and the horses driven away.

Sometimes it seemed to him that he was at the Dankova posting-station, that the nocturnal rain was pat-

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tering on the pent-house over the gate, and that the little bell above it was being pulled and was ringing incessantly—thieves had come and had led thither, through the impenetrable darkness, his splendid stallion, and if they were to discover his presence there, they would murder him. And again consciousness of the reality would return to him. But even the reality was alarming. The old watchman was walking about under the windows with his mallet, but it seemed as if he were far, far away; as if the sheep-dog, with choking growls, were rending some one—had rushed off into the fields with tempestuous barking, and suddenly had presented himself again under the windows and was trying to rouse him by standing on one spot and barking violently. Then Tikhon Ilitch started to go out and see what was the matter, whether everything were as it should be. But as soon as he reached the point of making up his mind to rise, the heavy slanting rain began to rattle more thickly and densely than ever against the small dark windows, driven by the wind from the dark and boundless fields, and sleep seemed to him the most precious thing in the world. At last a door banged, a stream of damp, cold air entered, and the watchman, Chaff, dragged a bundle of rustling straw into the vestibule. Tikhon Ilitch opened his eyes: it was six o'clock, the daylight was dull and wet, the tiny windows were misted over with moisture.

“Make a little fire, my good man, make a little fire,” said Tikhon Ilitch, his voice still hoarse with sleep. “Then we’ll go and feed the cattle, and you can go to your place and sleep.”

The old man, who had grown thin over night and all blue with cold, the dampness, and fatigue, gazed at him with sunken dead eyes. In his wet cap, his short rain-drenched outer coat, and his ragged bast-slippers soaked with mud and water, he growled out something in a dull tone as he got down with difficulty on his knees in front of the stove, stuffing it with the cold, fragrant bundle of straw and blowing on the lighted mass.

“Well, has the cow bitten your tongue off?” shouted Tikhon Ilitch hoarsely, as he climbed out of bed and picked up his coat from the floor. “What’s that you’re muttering there to yourself?”

“I’ve been walking all night long, and now it’s ‘give the cattle their fodder,’” mumbled the old man without raising his head, as if talking to himself.

Tikhon Ilitch looked askance at him: “I saw the way you walked about!”

He felt worn out; nevertheless he put on his coat and, conquering a petty fit of shivering in his bowels, went out on the porch, which was covered with the footprints of the dogs, into the icy chill of the pale stormy morning. Everywhere the ground was flooded with lead-coloured puddles; all the walls had turned dark with the rain.

“A nice lot; these workmen!” he said to himself angrily.

It was barely drizzling. “But surely it will be pouring again by noon,” he said to himself. And he glanced with surprise at shaggy Buyan, who dashed toward him from under the granary. His paws were

muddy, but he himself was boiling with excitement, his eyes were sparkling, his tongue was fresh and red as fire, his healthy hot breath fairly exuding the odour of dog. And that after racing about and barking all night long!

He took Buyan by the collar and, slopping through the mud, made the rounds, inspecting all the locks. Then he chained the dog under the granary, returned to his ante-room, and glanced into the roomy kitchen, the cottage proper. The cottage had a hot, repulsive odour; the cook lay fast asleep on a bare box-bench, beneath the holy pictures, her face covered with her apron, her loins displayed, and her legs clad in huge old felt boots, the soles thickly plastered with the dirt from the earthen floors. Oska lay on the sleeping-board face downward, fully dressed, in his short sheep-skin coat and his bast-slippers, his head buried in a heavy, soiled pillow.

“That devil has been at the lad!” thought Tikhon Ilitch with disgust. “Just look at her—at her nasty debauch all night long—and towards morning, off she goes to the bench!”

And after a survey of the black walls, the tiny windows, the tub filled with dirty dish-water, the huge broad-shouldered stove, he shouted loudly and harshly: “Hey, there! My noble lords! You ought to know when you’ve had enough!”

While the cook, scratching herself and yawning, heated the stove, boiled some potatoes for the pigs, and got the samovar alight, Oska, minus his cap and stumbling with sleep, dragged bran for the horses and cows.

Tikhon Ilitch himself unlocked the creaking doors of the stable and was the first to enter its warm, dirty comfort, surrounded by sheds, enclosures, and styes. The stable was ankle-deep in manure. Dung, urine, and rain had all run together and formed a thick, light-brown fluid. The horses, already darkening with their velvety winter coats, were roaming about under the pent-houses. The sheep, of a dirty-grey hue, were huddled in an agitated mass in one corner. An old brown gelding dozed in isolation alongside his empty manger, smeared with dough. The drizzling rain fell and fell interminably upon the square farmyard from the unfriendly, stormy sky, but the gelding paid no heed to anything. The pigs moaned and grunted in an ailing, persistent way in their pen.

“’Tis deadly boresome!” thought Tikhon Ilitch, and immediately emitted a fierce yell at the old man, who was dragging along a bundle of grain-straw: “Why are you dragging that through the mud, you vile profligate?”

The old man flung the bundle of straw on the ground, looked him over, and all at once remarked quietly: “I’m listening to a vile profligate.”

Tikhon Ilitch cast a swift glance around, to see whether the lad had gone out, and, on convincing himself that he had, stepped up to the old man and with apparent calmness gave him such a thwack in the teeth that his head shook to and fro, seized him by the collar, and hustled him to the gate with all his might. “Begone!” he bawled, panting for breath and turning as white as chalk. “Don’t let me ever catch so much

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as the smell of you here in the future, you cursed tatterdemalion!"

The old man flew through the gate, and five minutes later, his bag on his shoulders and a stick in his hand, he was striding along the highway to his home in Ulianovka. Meanwhile Tikhon Ilitch, with shaking hands, had watered the stallion, had himself given the animal his portion of fresh oats—he had merely turned yesterday's oats over with his muzzle and slobbered on them—and with long strides, through the liquid mess and the manure, had betaken himself to his cottage.

"Are things ready?" he inquired, opening the door a crack.

"There's no hurry!" snarled the cook.

The cottage was beclouded with a warm, sweetish steam emanating from the pot where the potatoes were boiling. The cook, assisted by the lad, was energetically mashing them with a pestle, sprinkling in flour the while, and Tikhon Ilitch did not hear the reply because of the noise. Slamming the door, he went to drink his tea.

XVI

IN the tiny ante-room he pushed aside with his foot a heavy, dirty horsecloth which lay across the threshold and went to one corner, where, over a stool surmounted by a pewter basin, a brass washstand was fastened, while on a small shelf lay a small, clammy piece of cocoanut-oil soap. As he rattled the

water-tank, squinted, frowned, and puffed out his nostrils, he was not able to refrain from a malicious fugitive glance, and he remarked with peculiar distinctness: "H'm! No, who ever saw the like of the labourers? There's no getting on with them at all nowadays! Say one word to such a fellow, and he'll come back at you with ten words! Say a dozen to him, and he'll fling you back a hundred! They're gone dead crazy! Though it isn't summer time, there's plenty of you to be had, you devils! You'll want something to eat for the winter, brother—you'll come, you son of a dog, you'll co-ome, and bow lo-o-ow in entreaty!"

The towel, which served for the master as well as for the lodger-travellers, had been hanging beside the water-tank since St. Michael's Day. It was so filthy that Tikhon Ilitch gritted his teeth when he looked at it. "Okh!" he ejaculated, closing his eyes and shaking his head. "Ugh! Holy Mother, Queen of Heaven!" And hurling the towel on the floor, he wiped himself on the embroidered skirt of his shirt, which flapped outside his waistcoat.

Two doors opened from the ante-room. One, on the left, led to the room assigned to travellers, which was long, half-dark, and with tiny windows that looked out on the barn; in it stood two large divans, hard as stone, covered with black oilcloth, filled more than full with living and with crushed and dried bugs, while on the partition-wall hung the portrait of some general with fierce beaver-like side whiskers. This portrait was bordered with small portraits of heroes of the Russo-

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Turkish war, and underneath was an inscription: "Long will our children and our dear Slavic brethren remember the glorious deeds; how our father, the courageous Suleiman Pasha, crushed and conquered the treacherous foemen and marched with his lads along such crags as only clouds and the feathered Kings of the air were wont to scale." The second door led into the master's room. There, on the right—alongside the door, glittered the glass of a cupboard, on the left a stove-bench gleamed white; the stove had cracked at some past day, and over the white it had been smeared with clay, which had imparted to it the outline of something resembling a thin, dislocated man, which seriously displeased Tikhon Ilitch. Beyond the stove rose aloft a double bed: above the bed was nailed up a rug of dull-green and brick-coloured wool, bearing the image of a tiger with whiskers and ears which stood erect like those of a cat. Opposite the door, against the wall, stood a chest of drawers covered with a knitted tablecloth, and on the table-cloth Nastasya Petrovna's wedding-casket. In the casket lay contracts with the labourers, phials containing medicines long since spoiled with age, matches.

"Wanted in the shop!" screamed the cook, opening the door a crack.

"There's no hurry—the goats in the bazaar can wait!" replied Tikhon Ilitch wrathfully—but he hurried out.

The distance was veiled by a watery mist; the effect resembled that of twilight. The rain still drizzled on, but the wind had veered round; it was now blowing

from the North, and the air had grown colder. The freight train, which was just pulling out of the station, rattled more cheerfully and resoundingly than it had for many days past.

"'Morning, Ilitch," said the hare-lipped peasant, who was holding a wet piebald horse at the porch, as he nodded his soaking fur cap, which was of the tall Mandzhurian shape.

"'Morning," nodded Tikhon Ilitch, casting a side-long glance at the strong white tooth which gleamed through the peasant's cleft lip. "What do you need?" And, hastily providing the salt and kerosene required, he hurried back to his chamber. "The dogs, they don't give a man time to make the sign of the cross on his brow!" he grumbled as he went.

The samovar, which stood on a table against the partition-wall, was bubbling and boiling hard; the small mirror which hung above the table was enveloped in a thin layer of white steam. The windows and the chromo-lithograph which was nailed to the wall under the mirror—it depicted a giant in a yellow kaftan and red morocco boots, with a Russian banner in his hand, from beneath which peeped the towers and domes of the Moscow Kremlin—were also veiled in steam. Photographic portraits framed in shell-work surrounded this picture. In the place of honour hung the portrait of a priest in a moiré cassock, with a small, sparse beard, plump cheeks, and extremely small penetrating eyes. And, with a glance at him, Tikhon Ilitch crossed himself violently towards the holy pictures in the cor-

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ner. Then he removed from the samovar a smoke-begrimed teapot and poured out a cup of tea, which smelled very much like a steamed bathroom.

"They don't give a man a chance to cross himself," he said, wrinkling his face with the expression of a person suffering martyrdom. "They fairly cut my throat, curse them!"

It seemed as if there were something which he ought to call to mind, to take under consideration, or as if he ought simply to go to bed and get a good sleep. He longed for warmth, repose, clearness, firmness of thought. He rose, went to the glass cupboard with its rattling panes and cups and saucers, and took from one of the shelves a bottle of liqueur flavoured with mountain-ash berries and a cask-shaped glass on which was inscribed: "Even monks take this." "But perhaps I oughtn't," he said aloud. However, he lacked firmness. Through his mind, against his will, flashed the old saw: "Drink and you'll die, and don't drink and you'll die just the same." So he poured out a glassful and tossed it off, poured out another and gulped that down, also. And, munching at a thick cracknel, he sat down at the table.

He became conscious of an agreeable burning sensation inside, and eagerly sipped the boiling tea from his saucer, sucking at a lump of sugar which he held in his teeth. He felt better, so far as his body was concerned. But his soul went on living its own life, which was both gloomy and melancholy. Thoughts followed thoughts, but there was no sense in them. As

he sipped his tea, he cast an abstracted and suspicious glance sidelong at the partition-wall, at the man in the yellow kaftan, at the photographs in the shell-work frames, and even at the priest in his watered-silk cassock. "Lerigion means nothing to us pigs!" he said to himself; and, as though by way of justifying himself to some one, he added roughly: "Just you try living in the village, and drinking sparkling kvas, like us!"

As he gazed askance at the priest he felt that everything was dubious; even his habitual reverence for that priest seemed doubtful, not founded on reason. When one really came to think about it. . . .

But at this point he made haste to transfer his glance to the Moscow Kremlin. "Shame on me!" he muttered. "I've never been in Moscow since I was born!" No, he had not. And why? His pigs wouldn't let him! Now it was his petty trading which hindered, now the posting-station, then the pot-house, then Durnovka. And now he could not get away because of the stallion and the boar-pigs. But why speak of Moscow? For the last ten years he had been intending, without success, to get as far as the little birch grove that lay the other side of the highway. He had kept on hoping that somehow or other he would manage to tear himself free for an evening, carry a rug and samovar with him, sit on the grass in the cool air, in the greenery—and he simply had not been able to get away. The days flowed past like water between the fingers, and before one had time to gather one's

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wits together, one's fiftieth year had knocked at the door, and that meant the end of everything, and it didn't seem so very long ago that one was running about without any breeches, did it? Just as if it had been yesterday!

XVII

THE faces gazed out in complete immobility from their shell-work frames. Here was a scene which had never taken place and could not take place: In the field, amid the thick-growing rye, lay two persons—Tikhon Ilitch himself and a young merchant named Rostovtzeff, holding in their hands glasses exactly half filled with dark beer. What a close friendship had sprung up between Rostovtzeff and Tikhon Ilitch! How well he remembered that grey day in Carnival Week when the picture was taken! But in what year had that happened? What had become of Rostovtzeff? Perhaps he had died in Voronezh—and now no one knew for a certainty whether he were still alive in this world or not. And yonder stood three petty burghers, drawn up in military style and perfectly wooden, with their hair parted in the middle and very smooth, dressed in embroidered Russian shirts opening at the side and long coats, with their boots well polished—Butchneff, Vystavkin, and Bogomoloff. Vystavkin, the one in the middle, was hold-

ing in front of his breast the bread and salt of hospitality on a wooden platter, covered with a towel embroidered with cocks, while Butchneff and Bogomoloff each held a holy picture. They had been photographed on a dusty, windy day, when the grain-elevator had been blessed—when the Bishop and the Governor had come for the ceremony, when Tikhon Ilitch had felt so proud that he had been one of the crowd appointed to greet the officials. But what had his memory retained about that day? Merely this—that they had waited beside the elevator for five hours, on the new brown rails of the track, that the white dust had been blown in clouds by the wind, that the railway carriages and the trees were all covered with dust, that the Governor, a long, lean man, exactly like a corpse in white trousers with gold stripes, a uniform embroidered in gold, and a three-cornered hat, walked towards the deputation in a remarkably deliberate manner—that it was very alarming when he began to speak as he accepted the bread and salt, that every one had been surprised at the thinness and whiteness of his hands, and the skin on them, as delicate and gleaming as the hide stripped from a snake, the brilliant, polished gold rings and rings with gems on his dry, slender fingers with their long transparent nails. Now that Governor was no longer among the living, and Vystavkin was dead, also. And in another five or ten years people would be saying, in speaking of Tikhon Ilitch, too: “The late Tikhon Ilitch.”

The room had grown warmer and more cosy, now

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that the stove had got to going well; the little mirror had cleared off; but nothing was to be seen through the windows, which were white with a dull steam, indicating that the weather had grown colder outside. The insistent grunting of the hungry pigs made itself more and more audible. And suddenly the grunt was transmuted into a mighty unanimous roar: obviously the pigs had heard the voices of the cook and Oska, who were lugging to them the heavy tub with their mess. And, without finishing his reflections on death, Tikhon Ilitch flung his cigarette into the slop-basin, drew on his overcoat, and hurried out to the barn. With long strides, sinking deep in the sloppy manure, he opened the door of the sty with his own hands, and for a long time kept his greedy, melancholy eyes riveted on the pigs, which hurled themselves on the trough into which the steaming mess had been poured.

The thought of death had been interrupted by another: "the late," as applied to himself, was all right, but possibly this particular dead man might serve as an example. Who had he been? An orphan, a beggar, who had often had no bread to eat for a couple of days at a stretch. But now? "Your biography ought to be written," Kuzma had said one day, in jest. But there was no occasion for jesting, if you please. He must have had a noddle on his shoulders, if the wretched little urchin who barely knew how to read had turned out not Tishka, but Tikhon Ilitch: that was what it meant.

But all of a sudden the cook, who had also been

staring intently at the pigs as they jostled one another and got their forefeet into the trough, hiccupped and remarked: "Okh, O Lord! I only hope some calamity won't happen to us today! Last night I had a dream—I thought cattle were being driven into our farmyard: sheep, cows, all sorts of pigs were being driven to us. And they were all black, every last one of them was black!"

And once more his heart sank within him. Yes, there were those cattle! The cattle alone were enough to drive a man to hang himself. Not three hours had elapsed—and again you had to seize your keys, again drag fodder for the whole farmyard. In the common stall were three milch cows; in special stalls were the red calf and the bull Bismarck: now they must be supplied with hay. The horse and sheep got bran for their dinner, but the stallion—the devil himself couldn't tell what that beast wanted! He was completely spoiled. He thrust his muzzle against the grated top of his door, sniffed at something, and made grimaces: he curled back his upper lip, bared his rose-coloured gums and white teeth, distorted his nostrils. And Tikhon Ilitch, in a rage which surprised even himself, suddenly yelled at him: "You spoiled pet, curse you, may the lightning strike you!"

Again he had got his feet wet; he had a chill; it began to sleet—and again he had recourse to the mountain-ash-berry brandy. He ate some potatoes with sunflower-seed oil, and salted cucumbers, sour cabbage soup with mushrooms added to it, and wheat groats. His face got red, his head grew heavy.

XVIII

HE began to feel drowsy, thanks to the vodka, what he had eaten, and his incoherent thoughts. Without undressing, merely pulling his muddy boots off by the simple expedient of rubbing one foot against the other, he threw himself on his bed. But he was disturbed by the necessity of rising again almost immediately: before night oat-straw must be given to the horses, the cows, and the sheep, and also to the stallion—or, no, it would be better to mix it with hay and moisten and salt it well. Only, if he let himself go he would certainly fall asleep. Tikhon Ilitch reached out to the chest of drawers, grasped the alarm-clock, and began to wind it up. And the alarm-clock came to life and began to tick—and the atmosphere in the chamber seemed to become more tranquil, more cheerful, under the influence of its rapid, even ticking. His thoughts began to get confused.

But no sooner had they become drowsily obscure than a rough, loud sound of ecclesiastical chanting suddenly made itself audible. Opening his eyes with a start, Tikhon Ilitch at first could make out only one thing: two peasants were roaring through their noses, and a gust of cold air mingled with the odour of wet great-coats penetrated from the ante-room. Then he sprang up, sat on the side of his bed, and scrutinized the peasants to see what sort of men they were, and

suddenly became conscious that his heart had started beating. One was blind—a big pockmarked fellow with a small nose, a long upper lip, and a large round skull—and the second was none other than Makar Ivanovitch!

Makar Ivanovitch had been known, once on a time, as Makarka—everybody called him “Makar-the-Pilgrim”—and one day he entered Tikhon Ilitch’s dramshop. He was roaming somewhither along the highway, arrayed in bast-slippers, a pointed skull-cap of ecclesiastical cut, and a dirty under-cassock—and he had entered. In his hand was a long staff, painted the hue of verdigris, with a cross on its upper extremity and a spear-like point at its lower, a wallet and a soldier’s canteen on his back; his face was broad and the colour of cement, his nostrils were like two gunbarrels, his nose was broken across the middle like a saddle-tree, and his eyes were of the sort which often goes with such noses, light-hued and sharply brilliant. Shameless, shrewd, greedily smoking one cigarette after another and emitting the smoke through his nostrils, speaking in a rough, abrupt tone which completely excluded any reply, he had made an extremely pleasant impression on Tikhon Ilitch, in particular by that tone, because it was immediately evident that he was “a thoroughgoing rascal.”

So Tikon Ilitch kept him with him as his assistant. He removed his tramp’s garb and kept him. But Makarka turned out to be such a thief that it became necessary to give him a severe thrashing and turn him out. A year later Makarka rendered himself famous

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throughout the entire county by his prophecies—prophecies so ill-omened that people began to dread his visits as they dreaded fire. He would walk up under some one's window and snuffingly strike up, "Give rest with the Saints," or would make a present of a fragment of incense or a pinch of dust—and, infallibly, that house soon had a corpse.

Now Makarka, in his original garb, staff in hand, was standing on the threshold and chanting. The blind man was chiming in, rolling his milky eyes up under his lids the while, and Tikhon Ilitch, judging merely from his ill-proportioned features, immediately set him down as a runaway convict, a terrible and ruthless wild beast. But what these vagabonds were singing was even more terrible. The blind man, gloomily twitching his uplifted brows, sang out boldly, in a nasty, snuffling tenor voice. Makarka, his immovable eyes flashing, boomed along in a savage basso. The effect was immeasurably loud, roughly melodious, antiquely ecclesiastical, powerful, and menacing:

"Damp Mother-Earth is weeping heavily, is sobbing!"

sang the blind man.

"Is Wee-p-i-i-ng hea-vi-ly, is sob-bing!"

Makarka repeated sharply, with conviction.

"Before the Saviour, before His image—"

roared the blind man.

“Perchance the sinners will repent!”

threatened Makarka, inflating his insolent nostrils
And merging his basso with the blind man’s tenor, he
articulated distinctly:

“They shall not escape God’s judgment!
They shall not escape the fires eternal!”

And suddenly he broke off—in accord with the blind
man—cleared his throat, and simply, in his habitual
insolent tone, demanded: “Give us a contribution,
merchant, to warm us up.” Thereupon, without wait-
ing for a reply, he strode across the threshold, marched
up to the bed, and thrust a small picture into Tikhon
Ilitch’s hand.

It was a simple clipping from an illustrated journal,
but, as he glanced at it, Tikhon Ilitch felt a sudden
pain in his lower breast. Beneath the picture, which
depicted trees bending before the tempest, a white zig-
zag athwart the storm-cloud, and a falling man, was
the inscription: “Jean-Paul Richter, killed by light-
ning.”

And Tikhon Ilitch was dumbfounded.

But he immediately recovered himself. “Akh, the
scoundrel!” he said to himself, and he slowly tore the
picture into tiny bits. Then he got out of bed and,
drawing on his boots, said: “Go scare some one who
is a bigger fool than I am. I know you well, you see,
my good man! Here—take what’s right, and—God
be with you!” Then he went into the shop, carried
out to Makarka, who was standing with the blind man

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near the porch, a couple of pounds of cracknels and a couple of herrings, and repeated once more, sternly: "The Lord be with you!"

"And how about some tobacco?" audaciously demanded Makarka.

"I have only a scant supply of it on hand for myself."

Makarka grinned.

"Correct!" said he. "That means—furnish your own tobacco, I'll give the paper—and let's have a smoke!"

"Behind the dram-shop in the town tobacco grows on the bushes," retorted Tikhon Ilitch curtly. "You can't outdo me in foul language, my good man!" And, after a pause, he added: "Hanging's too good for you, Makarka, after the tricks you've played!"

Makarka surveyed the blind man, who was standing erect, firmly planted with brows elevated, and asked him: "Man of God, what ought we to do, think you? Strangle him or shoot him?"

"Shooting's surer," replied the blind man gravely. "At any rate, that's the most direct road."

XIX

IT was growing dark, the thick layers of clouds were turning blue and cold, and there was a touch of winter in the air. The mud was congealing. Having got rid of Makarka, Tikhon Ilitch stamped his frost-bitten feet on the porch and entered the house.

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There, without removing his coat and cap, he seated himself on a chair near the little window, began to smoke, and again became immersed in thought. He recalled to mind the summer, the rebellion, the Bride, his brother, his wife—and that, so far, he had not paid off his farmhands for their season's work. It was his custom to delay payment. The young girls and children who came to him on daily wages stood for days on end at his threshold, complained of their extreme need, waxed angry, sometimes made insolent remarks. But he was inexorable. He shouted and called upon God to witness that he had only two coppers in his house. "Search and see if you can find any more!"—and he turned his pockets and his purse inside out and spat in feigned wrath, as though amazed by the distrust, the "dishonesty" of the suppliants. But now that custom seemed to him the opposite of good. He had been ruthlessly harsh with his wife, and cold, and so complete a stranger to her that, at times, he utterly forgot her existence. And now, all of a sudden, this astonished him: good God, why, he had not even the least idea what sort of person she was! If she were to die that day, he would not be able to say two words as to why she had lived, what she had thought, what she had felt throughout all the long years she had lived with him—those years which had merged themselves into a single year, and had flashed past in ceaseless cares and anxieties. And what had he to show for all those worries? He threw away his cigarette, and lighted a fresh one. Ugh, but that Makarka was a clever beast! and, once granted that he was clever,

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why wasn't it possible that he might be able to foresee things—when something was coming, and what it was, and to whom? Something abominable was, indubitably, awaiting him, Tikhon Ilitch. For one thing, he was no longer a young man. How many of his contemporaries were in the other world! And from death and old age there is no escape! Not even children would have saved him. And he would not have known the children, and the children would have found him as much of a stranger as he had been to all those, alive or dead, who had been nearly connected with him. There were as many people on the earth as there are stars in the sky; but life is short, people come into being, grow up, and die so rapidly, are so slightly acquainted with one another, and so quickly forget all that has happened to them, that it is enough to drive a man crazy if he once sets about considering the matter attentively! Only quite recently he had said to himself: "My life ought to be written up. . . ." But what was there to write about? Nothing. Nothing at all, or nothing of any consequence. Why, he himself could recall scarcely anything of that life. For example, he had completely forgotten his childhood: once in a while, it is true, a fleeting memory would flash across his mind of some summer day, some incident, some playfellow. Once he had singed somebody's cat—and had been whipped for it. Some one had given him a little whip with a bird-call whistle in the handle, and it had made him indescribably happy. His drunken father had a special way of calling to him—caressingly, his voice laden with sadness:

“Come to me, Tisha, come, dear lad!” Then, suddenly, he would grab him by the hair. . . .

If Ilya Mironoff, the huckster, had still been alive, Tikhon Ilitch would have supported him out of kindness, and would have known nothing about him, and would barely have noticed his existence. It had been the same way with his mother. Ask him now: “Do you remember your mother?” and he would answer: “I remember some crooked old woman who dried the manure and kept the stove hot, tippled in secret, and grumbled.” Nothing more. He had served nearly ten years with Matorin, but that decade had melted together into about a day or two: the fine April rain pattering down and speckling the sheets of iron which, rattling and clanging, were being loaded into a cart alongside the neighbouring shop; a grey, frosty noon-day, the pigeons alighting in a noisy flock upon the snow beside the shop of another neighbour who dealt in flour, groats, and bran, crowding together, cooing and flapping their wings, while he and his brother whipped with an ox-tail a peg-top spinning on the threshold. Matorin was young, then, and robust, and purplish-red of complexion, with his chin cleanly shaven and sandy side-whiskers cut down to half-length. Now he was poor; he ambled about with the walk of an old man, his great-coat faded by the sun, and his capacious cap; ambled from shop to shop, from one acquaintance to another, played checkers, lounged in Daeff’s eating-house, drank a little, got tipsy and loquacious: “We are pretty folks: we’ve drunk, and eaten, and paid our score—and off we go,

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home!" And, on encountering Tikhon Ilitch, he did not immediately recognize him, but would smile woe-fully and say: "Is that really you, Tisha?"

And Tikhon Ilitch himself had not recognized his own brother when first they met that autumn: "Can that be Kuzma, with whom I roamed for so many years about the fields, the villages, and the byelanes?"

("How old you have grown, brother!")

"I have, a bit."

"And how early!"

"That's because I'm a Russian. That happens quickly with us.")

And, great heavens, how everything had changed since the days when they had been roving peddlers! How dreadfully unlike was the present Tikhon Ilitch to the half-gipsy huckster Tisha, swarthy as a black-beetle, reckless, and merry!

As he lighted his third cigarette, Tikhon Ilitch stared fixedly and questioningly out of the tiny window:

"Can it be like this in other lands?"

No, it could not be the same. Men of his acquaintance had been abroad—there was merchant Rukavishnikoff, for instance—and they had told him things. And even aside from Rukavishnikoff, one could put things together. Take the Germans of the towns, or the Jews: all conduct themselves reasonably, are punctual, all know one another, all are friends—and that not alone in a state of intoxication—and all are mutually helpful: if they are separated, they write letters to one another all their lives long

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and exchange portraits of fathers, mothers, acquaintances from family to family; they teach their children, love them, walk with them, talk with them as with equals so that the child has something to remember. But with us, all are enemies of one another, every one envies and slanders every one else, goes to see acquaintances once a year, sits apart, each in his kennel; all bustle about like madmen when any one drops in for a visit, and dash around to put the rooms in order. But what's the truth of the matter? They begrudge the guest a spoonful of preserves! The guest will not drink a second cup of tea without being specially invited. Ugh, you slant-eyed Kirghizi! You yellow-haired Mordvinians! You savages!

Some one's troika-team drove past the windows. Tikhon Ilitch scrutinized it attentively. The horses were emaciated but obviously mettlesome. The tarantas was in good condition. Whose could it be? No one in the immediate neighbourhood owned such a troika. The neighbouring landed proprietors were so indignant that they sat for three days at a stretch without bread, had sold the last scrap of vestments from their holy pictures, had not a farthing wherewith to replace broken glass or mend the roof; instead they stuffed cushions into the window-frames and set bread-troughs and buckets all over the floor when rain came on—and it poured through the ceilings as through a sieve. Then Deniska the cobbler passed. Where was he going? And what was that he had with him? That couldn't be a valise he was carrying? Okh, there's a fool for you, forgive my sin, O Lord!

XX

M ECHANICALLY Tikhon Ilitch threw his great-coat on over his jacket, thrust his feet into overshoes, and went out on the porch. On emerging he inhaled a deep breath of fresh air in the bluish early winter twilight, then halted once more and sat down on the bench. Yes, there was another nice family—the Grey Man, Syery, and his son! Tikhon Ilitch traversed in thought the road which Deniska had traversed in the mud, with that valise in his hand. He descried Durnovka, his manor, the ravine, the peasant cottages, the descending twilight, the light in his brother's room, the lights among the peasant dwellings. Kuzma was probably sitting and reading. The Bride was standing in the dark, cold ante-room near the faintly-heated stove, warming her hands, her back, waiting until she should be told "Bring the supper!" and, with her dry lips, already grown old and pursed up, was thinking—of what? Perchance of Rodka? 'Twas a lie, all that about her having poisoned Rodka—a lie! But if she did poison him—

Oh, Lord God! If she did poison him, what must she be feeling? What a heavy tombstone lay upon her strange, reticent soul! And how had that come about upon which she had decided, crazed by hatred of Rodka and of his brutal beatings—possibly, also, by her outraged feelings toward him, Tikhon Ilitch, and

her disgrace, and the fear that Rodka would eventually hear of that disgrace? Okh, and he had been in the habit of beating her! And Tikhon Ilitch had played a fine part, too. And God would surely punish him, too.

With his mind's eye he cast a glance from the porch of his Durnovka manor house, at Durnovka—a rebel, also!—at the black cottages scattered over the declivity beyond the ravine, at the threshing floors and bushes in their back yards. Beyond the houses to the left, on the horizon, stood a railway watch-tower. Past it, in the twilight, a train was running, and with it ran a chain of fiery eyes. Then eyes began to shine out from the cottages. It grew darker; one began to feel more comfortable—yet a disagreeable sensation stirred every time one cast a glance at the cottages of the Bride and the Grey Man, which stood almost in the centre of Durnovka, separated only by three houses. There was no light in either of them. And it was that way nearly all winter long! The Grey Man's small children frolicked with joy and wonder when he managed, on some lucky evening, to burn a light in the cottage.

“Yes, 'tis sinful!” said Tikhon Ilitch firmly, and rose from his seat. “Yes, 'tis wicked! I must give them at least a little help,” he said, as he wended his way towards the station.

The air was frosty, and the odour of the samovar which was wafted from the station was more fragrant than it had been on the preceding day. The lights at the gate were burning more brightly beyond the trees, which had been smartly frost-bitten and were almost bare, tinted by a little scanty foliage.

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The sleighbells on the troika pealed more sonorously. A capital team of horses, those three! On the contrary, it was painful to look at the wretched nags of the peasant cabmen, their tiny vehicles mounted on half-crumbling, misshapen wheels, plastered with mud. The door to the railway station was squeaking and dully banging beyond the palisade. Making his way around it, Tikhon Ilitch ascended the lofty stone platform, on which a copper samovar of a couple of buckets' capacity was hissing, its grating glowing red like fiery teeth; and immediately came upon the person of whom he was in search—that is, Deniska.

Deniska, his head bowed in thought, was standing on the platform and holding in his right hand a cheap grey valise, lavishly studded with tin nailheads and bound about with a rope. Deniska was wearing an under-jacket, an old and, evidently, a very heavy garment with pendant shoulders and a very low waist-line, a new peaked cap, and dilapidated boots. His figure was badly built; his legs were extremely short in comparison with his body: "I have nothing but a body," he sometimes said of himself, with a laugh. Now, with that low waist-line and those broken boots, his legs looked shorter than ever.

"Denis?" shouted Tikhon Ilitch. "What are you doing here?"

Deniska, who was never surprised at anything, raised his dark and languid eyes with their long lashes, looked at him with a melancholy grin, and pulled the cap from his hair. His hair was mouse-coloured and immeasurably thick; his face was earthy in hue and

bore the appearance of having been greased, but his eyes were handsome.

“Good Morning, Tikhon Ilitch,” he replied, in a sing-song citified tenor voice, and, as usual, rather shyly. “I’m going to—what d’ye call it?—to Tula.”

“But why, if you permit me to ask?”

“Maybe some sort of a job will turn up there.”

Tikhon Ilitch surveyed him. In his hand was the valise; from the pocket of his long-skirted waistcoat protruded sundry little books in green and red covers, twisted into a roll. The waistcoat must belong to some one else. “You’re no dandy to make an impression in Tula!”

Deniska also cast an appraising eye over himself.

“The waistcoat, you mean?” he inquired modestly. “Well, when I earn some money in Tula, I’ll buy myself a hussar jacket. I did pretty well during the summer. I sold newspapers.”

Tikhon Ilitch nodded in the direction of the valise: “What’s that contraption you have there?”

Deniska lowered his eyelashes. “I bought myself a volish, sir.”

“Well, you can’t possibly go about in a hussar jacket without a valise!” said Tikhon Ilitch scoffingly. “And what’s that you’ve got in your pocket?”

“Nothing much—just a lot of small stuff.”

“Let me look at it.”

Deniska set down his valise on the platform and pulled the little books out of his pocket. Tikhon Ilitch took them and examined them attentively. There was the song-book “Marusya,” “The Woman

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Debauchee," "An Innocent Young Girl in the Clutches of Violence," "Congratulatory Verses to Parents, Teachers, and Benefactors," "The Rôle—"

At this point Tikhon Ilitch faltered, but Deniska, who was watching closely, briskly and modestly prompted him: "The Rôle of the Proletariat in Russia."

Tikhon Ilitch shook his head. "Here's something new! Not a mouthful of food, but you buy yourself a valise and nasty little books. Truly, 'tis not for nothing that folks call you an agitator. They say you are constantly reviling the Tsar! Look out, brother!"

"Well, 'tis not so costly as buying an estate," replied Deniska, with a melancholy grin. "They are good little books. And I haven't touched the Tsar. They tell lies about me as if I were dead and couldn't defend myself. But I never had any such thing in my thoughts. Am I a lunatic?"

The door-pulley creaked, and the station watchman made his appearance—a discharged soldier, grey-haired, afflicted with a hoarse, whistling asthma—also the restaurant keeper, a fat man with puffy eyes and greasy hair.

"Step aside, Messrs. Merchants, let me get the samovar." Deniska stepped aside and again grasped the handle of his valise.

"You stole that somewhere, I suppose?" asked Tikhon Ilitch, nodding towards the valise, and thinking of the business upon which he had come to the station.

Deniska bent his head but made no reply.

"And it's empty, of course?"

Deniska broke into a laugh.

"Yes, it's empty."

"Were you turned out of your place?"

"I left of my own accord."

Tikhon Ilitch heaved a sigh. "The living image of his father!" said he. "That one was always exactly like that: Pitch him out of a place by the scruff of his neck, and he'd tell you—'I left of my own accord.'"

"May I drop dead right before your eyes if I'm lying."

"Well, all right, all right. Have you been at home?"

"Yes, two weeks."

"Is your father out of work again?"

"Yes, he is out of work naow."

"Naow!" Tikhon Ilitch mimicked him. "A wooden-headed village! And a revolutionary to boot! You're trying to play the wolf, but your dog's tail betrays you."

"I rather think you come from the same litter," Deniska said to himself, with a faint grin, keeping his head down.

"That means, the Grey Man is sitting at home smoking?"

"He's a worthless fellow!" said Deniska with conviction.

Tikhon Ilitch rapped him on the head with his knuckles. "You might, at least, not exhibit your stupidity! Who speaks of his father like that?"

"He ought to be called an old dog, not a daddy," replied Deniska calmly. "If he's a father—then let

him provide food. But he has fed me heartily, hasn't he?"

But Tikhon Ilitch was not listening to him. He chose a suitable moment for beginning a business-like talk. And, paying no heed to him, he interrupted: "Well, you've turned out an empty-headed babbler. Has Yakoff sold the mare?"

Deniska suddenly broke out into a coarse, vociferous guffaw. But he replied in the same sing-song tenor voice as usual: "Yakoff Mikititch, you mean? What are you talking about? He's getting richer and richer, and stingier and stingier. There was a great joke on him yesterday!"

"What about?"

"Why, there was! His colt died, and what sort of a trick did he concoct? He made use of its legs and hoofs. He hadn't enough stakes for his wattled fence, so—he took and wove in those same legs."

"He's fit for a cabinet-minister, not a peasant!" said Tikhon Ilitch. "You tatterdemalions are not in the same class with him. I suppose you are travelling to Tula on a wolf's ticket?"

"And what should I want of a ticket?" retorted Deniska. "I get into the carriage and dive straight under the seat—and may the Lord bless and protect! All I want is to get to Uzlovskaya."

"What's that? Uzlovskaya? Do you mean Uz-slova?"

"Well, then, Uzslova; it's the same thing. I'll ride there, and from there on 'tis not far—I can go afoot."

"And what were you thinking about doing with all your little books? You can't read them under the seat."

Deniska thought that over. "Right you are!" said he. "Well, I won't stay under the bench all the time. I'll creep into the toilet—I can read there until daylight."

Tikhon Ilitch frowned. "Well, see here now," he began. "See here: 'tis time for you to stop that sort of talk. You're not a small boy, you fool. Trot back as fast as you can to Durnovka. 'Tis time to buckle down to business. Why, as you are, it makes one sick at the stomach just to look at you. My courtyard-councillors there live better than you do. I'll help you—that's got to be done—at the start. Well, I'll help you to get some simple merchandise and implements. Then you'll be able to feed yourself and give a little to your father."

"What's he driving at with all this?" Deniska said to himself.

But Tikhon Ilitch had come to a decision, and wound up: "Yes, and 'tis time you married."

"So—oo, that's it!" said Deniska to himself, and began in a leisurely way to roll himself a cigarette.

"Very good," he responded, with a barely perceptible trace of sadness, and without raising his eyelashes. "I'll not resist. I might marry. 'Tis worse to go with the public women."

"Well, and that's precisely the point," put in Tikhon Ilitch, perturbed. "Only, brother, bear in mind that you must make a sensible marriage. 'Tis a good

thing to have money on which to rear your children."

Deniska burst out laughing.

"What are you guffawing about?"

"Why, what you say, of course! Rear! As though they were chickens or pigs."

"They require food, just as much as chickens and pigs do."

"And whom shall I marry?" inquired Deniska, with a melancholy smile.

"Whom? Why, any one you like."

"You mean the Bride?"

Tikhon Ilitch flushed deeply. "Fool! What's wrong with the Bride? She's a peaceable, hard-working woman—"

Deniska remained silent, and picked with his fingernail at one of the tin nailheads on the valise. Then he pretended to be stupid. "There's a lot of them—of young women," he drawled. "I don't know which one you're jabbering about. Do you happen to mean the one with whom you lived?"

But Tikhon Ilitch had already recovered his composure. "Whether I have lived with her or not is none of your business, you pig," he retorted, and that so swiftly and peremptorily that Deniska submissively muttered:

"Well, 'tis all the same to me. I only said— 'Twas a chance remark—slipped off my tongue."

"Well, then, mind what you're about, and don't indulge in idle chatter. I'll make decent people of you. Do you understand? I'll give you a dowry. Understand that?"

Deniska reflected. "I think I'll go to Tula—" he began.

"The cock has found a pearl! A priceless idea! What are you going to do in Tula?"

"We're too starved at home."

Tikhon Ilitch unfastened his coat, thrust his hand into the pocket of his sleeveless under-kaftan—he had almost made up his mind to give Deniska a twenty-kopek coin. But he came to his senses—'twas stupid to squander his money, and, what was more, that dolt would become conceited, would say he had been bribed. So he pretended to be hunting for something. "Ah, I've forgotten my cigarettes! Come, give me some tobacco."

Deniska gave him his tobacco-pouch. The lantern over the station entrance had already been lighted, and by its dim light Tikhon Ilitch read aloud the inscription embroidered in coarse white thread on the bag: "To whoam I luv I giv I luv hartilie I giv a poch foureaver." "That's clever!" he said, when he had finished reading.

Deniska modestly cast down his eyes.

"So you have a lady-love already?"

"There's a lot of them, the hussies, roaming about!" replied Deniska, quite unembarrassed. "But as for marrying—I don't refuse. I'll be back by the Meat-days, and then, Lord bless our marriage!"

From behind the palisade thundered a peasant cart, spattered all over with mud. It rolled up to the platform with a peasant perched on the side-rail and the deacon, Govoroff, from Ulianovka, seated on the straw

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inside. "Has it gone?" shouted the deacon in agitated tones, thrusting out of the straw one foot in a new overshoe. Every individual hair of his frowsy, reddish-sandy beard curled turbulently; his cap had retreated to the nape of his neck: his face was fiery-red from the wind and his excitement.

"The train, you mean?" inquired Tikhon Ilitch. "No, sir, it hasn't even arrived yet. Good morning, Father Deacon."

"Aha! Well then, thank God!" said the deacon joyfully and hastily; but nevertheless he leaped from the cart and rushed headlong to the door.

Tikhon Ilitch shook his head. "Oh, that long-maned fellow came at the wrong time! Nothing will come of my affair!"¹ But as he grasped the handle of the door he said, firmly and confidently: "Well, so be it. It's settled for the meat-season."

XXI

THE railway station was permeated with the odours of wet sheepskin coats, the samovar, cheap tobacco, and kerosene. The smoke was so dense that it gripped one's throat; the lamps hardly

¹All priests and monks in the Orthodox Catholic Church wear the hair and beard long. Tikhon Ilitch refers to the superstition that it portends bad luck to meet an ecclesiastic when one is arranging something or going somewhere.—

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shone through the clouds of it, and of the semi-darkness, dampness, and cold. The doors squeaked and banged; peasants, whips in hand, jostled and yelled—cabmen from Ulianovka, who sometimes waited a whole week before they captured a passenger. In and out among them, with brows elevated, perambulated a Jew grain-dealer, wearing a round-topped hat and a hooded overcoat and carrying an umbrella over his shoulder. Near the ticket-seller's window peasants were dragging to the scales the trunks of some land-owners and basket-hampers enveloped in oil-cloth. The telegraph clerk, who was discharging the duties of assistant station agent, was shouting at the peasants. He was a short-legged young fellow with a big head and a curly yellow crest of hair, brought forth from beneath his cap on the left temple, kazak fashion. A pointer dog as spotted as a frog, with melancholy eyes like those of a human being, was sitting on the dirty floor and shivering violently.

Elbowing his way through the crowd of peasants, Tikhon Ilitch approached the door of the first-class waiting-room, beside which, on the wall, hung a wooden frame containing letters, telegrams, and newspapers, which sometimes lay on the floor. It turned out that there were no letters for him. There was nothing but three numbers of the "Orloff Messenger." Tikhon Ilitch was on the point of stepping over to the counter to have a chat with the restaurant manager. But on a stool by the counter sat a drunken man with blue, glassy eyes and shiny purplish face, in a round grey-peaked cap topped with a button—the cellarman

from the whiskey distillery of Prince Lobanoff. So Tikhon Ilitch hastily turned back. He knew that cellarman only too well: if that man's eye lighted on him he wouldn't be able to tear himself free for twenty-four hours.

Deniska was still standing on the platform. "I want to ask you something, Tikhon Ilitch," he said with even more timidity than was his wont.

"What is it?" inquired Tikhon Ilitch angrily. "Money? I won't give you any."

"No, not money at all. I want you to read my letter."

"A letter? To whom?"

"To you. I wanted to give it to you a long time ago, but I didn't dare."

"Well, what's it about?"

"Why—I have described my way of life."

Tikhon Ilitch took the scrap of paper from Deniska's hand, thrust it into his pocket, and strode swiftly homeward through the springy mud, which was beginning to congeal.

He was now in a resolute frame of mind. He craved work, and reflected with pleasure that there was something to be done—the cattle must be fed. After all, 'twas a pity he had lost his temper and discharged Chaff; now he would have to lose his sleep at night. Very little reliance could be placed on Oska. Probably he was already asleep. If not, he was sitting with the cook and reviling his master. And, passing by the lighted windows of his cottage, Tikhon Ilitch crept into the ante-room, stumbled in the darkness over the

cold, fragrant straw, and glued his ear to the door. Laughter, and then the voice of Oska, were audible on the other side of the door.

“So now, here’s another story. In a village dwelt a peasant, poor, the poorest of the poor; in all the village there was none poorer than he. And one day, my good people, this same peasant went out to till his land. And a spotted cur dogged him. The peasant ploughed along, and the cur nosed about all over the field and kept digging at something. He dug and dug, and how he ho-owled! What was the meaning of that? The peasant ran to him, looked into the hole, and there was—a kettle.”

“A ket-tle?” asked the cook.

“Just listen to what comes next. The kettle was only a kettle, but in the kettle was—gold! An immense quantity. Well, and so the peasant became very rich.”

“Akh, lies!” said Tikhon Ilitch to himself, and began to listen eagerly to what was going to happen to the peasant next.

“The peasant got rich, and lost his head, just like any merchant—”

“Exactly like our Stiff-Leg,” interposed the cook.

Tikhon Ilitch grinned: he knew that, for a long time, he had been called “Stiff-leg.” Every man has some nickname.

Oska went on: “Even richer than he. Yes. And then the dog takes and dies. What was he to do? He couldn’t bear it—he was sorry for the dog, and he had to bury him decently—”

An explosion of laughter rang out. The story-teller himself guffawed, and so did some one else—some one with an old man's cough.

"Can it be Chaff?" thought Tikhon Ilitch, in perturbation. "Well, glory to God! I told that fool myself: 'You'll be coming back!'"

"The peasant went to the priest," pursued Oska—"he went to the priest: 'Thus and so, father, a dog has died—he must be buried.'"

Again the cook could not control herself and shrieked joyously: "Phew, you stick at nothing!"

"Give me a chance to finish!" shouted Oska in his turn, and once more dropped into the narrative tone, depicting now the priest, now the peasant: "'Thus and so, batiushka—the dog must be buried.' The priest stamped his feet: 'How is it to be buried? Where is it to be buried? In the cemetery? I'll make you rot in prison, I'll have you put in fetters!'—'Batiushka, you see, this is no common dog: when he was dying he bequeathed you five hundred rubles!' The priest fairly leaped from his seat: 'Fool! Am I scolding you for burying the dog? I'm scolding you about the place where he is to be buried. He must be buried in the churchyard!'"

Tikhon Ilitch coughed loudly and opened the door. At the table beside the smoking lamp, the broken chimney of which was patched on one side with a bit of blackened paper, sat the cook, her head bent and her face completely veiled by her wet hair. She was combing it with a wooden comb and inspecting the comb athwart her hair by the light of the lamp. Oska,

with a cigarette in his teeth, was laughing vociferously, his head thrown back, as he dangled his feet to and fro in their bast-slippers. Near the stove, in the semi-darkness, gleamed a red spark of flame—a pipe. When Tikhon Ilitch jerked the door open and made his appearance on the threshold, the laughter came to an abrupt end, and the person who was smoking the pipe rose timidly from his seat, removed the pipe from his mouth, and thrust it into his pocket. Yes, it was Chaff! But Tikhon Ilitch shouted, in an alert and friendly way, as though nothing had happened that morning: “Time to feed the cattle, my lads!”

XXII

THEY rambled about the stable with a lantern, illuminating the coagulated manure, the straw scattered all about, the mangers, the posts; casting immense shadows, waking up the fowls on the roosts under the sloping roofs. The chickens flew down, tumbled down, and, with heads ducked forward, fell asleep as they ran, fleeing as chance directed. The large purplish eyes of the horses, which turned their heads toward the light, gleamed and looked strange and splendid. A mist rose from their breath, as if all of them were smoking. And when Tikhon Ilitch lowered the lantern and glanced upward, he beheld with joy, above the square farmyard in the deep, pure

sky, the brilliant vari-coloured stars. The north wind could be heard crackling drily over the roofs and whistling through the crevices with a frosty chill. Thank the Lord, winter was come!

Having completed his task and ordered the samovar, Tikhon Ilitch went with his lantern into the cold shop, reeking with smells, and picked out the best pickled herring he could find. That was all right, not a bad idea: to cheer oneself up a bit before tea! And at tea he ate it, drank several small glasses of bitter-sweet, yellowish-red liqueur made of mountain-ash berries, poured himself out a brimming cup of tea, and drew towards him his large old counting-frame. But, after some reflection, he hunted out Deniska's letter and set himself to the task of deciphering its scrawl.

"Denya reseved 40 rubles in munny, and than kolected his thinges . . ." ("Forty!" said Tikhon Ilitch to himself. "Akh, the poor beggar!") "Denya wint to Tula station and hee wos enstantly robbt they tuk Evrything to the last kopak hee had nowere to gow and sadness Sezed heem . . ."

This absurd scrawl was difficult and tiresome to decipher, but the evening was long, and he had nothing else to do. The samovar purred busily, the lamp shone with a quiet light—and there was sadness in the tranquillity and repose of the evening. The watchman's mallet was working away as he made his rounds noisily, beating out a dance-tune upon the frosty air.

"Aftr thot I hainkrd to goa hoam thoa fader wos vairy brutl . . ."

"Well, and there's a fool for you, Lord forgive me!" thought Tikhon Ilitch. "The Grey Man brutal, forsooth!"

"I wint Into the tik foarest to peck out the talest fur-tre and taik a cord frum a shuger-loof and fixe myselff in iternl laife in my nu briches but witaut boots . . ."

("Without his boots, he means, I suppose?" said Tikhon Ilitch, holding the paper at a distance from his tired eyes. "Yes, that's right; that's what he means.")

"Eftwords come strung wind blu clauds and thunstrum and a kwik bige litul rayne poared the son kam frum behain foarest the coard bend bend and asuden brooke and Denya fall on the grond the ents krall and bigin to bite and wurk on hem and thair cold alzo a snaek and a green krawfish . . ."

Tossing the letter into the slop-bowl, Tikhon Ilitch sipped his tea, planted his elbows on the table, and stared at the lamp. What a queer nation! A soul of many hues! Now a man is just a plain dog, then again he is melancholy, pities himself, turns soft, weeps over himself—after the fashion of Deniska, or of himself, Tikhon Ilitch. The window-panes were perspiring vigorously and clearly, as they do in winter; the watchman's mallet said something melodiously coherent. Ekh, if he only had children! If—well, if he only had a nice mistress instead of that bloated old woman, who made his flesh crawl merely by what she said; by her words about the Princess, and about some pious nun or other named Polikarpia, who was

called in the town "Polukarpia."¹ But it was too late, too late.

Unfastening the embroidered collar of his shirt, Tikhon Ilitch, with a bitter smile, felt of his throat behind the ears. Those hollows were the first sign of old age; his head was assuming the shape of a horse's head! But otherwise things were not so bad. He bent his head, thrust his fingers into his beard. And his beard was grey, dry, dishevelled. Yes, enough—enough, Tikhon Ilitch!

He drank, grew intoxicated, set his jaws more and more tightly, stared more intently than ever at the wick of the lamp, burning with an even flame. Think of it! You couldn't go to see your own brother—the pigs prevented, like the swine they were! And if they would let him, there would still be small cause for joy. Kuzma would read him a lecture, the Bride would stand with lips pressed tight and drooping eyelashes. Why, those lowered eyelids alone were enough to make a man take to his heels!

His heart sank within him, ached; a pleasing mist clouded his brain. Where had he heard that song?—

"My tiresome evening's come;
I know not what to do.
My friend lov'd is come,
He fondles me, loves me true."

Ah, yes, it was in Lebedyan, at the posting station. The young girls, lace-makers, were sitting on a winter

¹ Polu, meaning "half," reduces the name to absurdity: something like "the Half-carp."—

evening and singing. There they sat, weaving their lace and never raising their eyelashes; they sang in deep, ringing voices:

“He kisses me, embraces me,
Then takes his leave of me. . . .”

His brain was clouded. Now it seemed as if everything lay ahead of him—joy, liberty, freedom from care—then his heart began to ache painfully, hopelessly. Now he said: “If I only had a bit of money in my pocket, I could buy anything—even an aunt—at the market!” Again he cast a vicious glance at the lamp, and muttered, alluding to his brother: “Teacher! Preacher! Pitiful Philaret!¹ Ragged devil!”

He drank the rest of the mountain-ash-berry cordial and smoked until the room grew dark. With uncertain steps he went out, across the shaking uneven floor, clad only in his roundabout, into the dark ante-room. He was sensible of the piercing coldness of the air, the smell of straw, the odour of dogs, and he perceived two greenish lights blinking on the threshold. “Buyan!” he shouted. And he kicked Buyan over the head with all his might.

Then he listened to the watchman’s mallet, keeping time to it with his feet. He spat on the steps of the porch, mentally accompanying the action with:

“Come straight to me,
Look straight at me.”

¹ Referring to a famous Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow.
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And as he set off in the direction of the highway he shouted: "Blow on a squirrel's tail—it will be all the more downy for it!"

A deathlike silence lay over the earth, which showed softly black in the starlight. The highway shone faintly white as it faded out in the gloom. Far away, as if emanating from beneath the surface of the earth, a rumbling sound became audible and grew louder from moment to moment. And suddenly the orchestra came to the surface with its droning: in the distance, cutting across the highway, its chain of windows lighted by electricity, gleaming whitely, trailing smoke-wreaths as a flying witch trails her tresses, redly illuminated from below, the express train dashed past.

"It's passing Durnovka!" said Tikhon Ilitch, with a hiccough. "Passing the Grey Man! Akh, the robbers, curse them—"

The drowsy cook entered the living-room, which was dimly lighted by the burned-out lamp and stank of tobacco. She was bringing in a greasy little kettle of sour cabbage soup, which she held in rags black with dirt and soot. Tikhon Ilitch cast a sidelong glance at her and said: "Get out of here, this very minute."

The cook wheeled round, pushed open the door with her foot, and disappeared. Then he picked up Gatzuk's calendar, dipped a rusty pen into the rusty ink, and began, with set teeth and leaden eyes staring fixedly, to write endlessly on the calendar, up and down and across:

"Gatzuk, Gatzuk, Gatzuk, Gatzuk . . ."

PART TWO



I

ALMOST all his life long Kuzma had dreamed of writing, of obtaining an education. Verses did not count. He had dallied with verses as a mere child. He longed to narrate how he had come to naught; to depict, with unprecedented ruthlessness, his poverty and that dreadful factor in his commonplace life which had crippled him, made of him a barren fig-tree.

When he reviewed his life in his own mind he both condemned and acquitted himself. Yes, he was an indigent petty townsman who, almost up to the age of fifteen, had been able to read only by spelling out every word. But his history was the history of all self-taught Russians. He had been born in a country which had more than a hundred million illiterate inhabitants. He had grown up in the Black Suburb, where down to the present day men fight to the death with their fists. In his childhood he had seen dirt and drunkenness, laziness and boredom. His childhood had furnished only one poetical impression: there had been the dark cemetery grove, and the pasture on the hill behind the Suburb, and beyond that—space, the hot mirage of the steppe, a white cottage beneath a poplar-tree in the far distance. But

he had been taught to look upon even this cottage with scorn: Little Russians dwelt there, and, of course, they were so stupid that in reply to the question, "Little Russians, where are your kettles?"¹ they said: "Do you need to be told that they are under the wagons?" He and Tikhon had been taught the alphabet and figures by a neighbour named Byelkin, whose trade was to make rubber overshoes in moulds; but he had taught them because he never had any work—for what demand was there in the Suburb for overshoes?—and because it was always agreeable to pull some one's hair, and because a man cannot sit for ever on the earth wall alongside his hut absolutely idle, with his frowsy head bent and exposed to the sun, doing nothing but spit in the dust between his bare feet.

In Matorin's shop the brothers had speedily attained to writing and reading, and Kuzma had begun to be attracted by the little books which the accordeon-player, old Balashkin, the eccentric free-thinker of the bazaar, gave him. But what chance for reading was there in the shop? Matorin very often shouted: "I'll box your ears for those books of yours, you abominable little devil!"

That was an old story; but Kuzma wished to recall, also, the morals of the bazaar. In the bazaar he had picked up much that was opprobrious. There he and his brother had been taught to sneer at the

¹The insulting nickname "khokhly" is used. The question mentioned is in the form of a rhyme, intentionally offensive. The reply is also rhymed.—TRANS.

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poverty of their mother, at her having taken to drink, abandoned as she was by her adolescent sons. There they once played the following prank: Every day, on his way from the library, the son of the tailor Vitebsky passed the door of the shop—a Jew aged sixteen, with a pallid greyish face; a terribly lean, big-eared fellow who wore spectacles and industriously read as he walked, his book held close up to his eyes. So they threw some bricks and rubbish on the sidewalk—and the Jew (“that learned man!”) stumbled so successfully that he bruised his knees, elbows, and teeth to the point of bleeding. Then Kuzma started to write. He began a story about a merchant who, driving by night in a fearful thunderstorm through the Murom forests, came upon an encampment of bandits and got his throat cut. Kuzma fervently set forth his remarks and thoughts on the brink of death, his grief over his iniquitous life, “so prematurely cut short.” But the bazaar mercilessly threw cold water on it.

“Well, you are a queer one, Lord forgive us!” it pronounced, merrily and insolently, through Tikhon’s mouth. “‘Prematurely’! That pot-bellied devil ought to have been done for long before! Well, and how did you know what he was thinking about? They cut his throat, didn’t they?”

Then Kuzma wrote, in the style of Koltzoff, a ballad about an extremely ancient knight who bequeathed to his son a faithful steed. “He carried me in my youth!” exclaimed the hero in the ballad. But Tikhon merely shook his head over that.

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“Really!” said he, “how old was that horse? Akh, Kuzma! Kuzma! You’d better compose something practical—well, about the war, for example.”

And Kuzma, catering to the taste of the market-place, began with great zeal to write about what the bazaar was discussing at the moment—the Russo-Turkish war: about how—

“In the year of seventy-seven
The Turk set out to fight;
He advanced with his hordes
And tried to capture Russia”

and how those hordes

In uncouth nightcaps
Crept stealthily to the Tsar-Cannon.¹

Later on it pained him to realize how much stupidity and ignorance this doggerel contained, the servile quality of its language, and its Russian scorn for foreign headgear. With pain he recalled much else. For example, Zadonsk. One day there he was overcome by a passionate longing for repentance, a terror lest his mother, who had died, practically, of starvation, had bitterly reported in heaven her sorrowful life; and he set forth on foot to the abode of a holy man. Once there, he did nothing whatever except to read to assembled admirers, with malicious joy, a “sheet” which had made a special impression on him: how a certain village scribe had taken it into his head to

¹That is, to the heart of the Kremlin, in Moscow.—TRANS.

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reject the authorities and the Church, and God had waxed so wroth that "this aristocrat was laid low on his bed of death," his malady such that "he devoured more than a pig, and shrieked that that was not enough, and withered away until he was unrecognizable." And Kuzma's entire youth was spent in just such affairs! He thought and professed one thing—and said and did something entirely different. Aspiring to write and reckoning up the sum-total of his life, Kuzma shook his head mournfully: "A genuine Russian trait, sir! The sowing was half peas, half thistles."

It seemed as if he had been merry in his youth, kind, tender, quick to understand, eager to learn. But was it really so? He was not Tikhon, of course. But why had he, equally with Tikhon, assimilated so promptly the savagery of those who surrounded him? Why had he, kind and tender as he was, so mercilessly neglected his mother? Why had the bazaar so long reigned supreme over his heart, which was toiling so ardently over books? Why, why was he—a barren fig-tree?

Tikhon had been in the habit of keeping most of his earnings in one common money-box: they had decided to set up in business for themselves. Kuzma surrendered his money with a full, hearty confidence which Tikhon never possessed. But his mother, his mother! He groaned as he recalled how, poverty-stricken as she was, she had bestowed her blessing on him, had given him her sole treasure, a relic of her better days, which had been preserved at the bottom of

her chest—a small silver-mounted holy picture. And the fact that he had groaned was good, also; but all the same his money had gone to Tikhon.

II

ABANDONING the shop counter, and having sold off what their mother had left, they had begun to trade—had gone out among the Little Russians, and to Voronezh. They were frequently in their native town, and Kuzma kept up his friendship with Balashkin as of yore, and read avidly the books which Balashkin gave him or recommended to him. This was not at all like Tikhon. Tikhon, when there was nothing to do, was fond of reading, also; a year might pass without his taking a book in his hand, but if he did begin one, he read swiftly to the very last line and, once he had finished that, instantly severed all connection with the book; on one occasion he had read through an entire volume of the “Contemporary” in one night, had not understood much, had pronounced what he had read extremely interesting—and then had forgotten the “Contemporary” for ever. Neither did Kuzma understand much of what he read—even in the writings of Byelinsky, Gogol, and Pushkin. But his comprehension increased, not by days but by hours: he was able to grasp the gist of the matter and rivet it in his heart to a positively amazing degree. Why, then, when he comprehended the

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words of Dobroliuboff, did he disfigure his speech in the bazaar and say "khvakt" instead of "fact"? Why, when conversing with Balashkin about Schiller, did he passionately long to borrow his "ekordeon"? Waxing enthusiastic over Turgenieff's "Smoke," he maintained nevertheless that "he who is intelligent but not educated, has much knowledge even without education." On visiting the grave of Koltzoff, in rapture he wrote upon the gravestone an illiterate epitaph: "Binith this munament is intered the boady of citazen alesei vasilevitch Kaltzoff campoaser and poet of voronezh riworded by the munarch's greciousnes *a lerningles man enlitend by natur.*"

Balashkin explained the meaning of things to him and impressed on Kuzma's soul a profound stamp of himself. Old, gigantic, lean, garbed summer and winter alike in a peasant overcoat which had turned green with age and a winter-weight peaked cap, huge-faced, clean-shaven, and wry-mouthed, Balashkin was almost terrifying with his malicious speeches, his deep, senile bass voice, the prickly, silvery bristles on his grey cheeks and lips, and his green left eye, bulging, flashing, and squinting in the direction in which his mouth was drawn awry. And he fairly took to barking one day at Kuzma's remark about "enlightenment without education." That eye of his blazed as he hurled aside his cigarette, which he had filled with the cheap tobacco on top of a tin which had contained pilchards. "Jaw of an ass! What's that you're jabbering? Have you ever considered what our 'enlight-

enment without education' signifies? The death of Zhadovskaya—that's its devilish symbol!"

"But what about the death of Zhadovskaya?" inquired Kuzma.

And Balashkin yelled in a rage: "You have forgotten? The poetess, a wealthy woman, a noblewoman—but she drowned herself. You have forgotten?" And again he seized his cigarette and began to roar dully: "Merciful God! They killed Pushkin, they killed Lermontoff, they drowned Pisareff. They strangled Ryl'yeeff, they condemned Polezhaeff to the ranks as a soldier, they walled up Shevtchenko as a prisoner for ten years, they dragged Dostoevsky out to be shot, Gogol went mad—and how about Koltzoff, Nikitin, Ryeshetnikoff? Okh, and is there any other such country in the world, any other such nation? thrice accursed may they be!"

Excitedly twisting the buttons of his long-tailed coat, now buttoning, again unbuttoning them, frowning and grimacing, Kuzma, perturbed, said in reply: "Such a nation! 'Tis the greatest of nations, and not 'such' a nation, permit me to remark to you!"

"Don't you presume to confer prizes!" Balashkin shouted.

"Yes, sir, I will presume! For those writers were children of that same nation!"

"Yes, curse you, they were—but George Sand was no worse than your Zhadovskaya, and she did not drown herself!"

"Platon Karataeff—there's an acknowledged type of that nation!"

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“And why not Yeroshka, why not Lukashka? My good man, if I take a notion to shake up literature I’ll find boots to fit all the gods! Why Karataeff and not Ruzuvaeff and Kolupaeff? why not a blood-sucker spider, an extortioner priest, a venal deacon? some Saltytchikha or other? Why not Karamazoff and Oblomoff, Khlestyakoff and Nozdreff? or, not to go too far afield, why not your good-for-nothing, nasty brother, Tishka Krasoff?”

“Platon Karataeff—”

“The lice have eaten your Karataeff! I don’t see that he’s an ideal!”

“But the Russian martyrs, saints, holy men, the fools-for-Christ’s-sake, the Old Ritualists?”

“Wha-at’s that? Well, how about the Coliseum, the crusades, the religious wars, the countless sects? And Luther, to wind up? No, nonsense! You can’t beat me down with one blow, like that!”

“Then what, in your opinion, ought to be done?” shouted Kuzma. “Blindfold our eyes and rush to the ends of the world?”

But at this point Balashkin suddenly became extinguished. He closed his eyes, and his huge grey face portrayed advanced, painful old age. For a long time with drooping head he turned over something in his mind, and at last muttered: “What ought to be done? I don’t know: we are ruined. Our last asset was ‘Memoirs of the Fatherland,’ and that has been knocked in the head! And yet, you fool, you think the only thing that is necessary is to educate oneself.”

Yes, one thing was necessary—to acquire an educa-

tion. But when? And how? Five whole years he had spent in peddling—and they were the best period of his life! Even the arrival in a town seemed an immense happiness. Rest, acquaintances, the odour of bake-shops and iron roofs, the pavement on Trading Street, fresh white rolls and the Persian March on the mechanical organ of the “Kars” eating-house. The floors in the shops watered from a teapot, the wood-notes of a famous quail in front of Rudakoff’s door, the smell of the fish shops in the bazaar, of fennel and coarse tobacco. The kindly and terrible smile of Balashkin at the sight of Kuzma approaching. Then—thunders and curses on the Slavophiles, Byelinsky and vile abuse, incoherent and passionate interchange of opprobrious names between the two, quotations. And, to wind up, the most desperately absurd deductions. “Well, now we’ve got to the end of our rope—and we’re dashing back to Asia at full speed!” the old man rumbled, and, abruptly lowering his voice, he cast a glance around him: “Have you heard? They say that Saltykoff is dying. He’s the last. ’Tis said he was poisoned.” And in the morning—again the springless cart, the steppe, sultry heat or mud, strained and painful reading to the accompaniment of jolts from the swiftly revolving wheels. Protracted contemplation of the steppe’s vast spaces, the sweetly melancholy melody of verses within, interrupted by thoughts about grains or of squabbles with Tikhon. The perturbing odour of the road—of dust and tar. The odour of gingerbread, flavoured with mint, and the suffocating stench of cat hides, of dirty fleeces, of boots greased with

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train-oil. Those years had, in truth, been a drain on his strength—the fatigue of not changing his shirt for a fortnight, of food eaten without the relief of any liquid, of lameness caused by heels bruised to the point of bleeding, of nights passed in strange villages, in strange cottages and sheds!

III

KUZMA crossed himself with a grand flourish when, at last, he escaped from that slavery. But he was already nearly thirty years of age; his hair was noticeably grey; he had become more sober, more serious; he had abandoned his verses, had abandoned reading; he had become accustomed to eating-houses, to drinking-bouts. He served for a year less a week with a drover near Eletz, went to Moscow on his employer's business—and left his service. Long before that time he had begun a love affair in Veronezh, with a married woman, and he longed to go thither. So he knocked about in Voronezh for nearly ten years, busying himself with the purchase of grain, horse-trading, and writing articles about the grain trade for the newspapers, bewildering—or, to speak more correctly, poisoning—his mind with the articles of Tolstoy and the satires of Saltykoff. And, all the while, he was overwhelmed with the conviction that he was wasting—had wasted—his life.

“There, now,” he said, as he recalled those years,

“that’s what it signifies—that knowledge without education!”

In the early ’nineties Balashkin died of hernia, and Kuzma saw him, for the last time, not long before his death. And what an interview it was!

“I must write,” complained one, gloomily and angrily. “One withers away like a burdock in the field.”

“Yes, yes,” boomed the other. The squint of his dying eye was already drowsy, and his jaws moved with difficulty, and the coarse tobacco did not fall as it should have done on his cigarette paper. “As the saying runs: learn every hour, think every hour, look about you at all our poverty and wretchedness—” Then, with a shame-faced grin, he laid aside his cigarette and thrust his hand into the breast of his coat. “Here,” he mumbled, rummaging in a package of tattered papers and clippings from newspapers. “Here, my friend, is a pile of stuff of some value. There was a great famine, curse it. And I read everything about it, and wrote it all down. When I die, ’twill be of some use to you, this devil’s material. Nothing but scurvy and typhus, typhus and scurvy. In one county all the small children died; in another all the dogs were eaten up. God is my witness that I am telling no lie! Here, wait a minute, I’ll find it for you immediately—”

But he rummaged and rummaged and did not find it, hunted for his spectacles, began in alarm to search through his pockets, to look under the counter, got tired, and gave it up. And, as soon as he gave up the

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search, he began to drowse and waggle his head.

"But no, no—don't you dare to touch on that yet. You are still uneducated, a weak-minded fellow. Cut a tree to suit your powers. Have you written anything on that subject I suggested to you—about Sukhonosy? Not yet? Well, so you are an ass's jaw, as I said, after all. What a subject that was!"

"I ought to write about the village, about the populace," said Kuzma. "For you yourself are always saying: 'Russia, Russia—'"

"Well, and isn't Sukhonosy the populace? isn't it Russia? *All Russia is nothing but a village: get that firmly fixed in your noddle!* Look about you: is this a town, in your opinion? The flocks jam the streets every evening—they kick up such a dust that you can't see your next-door neighbour. But you call it a 'town'! Ugh, you dull clodhopper—'tis plain that one might drive a stake into your head, and still you would never write anything."

And Kuzma understood clearly and conclusively that Balashkin had spoken the sacred truth: he was not destined to write. There was Sukhonosy. For many years that repulsive old man of the Suburb had never been out of his mind—an old man whose sole property consisted of a mattress infested with bugs and a woman's moth-eaten cloak which he had inherited from his wife. He begged, fell ill, starved, roosted for fifty kopeks a month in one corner of a cottage occupied by a woman trader in the "gluttons' row," and, in her opinion, might very well set his affairs straight by selling his inheritance. But he prized it

as the apple of his eye—and, of course, not in the least because of tender feelings toward the late lamented: it afforded him the consciousness that he owned incomparably more property than other folks. It seemed to him that it was worth a devilishly high price: “Nowadays such cloaks are not to be had at all!” He was not disinclined, not in the least disinclined, to sell it. But he asked such an outrageous price that would-be purchasers were dazed. And Kuzma understood this tragedy of the Suburb perfectly. But when he began to consider how it should be expressed, he began to live through the whole complicated life of the Suburb, through recollections of his childhood, of his youth—and he became confused, drowned Sukhonosy in the abundance of the pictures which besieged his memory, and dropped his hands in despair, crushed by the necessity of expressing his own soul, of setting forth everything which had crippled his own life. And the most terrible thing about that life was the fact that it was a simple, everyday life, which broke up into petty details with incomprehensible rapidity. Yes, and what was more, he did not know how to write: he did not even know how to think regularly or long; he suffered like a puppy in a bed of straw when he took up a pen. And Balashkin’s death-bed prophecy brought him to his senses; ’twas not for him to write stories! So the first thought which flashed through his mind was, to write “The Sum-Total,” a stern, harsh epitaph on himself and—on Russia.

IV

BUT since that time twelve more barren years had elapsed. He had plied the trade of horse-dealer in Voronezh; then, when the woman with whom he had been living died of puerperal fever, he had carried on the same trade in Eletz, had worked in a candle shop in Lipetzk, had been a clerk on Kasatkin's farm. And his life had flowed on smoothly, engrossed in work, in everyday tasks—until his habit of tipping had rather abruptly turned into hard drinking. He had become a passionate follower of Tolstoy: for about a year he did not smoke, never took a drop of vodka, ate no meat, never parted with "My Confession" and "The Gospels," wanted to emigrate to the Caucasus and join the Dukhobortzy.¹ But he was sent to Kieff on a business matter. And as he set forth, he felt something akin to a sickly joy, as if he had suddenly been released, after prolonged imprisonment, into complete freedom. It was clear weather at the end of September, and everything seemed easy, very beautiful—the pure air, the comfortable sun, and the cadence of the train, the open windows, and the flowering forests which flashed past them. All at once, when the train halted at Nyezhin, Kuzma saw a large

¹A sect which denies the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They emigrated from the Caucasus to British Columbia in the '90's, with money furnished by Count L. N. Tolstoy, and have had many conflicts with the British authorities.—TRANS.

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crowd surrounding the door of the station. The crowd was gathered round some one, and was shouting and quarrelling in great agitation. Kuzma's heart began to beat violently, and he ran toward the crowd. Rapidly elbowing his way through it, he caught sight of the red cap of the station-master, the white, pyramidal cap of a cook, resembling that of a Kazak Hetman, and the grey overcoat of a sturdy gendarme, engaged in roundly berating three Little Russians, who were standing meekly erect in front of him, clad in short, thick coats, indestructible boots, and caps of snuff-coloured lambskin. These caps hung precariously on some dreadful objects that proved to be round heads bandaged with coarse muslin, stiff with dried serous fluid, above swollen eyes and faces puffy and glassy with greenish-yellow bruises, bearing wounds on which the blood had coagulated and turned black. The men had been bitten by a mad wolf, had been despatched to the hospital in Kieff, and had been held up for days at a stretch at almost every large station, without a morsel of bread or a kopek of money. And, on learning that they were not to be taken aboard now, because the train was called an express train, Kuzma suddenly flew into a rage and, to the accompaniment of approving yells from the Jews in the throng, began to bawl and stamp his feet at the gendarme. He was arrested, an official report was drawn up, and, while awaiting the next train, Kuzma, for the first time in his life, got dead drunk.

The Little Russians were from the Tchernigoff

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Government. This he had always thought of as a far-away region with a sky of dim, gloomy blue above the forests. These men, who had gone through a hand-to-hand encounter with the mad wolf, reminded him of the days of Vladimir, the life of long ago, of ancient peasant life in the pine forests. And as he proceeded to get drunk, pouring out glass after glass of liquor with hands shaking after the row, Kuzma became transported with delight: "Akh, that was a great epoch!" He was choking with wrath at the gendarme, and at those meek cattle in their long-tailed coats. Stupid, savage, curse them! But—Russia, ancient Russia! And tears of drunken joy and fervour, which distorted every picture to supernatural dimensions, obscured Kuzma's vision. "But how about non-resistance?" recurred to his mind at intervals, and he shook his head with a grin. A trim young officer was eating his dinner, with his back to him, at the general table; and Kuzma gazed in an amicably insolent manner at his white linen uniform blouse, so short, so high-waisted, that he wanted to step up to him and pull it down. "And I will do that!" thought Kuzma. "But he would jump up and shout—and slap my face! There's non-resistance for you!" Then he journeyed on to Kieff and, completely abandoning his business, spent three days roaming about the city and on the bluffs above the Dnyepr, in the joyous excitement induced by his intoxication.

In the Cathedral of St. Sophia, at the Liturgy, many persons stared in amazement at the thin, broad-

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shouldered katzap¹ who stood in front of Yaroslaff's² tomb. He was neatly dressed, held in his hand a new peaked cap, stood with decorum; but there was something queer in his general appearance. The service came to an end: the congregation departed, and the doors were opened; the verger extinguished the candles. Through the upper windows, athwart the blue smoke, filtered golden streaks of the hot noonday sun; but he, with set teeth, his sparse greying beard drooping on his breast and his deeply sunken eyes closed in a sort of happy pain, remained there listening to the pealing of the bells, carolling and dully booming above the cathedral—that ancient peal which had, in days of yore, accompanied the campaigns against the Petchenyegi.³ And, toward evening, Kuzma was seen at the Lavra.⁴ He was sitting opposite its gate beneath a withered acacia, alongside a crippled lad, gazing with a troubled, melancholy smile at its white walls and enclosures, at the gold of its little cupolas shining against the pure autumnal sky. The lad had no cap, a sack of coarse linen hung over his shoulder, and on his body hung dirty, ragged old garments; in one hand he held

¹ The Little Russian nickname for the Great Russians.—
TRANS.

² Yaroslaff the Great, son of Prince Vladimir, 1016-1054.—
TRANS.

³ A Turkish tribe which migrated from Asia to Eastern Europe. They came into collision with the Russians at the end of the ninth century and the beginning of the tenth.—
TRANS.

⁴ A Lavra is a first-class Monastery. Here it refers to the famous "Catacombs" Monastery.—TRANS.

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a wooden cup, with a kopek in the bottom, while with the other he incessantly changed the position of his deformed leg—which was bare to the knee, withered and unnaturally thin, burned black by the sun, and covered with a thick growth of golden-hued hair—as if it did not belong to him, as if it were a mere object. There was no one in their vicinity; but the lad, with his close-cropped head thrown back, stiff from the effects of the sun and the dust, displaying his thin, childish collar-bones, and paying no heed to the flies which settled on the excretions of his nostrils, drawled drowsily, painfully, and without ceasing:

“Take a look, ye mammas,
See how unhappy, how miserable we are!
Akh, God grant you, mammas,
Never to suffer so!”

And Kuzma confirmed him: “That’s so, that’s right!”

When he had conquered his intoxication and come to his senses, Kuzma felt that he was already an old man. Since that trip to Kieff three years had elapsed. And, during that space of time, something extremely important had indubitably been effected within him. How it had been effected, he himself did not even attempt to define. Life during those three years had been too abnormal—his own life and the life of the community. Of course, he had understood while still in Kieff that he would not remain long with Kasatkin, and that ahead of him lay poverty, the loss of even the semblance of manhood. And so it came to pass.

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He managed to scrape along through two more jobs, but under very humiliating and oppressive conditions: eternally half-drunk, slovenly, with voice turned hoarse, permeated through and through with the reek of cheap, strong tobacco, making herculean efforts to conceal his unfitness for business. Then he fell lower still; he returned to his native town, and ran through his last kopeks; he spent his nights all winter long in the general room of the lodging-house of Khodoff, whiled away the days in Avdyeef's eating-house in the Women's Bazaar. Out of these last kopeks many went for a stupid caprice, the publication of a little volume of verses—after which he had to stroll about among the patrons of Avdyeef's establishment and force his booklet on them at half-price.

But even that was not all: he came near turning into a buffoon! Once, on a frosty, sunny morning, he was standing in the bazaar near the flour shops and gazing at a barefoot beggar cutting up antics before Mozzhukin the merchant, who had come out on his threshold. Mozzhukin, drowsily derisive, with a face resembling the reflection in a samovar, was chiefly interested in a cat which was licking his polished boot. But the beggar did not stop. He thumped his breast with his fists and, humping his shoulders, began in a hoarse voice to declaim:

"He who drinks when he is already drunk,
Plays the part of a wise man. . . ."

And Kuzma, his swollen eyes beaming, suddenly cut in:

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“Then long live jollity,
Long life to good liquor!”

And an old woman of the petty burgher class, who was passing by—she had a face like that of an aged lioness—halted, cast a sidelong glance at him, and, elevating her crutch, remarked distinctly and maliciously: “’Tis likely you don’t know your prayers as well as that!”

Lower than that there was no place to fall. But precisely that was what saved him. He survived several attacks of heart disease—and immediately stopped getting drunk, firmly resolving to undertake the simplest, most laborious sort of life; to hire, for example, an orchard, a vegetable-garden; to purchase, somewhere in his native county, a bee-farm. Fortunately, he still had a hundred and fifty rubles left.

At first this idea delighted him. “Yes, that’s capital,” he said to himself with that mournful ironical smile which he had acquired so long ago. “’Tis time to go home!” And, of a truth, he needed a rest. It was not very long since that vast agitation had begun, both within him and round about him. But it had already done its work. He had become something very different from what he had been previously. His beard had turned completely grey; his hair, which he wore parted in the middle, and which curled at the ends, had grown thin and acquired a rusty hue; his broad face, with its high cheek bones, had grown darker and leaner than ever. His observing, sceptical mind had grown more keen. His soul had been puri-

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fied, had become more unhealthily sensitive, although he was able to conceal the fact behind the serious and, at times, even severe look of the little eyes under brows which almost met across his nose. He had completely pulled himself together, and had begun to think less of himself, more of those round about him. Nevertheless, he longed to go "home" and rest: he craved work to his liking.

V

IN the spring, several months before the reconciliation with Tikhon, Kuzma heard that a garden in the village of Kazakoff, in his native district, was to be leased, and he hastened thither. It was a remote spot, with black loam soil, not far from the place where the Krasoffs had first taken root.

It was the beginning of May; cold weather and rain had returned after a hot spell; gloomy autumnal storm-clouds sailed over the town. Kuzma, in an old overcoat and without goloshes over his broken calf-skin boots, was trudging to the railway station beyond the Cannon-makers' Suburb, and, shaking his head and screwing up his face from the effects of the cigarette held in his teeth, with hands clasped behind his back under his overcoat, he was smiling to himself. A dirty little barefoot boy ran up to him with a pile of newspapers and, as he ran, shouted briskly the customary phrase: "Giniral strike!"

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"You're behind the times, my lad," said Kuzma. "Isn't there anything newer?"

The small boy came to a halt, with flashing eyes.

"The policeman has carried the news off to the station," he replied.

"All hail to the constitution!" said Kuzma caustically, and pursued his course, skipping along through the mud, past fences darkened by the rain, past the branches of dripping gardens and the windows of lopsided hovels which were sliding down hill, to the end of the town street. "Wonders will never cease!" he said to himself as he went leaping along. "In former days, with such weather, people would have been yawning, hardly exchanging a word, in all the shops and eating-houses. But now, all over the town, they do nothing but discuss the Duma, riots and conflagrations, and how 'Murontzeff¹ has given the prime-minister a sound rating.' Well, a frog does not keep its tail very long!" The fireman's band was already playing in the town park. A whole company of kazaks had been sent. And the day before yesterday, on Trading Street, one of them, when drunk, went up to the window of the public library and made an insulting gesture to the young lady librarian. An elderly cabman, who was standing near by, began to reprove him, but the kazak jerked out his sabre from its scabbard, slashed the cabman's shoulder, and, cursing violently, rushed down the street in pursuit of the people who were walking and driving past, and, crazed

¹ Muromtzeff.

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with fear, were flying to the first shelter which presented itself.

“The catskin man, the catskin man,
He fell down beneath a fence!”¹

piped up some naughty little girls, in their thin voices, after Kuzma, as they hopped from stone to stone, across the shallow stream of the Suburb.

“When he skins cats, he gets the paws!”

“Ugh, you little wretches!” a railway conductor growled at them. In an overcoat that was dreadfully heavy even to look at, he was walking in front of Kuzma, and he shook a small iron box at them. “Why don’t you pick on some one of your own age?”

But one could judge from his voice that he was restraining his laughter. The conductor’s old, deep goloshes were crusted with dried mud; the belt of his coat hung by a single button. The small bridge of planks along which he was walking lay askew. Further on, alongside the ditches flooded by the spring freshets, grew stunted bushes. And Kuzma gazed cheerlessly at them, and at the straw-thatched roofs on the hill of the Suburb; at the smoky and bluish clouds which hung over them, and at the reddish-yellow cur which was gnawing a bone in the ditch. In the bottom of the ditch, his legs straddled far

¹A rhyme in the original. The “catskiner” collects hides throughout the countryside, for conversion into “furs.”—

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apart, sat a petty burgher, in a waistcoat over a cotton-print Russian shirt. His widely opened eyes looked white in his face, which, scarlet with effort, stared upward in an awkward, stupid grin. When Kuzma came opposite him, he said, out of sheer clumsiness: "Is it you our little girls are taunting? Why, those little imps learn effrontery in their infancy!"

"'Tis you yourselves who teach them," replied Kuzma, with a frown. "Yes, yes," he said to himself, as he ascended the hill, "a frog does not keep his tail long!" On reaching the crest of the hill, inhaling the damp wind from the plain and catching sight of the red buildings of the railway station in the midst of the empty green fields, he again began to smile faintly. Parliament, deputies! Last night he had returned from the public park, where, in honour of a holiday, there had been an illumination, rockets had soared aloft, and the firemen had played "Le Toreador" and "Beside the brook, beside the bridge," "The Maxixe" and "The Troika," shouting in the middle of the galop, "Hey, de-ear one!" He had returned home and had started to pull the bell at the gate of his lodging-house. He had pulled and pulled the rattling wire—not a soul. Not a soul anywhere around, either—only silence, darkness, the cold greenish sky in the West, beyond the square at the end of the street, and, overhead, storm-clouds. At last, some one crawled forward behind the gate, clearing his throat. He rattled his keys and grumbled: "I'm lame in my underpinning—"

"What's the cause of it?"

"A horse kicked me," replied the man; and, as he unlocked and opened the gate, he added: "Well, now there are still two left."

"The men from the court, you mean?"

"Yes."

"But don't you know why the judge came?"

"To try the deputy. They say he tried to poison the river."

"What, the deputy? You fool, do deputies meddle with such things?"

"The devil only knows what they'll do."

On the outskirts of the Suburb, beside the threshold of a clay hut, stood a tall old man wearing leg-cloths.¹ In the old man's hand was a long staff of walnut wood. On catching sight of a passer-by, he made haste to pretend that he was much older than he really was. He grasped the staff in both hands, hunched up his shoulders, and imparted to his countenance a weary, melancholy expression. The damp, cold wind which was blowing from the fields agitated the shaggy locks of his grey hair. And Kuzma recalled his own father, his own childhood.

"Russia, Russia! Whither art thou dashing?" Gogol's exclamation recurred to his mind. "Russia, Russia! Akh, vain babblers, you stick at nothing! That's the best answer you can make: 'The deputy

¹ About three-quarters of a yard of heavy homespun crash is wrapped over the foot and leg in lieu of a stocking, and confined in place by the stout cord or rope with which the slippers of plaited linden bark are tied on.—TRANS.

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tried to poison the river.' Yes, but who is responsible? First of all, the unhappy populace—and unhappy they are!" And tears welled up in Kuzma's little green eyes—welled up suddenly, as had often happened with him of late. Not long ago he had strolled into Avdyeff's eating-house, in the Woman's Bazaar. He had entered the courtyard, ankle deep in mud, and from the courtyard ascended to the first storey—"the Gentry's Department"—by a wooden staircase so stinking, so rotten through and through, that it turned even his stomach—the stomach of a man who had seen sights in his day. With difficulty he had opened the heavy, greasy door, covered with scraps of felt and tattered rags in place of a proper casing, and provided with a pulley-weight fashioned from a brick and a bit of rope. He was fairly blinded by the charcoal vapour, the smoke, the glare of the tin reflectors behind the little wall-lamps, and deafened by the crash of the dishes on the counter; by the talking, the clatter of the waiters running about in all directions, and the repulsive uproar of the gramophone. Then he passed on to the most distant room, where there were fewer people, ate at a small table, ordered a bottle of mead. Underfoot, on a floor soiled with the trampling of feet and with spittle, lay slices of lemon, eggshells, butts of cigarettes. And near the wall opposite sat a long-limbed peasant in bast-slippers, smiling beatifically, shaking his frowsy head, and listening to the shrieking gramophone. On his small table were a small measure of vodka, a small glass, and cracknels. But

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the peasant was not drinking: only wagging his head and staring at his bast-shoes.

All of a sudden, becoming conscious of Kuzma's gaze riveted upon him, he opened his eyes wide with joy, raised his wonderfully kind face with its waving reddish beard. "Well, so you've flown in!" he exclaimed, in delight and surprise. And he hastened to add, by way of justifying himself: "Sir, I have a brother who serves here—my own brother."

Blinking away his tears, Kuzma clenched his teeth. Ugh, damn it, to what a point had the people been trampled upon, beaten down! "You've flown in!" That in connection with Avdyeff's establishment! And that was not all: when Kuzma rose to his feet and said: "Well, goodbye!" the peasant hurriedly rose to his feet also, and out of the fulness of a happy heart, with profound gratitude for the light and luxury of the surroundings, and because he had been addressed in a human manner, quickly answered: "No offence meant!"

VI

IN former days conversation in the railway carriages had turned exclusively on the rain and the drought, on the fact that "God fixes the price for grain." Now, the sheets of newspapers rustled in the hands of many passengers, and discussion busied it-

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self with the Duma, the rights of the people, the expropriation of the land. No one even noticed the pouring rain which pattered on the roof, although the travellers belonged to the class which was always greedy for spring rains—grain dealers, peasants, petty burghers from the farms. A young soldier who had lost his leg passed along: he was suffering from jaundice, his black eyes were mournful, he hobbled and clattered his wooden leg as he doffed his tall Mandzhurian fur cap and, like a beggar, made the sign of the cross every time he received an alms. A noisy, angry discussion started up on the subject of the Government, the Minister Durnovo, and some governmental oats. They referred, jeeringly, to that which formerly had evoked their naif enthusiasm: how “Vitya,”¹ with the object of frightening the Japanese at Portsmouth, had ordered his trunks to be packed.

A young man, with his hair cut close like beaver fur, who sat opposite Kuzma, reddened, grew embarrassed, and made haste to interpose: “Excuse me, gentlemen! You are talking about liberty. I serve in the office of the tax inspector, and I write articles for the city newspapers. Do you think that is any business of his? He asserts that he, too, believes in liberty, but when he found out that I had written about the abnormal condition of our fire department, he sent for me and said: ‘Damn you, if you write any more pieces like that I’ll wring your neck!’ Permit me: if my views are more on the left than his—”

¹ Popular form of “Witte,” the famous Minister.—TRANS.

“Views?” suddenly shouted the alto voice of a dwarf, the young man’s neighbour, a fat skopetz¹ in bottle-shaped boots—miller Tchernyaeff, who had been casting sidelong glances at him all the while from his pig-like little eyes. And, without giving him a chance to reply, he roared: “Views? You mean to say you have views? And you’re more of a Left? Why, I’ve known you ever since you were running around without breeches in your childhood! And you were perishing with hunger, along with your father—you mendicants! You ought to be washing the inspector’s feet and drinking the dirty water!”

“The Con-sti-tu-u-tion,” interjected Kuzma in a shrill tone, interrupting the eunuch; and rising from his seat and jostling the knees of the sitting passengers, he went down the carriage to the door.

The eunuch’s feet were small, plump, and repulsive, like those of some aged housekeeper; his face, also, was feminine, large, yellow, solid, like gutta-percha; his lips were thin. And Polozoff was another nice one—the teacher at the pro-gymnasium, the man who had been nodding his head so amiably, and leaning on his stick, as he listened to the eunuch; a squat, well-nourished man of thirty, in high shoes with the tops tucked under grey trousers, a grey hat, and a grey coat with sleeve-flaps; a clear-eyed fellow with a round nose and a luxuriant sandy beard spreading all over his chest. A teacher, but he wore a heavy gold seal ring on his forefinger. And he already owned a small house—the dowry he had acquired along with the

¹ A member of the self-mutilating sect, the Skoptzy.—TRANS.

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Archpriest's daughter.¹ His feet also were small, his hands were short, his fingers mere stumps; he was neat, groomed to a surprising nicety, and he took a bath every day. He was said to be an execrable man; the Lord forbid! Yes, decidedly peasants and petty citizens were not fit for such as he. Kuzma, as he opened the door to the platform, inhaled a deep breath of the cold and fragrant rain-drenched air. The rain droned dully on the roof over the platform, poured off it in streams, and spurts of it splattered over Kuzma. After the town the air of the fields, mingled with the exciting odour of the smoke from the locomotive, intoxicated him. The carriages, as they swayed, rattled louder than the noise of the rain; rising and falling as they approached, the telegraph wires floated past; on both sides ran the dense vividly-green borders of a hazel copse. A motley-hued gang of small boys suddenly sprang out from under the foot of the embankment and shouted something or other shrilly in chorus. Kuzma burst out laughing from sheer pleasure, and his whole face was covered with tiny wrinkles. But when he raised his eyes, he saw on the opposite platform a pilgrim; a kindly, jaded peasant face, a grey beard, a broad-brimmed hat, a cloth coat girt with a rope, a pouch and a tin tea-kettle hanging on his back, and, on his skinny feet,

¹ Parish clergy are always married men in the Orthodox Catholic Church. An Archpriest is usually the head of a staff of clergy at a Cathedral. To a higher post and title no married priest can attain. The Bishops, Archbishops, and higher clergy must be monks.—TRANS.

bast-shoes. The pilgrim was smiling, too. And Kuzma shouted to him, athwart the rumbling and the noise: "What's your name, grandfather?"

"Anton. Anton Bezpalykh," replied the old man with amiable readiness, in a thin voice.

"Just back from a pilgrimage?"

"From Voronezh."

"Are they burning out the landed proprietors there?"

"Yes, they are. . . ."

"Well, that's fine!"

"What's that you say?"

"I say 'tis fine!" shouted Kuzma. And, turning aside and blinking away the welling tears, he began with trembling hands to roll himself a cigarette. But his thoughts had already grown confused. "The pilgrim is one of the people, but do not the eunuch and the teacher belong to the people? 'Tis only forty-five years since serfdom was abolished—so what can be expected of the people? Yes, but who is to blame for it? The people themselves. Russia under the Russian yoke; the Little Brothers¹ of divers sorts under the Turkish; the Galicians under the Austrians—and 'tis useless to say anything about the Poles. Hey there, thou great Slavonic family!" And Kuzma's face once more lightened. Darting oblique glances about him on all sides, he began to twiddle his fingers, wring them, and crack their joints.

¹ "Bratushki"—Little Brothers—is a term which originated during the Russo-Turkish War, 1877-78, and was applied to the Serbs and Bulgarians.—TRANS.

VII

HE alighted at the fourth station and hired a conveyance. At first the peasant drivers demanded seven rubles—it was twelve versts to Kazakovo—then they came down to five and a half. At last one of them said: “Give me a three-ruble note and I’ll drive you; otherwise, ’tis not worth wagging your tongue about. Times nowadays are not what they used to be.” But he was unable to maintain that tone, and added the customary phrase: “And, besides, fodder is dear.” And he drove, after all, for a ruble and a half. The mud was fathomless, impassable, the cart was tiny, the wretched little nag, barely alive, was as long-eared as an ass and extremely weak. When they had slowly emerged from the courtyard of the station, the peasant, seated on the side-rail, began to get impatient and jerked the rope reins as if he longed with his whole being to aid the horse. At the station he had bragged “She can’t be held back,” and now he evidently felt ashamed. But the worst part of it all was—the man himself. Young, huge of build, fairly plump, he was clad in bast-shoes and white leg-wrappers, a short kazak coat girt with a strip of cloth, and an old peaked cap on his straight yellow hair. He emitted the smoky odour out of a chimneyless hut and of hemp—a regular husbandman of olden times, with a white beardless face, a swollen throat and a hoarse voice.

"What's your name?" inquired Kuzma.

"I'm called Akhvanasiy."

"Akhvanasiy!" said Kuzma angrily to himself. "And what else?"

"Menshoff.—Ho, get up there, antichrist!"

"Is it the evil malady?" And Kuzma indicated his throat with a nod.

"Well, yes, it it," mumbled Menshoff, turning his eyes aside. "I've been drinking cold kvas."

"Does it hurt you to swallow?"

"To swallow?—no, it doesn't hurt—"

"Weil, anyway, don't talk unnecessarily," said Kuzma sternly. "You'd better go to the hospital as soon as you can. Married, I suppose?"

"Yes, I'm married. . . ."

"Well, there, now, you see. You'll have children, and you'll be making them all a famous present!"

"Just as sure as giving them a drink," assented Menshoff. And, waxing impatient, he began to jerk the reins again. "Ho, get up there. You're an unmanageable brute, antichrist!" At last he abandoned this futile effort and calmed down. For a long time he maintained silence, then suddenly inquired: "Have they assembled that Duma yet, merchant?"

"Yes."

"And they do say that Makaroff is still alive, only they don't want it known."

Kuzma merely shrugged his shoulders: the devil only knew what these steppe men had in their heads! "But what wealth is here!" he said to himself, as he sat miserably on a tuft of straw, his knees drawn up on

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the bare floor of the springless cart, covered with a coarse cloth used for wrapping grain. He surveyed the road. The weather had grown still colder; still more gloomily the storm-clouds from the northwest came sailing over this black loam region, saturated with rains. The mud on the roads was bluish, greasy; the green of the trees, of the grass, of the vegetable gardens was dark and dense; and over everything lay that bluish tint of the black loam and the storm-clouds. But the cottages were of clay, tiny, with roofs of manure. Alongside them stood dried-up water casks. Of course, the water in them contained tadpoles.

Here was a well-to-do farmstead. In the vegetable garden, behind old bushes, an apiary, and a tiny orchard of three or four wild apple-trees, rose an old, dark-hued grain rick. The stable, the gate, and the cottage were all under one roof, thatched with hackled straw. The cottage was of brick, in two sections, the dividing line marked out with chalk: on one side was a pole surmounted by a forked branch, a fir-tree; on the other was something resembling a cock. The small windows were also rimmed with chalk in a toothed pattern. "There's creative genius for you!" grinned Kuzma. "The stone age, God forgive me—the times of the cave men!" On the doors of the detached sheds were crosses sketched in charcoal; by the porch stood a large tombstone, obviously prepared in anticipation of death by grandfather or grandmother. Yes, truly, a well-to-do farmstead. But the mud round about was knee deep; a pig was reclining on the porch, and on top of him, balancing itself and flapping its wings,

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a yellow chicken was parading. The windows were tiny, and in the part of the cottage appropriated to human occupation, darkness and eternally cramped conditions must inevitably reign—the sleeping shelf on top of the oven, the loom for weaving, a good-sized oven, a trough filled with slops. And the family would be large, with many children, and in winter time there would be lambs and calves as well. And the dampness and the charcoal fumes would be such that a green vapour must hang over all. The children would whimper and howl when slapped on the nape of the neck; the sisters-in-law would revile one another (“May the lightning smite you, you roving, homeless cur!”) and each express the hope that the other might “choke on a bite on the Great Day”;¹ the aged mother-in-law would be incessantly hurling something—the oven-fork, the bowls—and rushing at her daughters-in-law, her sleeves tucked up on her dark, sinewy arms, and wearing herself out with shrill scolding, besprinkling now one of them, now another with saliva and curses. The old man, ugly-tempered and ailing, would wear them all to exhaustion with his exhortations, would drag his married sons by the hair; and sometimes they would weep, in the repulsive peasant way.

“Whose farm is this?” asked Kuzma. “The Krasnoffs’,” answered Menshoff, adding, “All of them are sick with it, too.”

Beyond the Krasnoff farm they drove out on to the pasturage. The village was large, and so was the

¹ Easter.—TRANS.

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common for pasture. The annual Fair was being arranged on it. The framework of booths already rose aloft here and there, and there were piles of wheels and pottery; a hastily constructed oven was smoking, and a smell of fritters hung in the air; the travelling caravan-wagon of some gypsies loomed grey on the plain, and close to its wheels sat sheep-dogs, fastened to them by chains. On the left, peasant cottages were visible; on the right lay a lumber-yard, two town shops, and a bakery. Farther away, alongside the governmental dram-shop, stood a dense cluster of young girls and peasant men, from which shouts rang out.

“The people are making holiday,” remarked Men-shoff thoughtfully.

“What’s the cause of their joy?” inquired Kuzma.

“They are hoping for—”

“For what?”

“Everybody knows for what. The house-sprite!”

And it was true. On that bare pasture-common, that overcast, chilly day, those squeals of delight and the sounds of two accordions played in perfect unison seemed pitiful, were swallowed in an atmosphere of commonplaceness, of boredom and age. The people were experiencing something new, were celebrating something, but did they believe in their festival? “Oh, hardly!” said Kuzma to himself, as he drove close and surveyed the white, pink, and green petticoats of the girls, the indifferent, coarsely painted faces, the orange-coloured, golden-hued, and crimson kerchiefs. The cart drove up to the crowd and halted.

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Menshoff stared boldly at the throng and broke into a grin. At that close range the sounds no longer seemed pitiful—the accordions eagerly played up to each other, and in harmony with them, amid the approving hubbub of the drunken men, quaint adages flew briskly about.

“Ho-o,” some one shouted, to an accompaniment of dull but lusty stamping of feet:

“Plough not, reap not,
But bring fritters to the maidens!”

And a peasant, short of stature, who was standing behind the crowd, suddenly began to flourish his arms. Everything about him was prosperous, clean, substantial—his bast-shoes, his leg-wrappers, his new trousers of heavy plaided home-made linen, and the pleated skirts of his under-coat, made of appallingly thick grey cloth and cut very short, with a bob-tailed effect. It is probable that he had never danced before in his life, but now he began, softly and skilfully, to stamp with his bast-shoes, to wave his arms, and to shout in a tenor voice: “Stand aside, let the merchant have a peep!” and, leaping into the circle, which parted before him, he began to kick his legs about wildly in front of a tall young fellow, who, tossing away his peaked cap, twisted his boots about in devilish fashion and, as he did so, flung aside his black jacket and danced on in his new cotton print shirt. The face of the young man was pale and perspiring and wore a concentrated, gloomy expression which made his piercing yells seem all the more violent and unexpected.

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“Son! Dear one!” shrieked an old crone in a plaided wool skirt of South Russian fashion, stretching out her hands. “Stop, for Christ’s sake! Dear boy, stop it—you’ll kill yourself!”

And her dear son suddenly threw back his head, clenched his fists and his teeth, and, with fury in his countenance and his trampling, screeched through his teeth:

“Tztzytz, good woman, shut your mouth with that cuckoo song.”

“And she has just sold the last bit of her home-made linen for him,” remarked Menshoff, as they crawled slowly across the pasture land. “She loves him passionately. She’s a widow. He raps her over the mouth when he is drunk. Of course, she deserves it.”

What do you mean by that—‘she deserves it.’?” inquired Kuzma.

“Because she does. You shouldn’t be too indulgent—”

Yes, in the town, in the railway carriages, in the hamlets, in the villages, everywhere, one could feel the presence of something unusual, the echoes of some great festival, some great victory, great expectations. But back there in the suburb Kuzma had already realized that the farther one went into those limitless fields, beneath that cold, gloomy sky, the duller, the more irrational, the more melancholy would those echoes become. Now they had driven away, and the shouts in the crowd about the dram-shop had again become pitiful. There they were keeping festival and

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trying to "celebrate," but ahead lay boredom, remote wilds, an empty street, smoky chimneyless hovels, water-casks with putrid pond water, and then more fields, the blue mist of the chilly distance, the dark forest on the horizon, low-hanging storm-clouds.

At one cottage—it had a broken window and a wheel on the rotten roof—a long-legged, ailing peasant sat on a bench. People look handsomer in their coffins than he looked in life. He resembled the poet Nekrasoff. Over his shoulders, above a long and soiled shirt of hemp crash, was thrown an old short sheep-skin coat; his stick-like legs stood in felt boots; his huge dead-looking hands lay evenly spaced on his sharp knees, upon his ragged trousers. His cap was pulled far down on his forehead, after the fashion of old men; his eyes were suffering, entreating; his superhumanly meagre and emaciated face was drawn down, his ashen lips half open.

"That's Tchutchen,"¹ said Menshoff, nodding in the direction of the sick man. "He's been dying these two years from trouble with his stomach."

"Tchutchen? What's that—a nickname?"

"Yes, a nickname."

"Stupid!" said Kuzma. And he turned his head away, in order to avoid seeing the horrid little girl by the neighbouring cottage. She was leaning back and holding in her arms an infant in a cap, and, as she stared intently at the passers-by and stuck out her tongue at them, she chewed on a bit of black bread, which she was preparing as a sucking-piece for the

¹ Scarecrow.—TRANS.

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child. And in the last yard and threshing-floor the bushes hummed in the breezes, and a scarecrow, all awry, fluttered its empty sleeves. The threshing-floor, which adjoins the steppe, is always uncomfortable, dreary; and there were the scarecrow, the autumnal storm-clouds, the wind humming across the fields, ruffling up the tails of the fowls which roved about the threshing-floor, overgrown with pigweed and mugwort, alongside the grain-rick with its uncovered crest, alongside the threshing machine of Ryazan make, painted blue. . . .

VIII

THE small forest which lay blue against the horizon consisted of two long ravines thickly overgrown with oak-trees. It was known by the name of Portotchka. Near this Portotchka Kuzma was overtaken by a driving downpour of rain mingled with hail, which accompanied him the whole way to Kazakovo. Menshoff whipped up his sorry nag into a gallop as they neared the village, while Kuzma sat with eyes tightly screwed up beneath the wet grain-cloth. His hands were stiff with cold; icy rivulets trickled down the collar of his great-coat; the coarse cloth, heavy with the rain, stank of the sour grain-kiln. The hailstones rattled on his head, cakes of mud flew up into his face, the water in the ruts beneath the wheels splashed noisily; lambs were bleating somewhere or other. At last Kuzma became so

stified that he flung the cloth from his head and greedily gulped in the fresh air. The rain lessened in intensity. Evening drew on; the flocks dashed past the cart, across the green pasture land, on their way to the cottages. A thin-legged black sheep had got astray from the flock, and a bare-legged peasant woman, garbed in a rain-drenched short petticoat, darted after it, her white calves gleaming. In the west, beyond the village, the sky was growing brighter; to the east, on a background of dusty-bluish storm-clouds, two greenish-violet rainbows hung over the grain fields. A dense, damp odour of verdure arose from the fields, and of warmth from the dwellings.

"Where's the manor-house of the proprietor?" Kuzma shouted to a broad-shouldered woman in a white chemise and a red petticoat.

The woman was standing on a stone beside the cottage of the village policeman, holding by the hand a little girl about two years of age. The little girl was vociferating so lustily that his question was inaudible.

"The homestead?" repeated the woman. "Whose?"

"The manor-house."

"Whose? I can't hear anything you say.—Ah, may you choke! I hope the fits will get you!" shrieked the woman, jerking the little girl so violently by the hand that she executed a complete turn and, flying off the stone, hung suspended.

They made inquiries at another cottage. Driving along the broad street, they turned to the left, then to the right, and, passing some one's old-fashioned manor-house, hermetically boarded up, they began to de-

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scend a steep declivity to a bridge across a small stream. Water trickled from Menshoff's face, his hands, his coat. His fat face with its long white eyelashes, thus washed, looked more stupid than ever. He was gazing off into space ahead with an expression of curiosity. Kuzma gazed, also. In that direction, on the sloping pasture land, lay the dark manor-park of Kazakovo, the spacious courtyard surrounded by decaying outbuildings and the ruins of a stone wall; in the centre of the courtyard, behind three withered fir-trees, stood the house, sheathed in grey boards, with a rusty-red roof. Below, at the bridge, was a cluster of peasants. And, coming to meet them up the steep road, which was washed into gullies, a troika-team of lean work-horses, harnessed to a tarantas, was struggling through the mud and straining up the hill. A tattered but handsome labourer, tall, pale, with a small reddish beard and clever eyes, was standing beside the vehicle, jerking at the reins, exerting his utmost efforts, and shouting: "Ge-et up there! G-g-et up there!" The peasants, meanwhile, with shouts and whistling, were chiming in: "Whoa! Who-oa!" A young woman dressed in mourning, large tears hanging on her long eyelashes and her face distorted with fear, who was seated in the carriage, was throwing out her hands despairingly before her. Fear, suspense, lay in the turquoise-blue eyes of the stout, sandy-mustached young man who sat beside her. His wedding ring gleamed on his right hand, which clutched a revolver; he kept waving his left hand, and, without doubt, he must have felt very warm in his camel's hair waist-

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coat and his gentleman's peaked cap, which had slipped over on the back of his head. The children, a small boy and a girl, pallid with hunger and fatigue, wrapped in shawls, looked on with gentle curiosity from the little bench opposite the main seat.

"That's Mishka Siversky," said Menshoff in a loud, hoarse voice, as he drove around the troika and stared indifferently at the children. "They turned him out yesterday. Evidently, he deserved it."

The affairs of the Kazakovo gentry were managed by a superintendent, a retired soldier of the cavalry, a tall, rough man. Kuzma was told that he must apply to him in the servants' quarters, by a workman who drove into the farmyard in a cart heaped with freshly cut coarse wet green grass. But the superintendent had had two catastrophes that day—his baby had died and a cow had perished—so Kuzma did not meet with an amiable reception. When, leaving Menshoff outside the gate, he approached the servants' quarters, the superintendent's wife, her face all tear-stained, was bringing in a speckled hen, which sat peaceably under her arm. Among the columns on the dilapidated porch stood a tall young man in full trousers, high boots, and a Russian shirt of cotton print, who, on catching sight of the superintendent's wife, shouted: "Agafya, where are you taking it?"

"To kill," replied the superintendent's wife, seriously and sadly, coming to a halt beside the ice-house.

"Give it here and I'll kill it."

Thereupon the young man directed his steps to the ice-house, paying no attention to the rain, which was

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beginning to drizzle down again from the drowning sky. Opening the door of the ice-house, he took from the threshold a hatchet. A minute later a brief tap resounded, and the headless chicken, with a red stump of a neck, went running across the grass, stumbling and whirling about, flapping its wings and scattering in all directions feathers and spatters of blood. The young man tossed aside the hatchet and went off to the orchard, while the superintendent's wife, after she had caught the chicken, stepped up to Kuzma. "What do you want?"

"I came about the garden."

"Wait for Fedor Ivanitch."

"Where is he?"

"He'll be here immediately, from the fields."

So Kuzma began to wait at the window of the servants' quarters. He glanced inside and descried in the semi-darkness an oven, sleeping boards, a table, a small trough on the bench near the window, and a little coffin made from such another trough, in which lay the dead baby with a large, nearly naked head and a little bluish face. At the table sat a fat blind young girl, fishing with a wooden spoon for the bits of bread in a bowl of milk. The flies were buzzing around her like bees in a hive, but the blind girl, sitting as erect as a stuffed figure, with her white eyeballs staring into the darkness, went on eating and eating. She made a terrible impression on Kuzma, and he turned away. A cold wind was blowing in gusts, and the clouds made it darker and darker.

In the centre of the farmyard rose two pillars with

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a cross-bar, and from the cross-bar hung, as if it were a holy picture, a large sheet of iron; upon this they rapped when they were alarmed at night. About the farmyard lay thin wolf hounds. A small boy about eight years of age was running around among them, dragging in a small cart his flaxen-haired, chubby-faced younger brother, who wore a large black peaked cap. The little cart was squeaking wildly. The manor-house was grey, heavy-looking, and, assuredly, devilishly dreary in this twilight. "If they would only light up!" Kuzma said to himself. He was deadly weary, and it seemed to him as if he had left the town almost a year ago. Suddenly a sound of roaring and barking became audible, and through the gate of the orchard madly leaped a pair of dogs, a greyhound and a watchdog, dragging each other sidewise, any way as chance decreed, colliding, staring wildly about, and trying to tear each other to pieces, their heads in different directions. After them, shouting something or other, raced the young gentleman.

IX

KUZMA spent the evening and the night in the garden, in the old bath-house. The superintendent, on arriving from the fields on horseback, had remarked angrily that the garden had been "leased long ago," and in reply to a request for lodging over-night had expressed insolent amazement.

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"Well, but you are a sensible fellow!" he had shouted, without either rhyme or reason. "A nice posting-station you've picked out! Are there many of your stamp roving about at present?" But he took pity on Kuzma in the end, and gave him permission to go into the bath-house. Kuzma paid off Menshoff and walked past the manor-house to the gate into the linden avenue. Through the unlighted open windows, from beyond the wire fly-screens, thundered a grand piano, drowned by a magnificent baritone-tenor voice, lifted in intricate vocalizations which were completely out of harmony with both the evening and the manor. Along the muddy sand of the sloping avenue, at the end of which, as if at the end of the world, the cloud-flecked sky gleamed dully white, there advanced toward Kuzma a poor-looking peasant, short of stature, with dark reddish hair, his shirt minus a belt; he was capless, wore heavy boots, and was carrying a bucket in his hand.

"Oho, ho!" he said, jeeringly, as he listened to the singing while he walked on. "Oho, he's going it strong, may his belly burst!"

"Who is going it strong?" inquired Kuzma.

The peasant raised his head and halted. "Why, that young gentleman of ours," he said, merrily, making havoc with his consonants. "They say he has been doing that these seven years."

"Which one—the one who was chasing the dogs?"

"N-no, another one. But that's not all! Sometimes he takes to screeching, 'To-day 'tis your turn, to-morrow 'twill be mine'—regular calamity!"

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“He’s taking lessons, of course?”

“Nice lessons they must be!”

“And that other one—what does he do?”

“That fellow?” The peasant drew a long breath, smiling in a discreetly jeering manner the while. “Why, nothing. Why should he? he has good victuals and amusement: Fedka tosses bottles, and he shoots at them; sometimes he buys a peasant’s beard, cuts it off, and stuffs it into his gun, for fun. Then again, there are the dogs: we have an immense number of them. On Sundays, when the church bells begin to peal, the whole pack of them sets to howling; ’tis an awful row they make! Day before yesterday they chewed up a peasant’s dog, and the peasants went to the courtyard of the manor. ‘Give us enough to buy a vedro¹ of liquor, and we’ll call it quits. Otherwise, we’ll go on strike at once.’”

“Well, did he give the money?”

“Of course he didn’t! Gi-ive, indeed, brother!—There is a miller here. He came straight out on the porch and said: ‘The wind is blowing from the fields, gentlemen-nobles!’ Catch him napping, forsooth! The young gentleman started to bully them: ‘What sort of a wind is that you’re talking about?’ ‘Just a certain sort,’ says he. ‘I’ve propounded a riddle to you; now you just think it over!’ That brought him to a dead standstill, brother!”

All this was uttered in a careless sort of way, passed over lightly, with intervening pauses, but accompanied by such a malignant smile and such tor-

¹ 2.70 gallons.—TRANS.

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turing of his consonants that Kuzma began to look more attentively at the man whom he had thus casually encountered. In appearance he resembled a fool. His hair was straight, cut in a round crop, and long. His face was small, insignificant, of ancient Russian type, like the holy pictures of the Suzdal school. His boots were huge, his body lean and somehow wooden. His eyes, beneath large, sleepy lids, were like those of a hawk, with a golden ring around the iris. When he lowered his lids he was a lispng idiot; when he raised them one felt a certain fear of him.

"Do you live in the garden?" asked Kuzma.

"Yes. Where else should I live?"

"And what's your name?"

"My name? Akim. And who are you?"

"I wanted to lease the garden."

"There, now—that is an idea!" And Akim, wagging his head scoffingly, went on his way.

The wind blew with ever increasing vehemence, scattering showers of rain from the brilliantly green trees; beyond the park, in some low-lying region, the thunder rumbled dully, pale blue flashes of aurora borealis lighted up the avenue, and nightingales were singing everywhere about. It was utterly incomprehensible how they were able so sedulously, in such complete disregard of surrounding conditions, to warble, trill, and scatter their notes broadcast so sweetly and vigorously beneath that heavy sky, veiled in leaden clouds, amid the trees bending in the wind, as they perched in the dense, wet bushes. But still more incomprehensible was it how the watchmen managed to pass the

night in such a gale, how they could sleep on damp straw beneath the sloping roof of the rotten hut.

There were three watchmen. And all of them were sick men. One, young, emaciated, sympathetic, formerly a baker by trade, but dismissed the preceding autumn for taking part in a strike, was now a beggar. He had not as yet lost the peasant look, and he complained of fever. The second, also a beggar, but already middle-aged, had tuberculosis, although he declared that there was nothing the matter with him except that he felt "cold between his shoulders." Akim was afflicted with night-blindness—he could not see well in the half-light of twilight. When Kuzma approached, the baker, pale and amiable of manner, was squatting on his heels near the hut. With the sleeves of a woman's wadded dressing gown tucked up on his thin, weak arms, he was engaged in washing millet in a wooden bowl. Consumptive Mitrofan, a man of medium size, broad and dark complexioned, who resembled a native of Dahomey, garbed entirely in wet rags and leg-wrappers which were worn out and stiff as an old horse's hoof, was standing beside the baker and, with hunched-up shoulders, staring at the latter's work with brilliant brown eyes, strained wide open but devoid of all expression. Akim had brought a bucket of water and was making a fire in a little clay oven-niche opposite the hut; he was blowing the fire into life. He entered the hut, selected the driest tufts of straw he could find, and again approached the fire, which was now fragrantly smoking beneath the iron kettle, muttering to himself the while,

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breathing with a whistling sound, smiling in a mockingly mysterious way at the bantering of his comrades, and occasionally bringing them up short with a venomous and clever remark. Kuzma shut his eyes and listened now to the conversation, now to the nightingales, as he sat on a wet bench beside the hut, besprinkled with icy splatterings of rain whenever the damp wind rushed through the avenue beneath the gloomy sky, which quivered with pale flashes of lightning, while the thunder rumbled. He felt a pain in his stomach, from hunger and tobacco. It seemed as if the porridge would never be cooked, and he could not banish from his mind the thought that perhaps he himself would be obliged to live just such a wild beast's life as that of these watchmen, and that ahead of him lay nothing but old age, sickness, loneliness, and poverty. His body ached, and the gusts of wind, the far-away monotonous grumbling of the thunder, the nightingales, and the leisurely, carelessly malicious lisp of Akim and his squeaking voice, all irritated him.

"You ought to buy yourself at least a belt, Akimushka," said the baker with affected simplicity, as he lighted a cigarette. He kept casting glances at Kuzma, by way of inviting him to listen to Akim.

"Just you wait," replied Akim in an absent-minded, scoffing tone, as he poured the fluid porridge from the boiling kettle into a cup. "When we've lived here with the proprietor through the summer, I'll buy you boots with a squeak in them."

"'With a skvvvveak'! Well, I'm not asking you to do anything of the sort."

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"You're wearing leg-wrappers now." And Akim began anxiously to take a test sip of the porridge from the spoon.

The baker was disconcerted, and heaved a sigh: "Why should the likes of us wear boots?"

"Oh, stop that," said Kuzma. "You had better tell me whether you have this porridge day in and day out, for ever and ever, as I think you do."

"Well, and what would you like—fish, and ham?" inquired Akim, without turning round, as he licked the spoon. "That really wouldn't be so bad: a dram of vodka, about three pounds of sturgeon, a knuckle of ham, a little glass of fruit cordial. But this isn't porridge: it's called thin gruel. The porridge is for the appetizer snack."

"But do you make cabbage soup, or any other sort of soup?"

"We have had that, brother—cabbage soup; and what soup it was! If you were to spill it on the dog his hair would peel off!"

"Well, you might make a little soup."

"But where would we get the potatoes? You can't buy any from a peasant, any more than from the devil, brother! You couldn't wheedle even snow out of a peasant in the middle of winter."

Kuzma shook his head.

"Probably 'tis your illness that makes you so bitter! You ought to get a little treatment—"

Akim, without replying, squatted down on his heels in front of the fire. The fire had already died down; only a little heap of thin coals glowed red under the

kettle; the garden grew darker and darker, and the blue aurora had already begun faintly to illuminate their faces, as the gusts of wind inflated Akim's shirt. Mitrofan was sitting beside Kuzma, leaning on his stick; the baker sat on a stump under a linden tree. On hearing Kuzma's last words, he grew serious.

"This is the way I look at it," he said submissively and sadly: "that nothing can be otherwise than as the Lord decrees. If the Lord does not grant health, then all the doctors cannot help. Akim, yonder, speaks the truth: no one can die before his death-hour comes."

"Doctors!" interposed Akim, staring at the coals and pronouncing the word in a specially vicious way—"doktogga!" "Doctors, brother, have an eye on their pockets. I'd let out his guts for him, for such a doctor, so I would!"

"Not all of them are thinking of their pockets," said Kuzma.

"I haven't seen all of them."

"Well, then, don't chatter nonsense about what you haven't seen," said Mitrofan severely, and turned to the baker: "Yes, and you're a nice one, too: making yourself out a hopeless beggar! Perchance, if you didn't wallow round on the ground, dog-fashion, you wouldn't have that acute pain."

"Why, you see, I—" the baker began.

But at this point Akim's scoffing composure deserted him of a sudden. And, rolling his stupid hawk-like eyes, he abruptly leaped to his feet and began to yell, with the irascibility of an idiot: "What? So

I'm chattering nonsense, am I? Have you been in the hospital? Have you? And I have been there! I spent seven days there—and did he give me any white-bread rolls, that doctor of yours? Did he?"

"Yes, you're a fool," interposed Mitrofan: "white rolls are not given to every sick person: it depends on their disease."

"Ah! It depends on their disease! Well, let him go burst with his disease, devil take him!" shouted Akim.

And, casting furious glances about him, he flung his spoon into the "thin gruel" and strode off into the hut.

X

THERE, breathing with his whistling breath, he lighted the lamp, and the hut assumed a cosy air. Then he fished out spoons from some niche close under the roof, threw them on the table, and shouted: "Bring on that porridge, can't you?" The baker rose and stepped over to the kettle. "Pray be our guest," he said, as he passed Kuzma. But Kuzma found it unpleasant to eat with Akim. He asked for a bit of bread, salted it heavily, and, chewing it with delight, returned to his seat on the bench. It had become completely dark. The pale blue light illuminated the trees more and more extensively, swiftly, and clearly, as if blown into life by the wind, and at each flash of the aurora the foliage, in its death-like

green, became for a moment as distinctly visible as in the daytime; then everything was again inundated by blackness as of the tomb. The nightingales had ceased their song—only one, directly above the hut, continued to warble sweetly and powerfully. In the hut, around the lamp, a peaceably ironical conversation was flowing on once more. “They did not even ask who I am, whence I come,” said Kuzma to himself. “What a people, may the devil take it.” And he shouted, jestingly, into the hut: “Akim! You haven’t even asked who I am, and whence I come.”

“And why should I want to know?” replied Akim indifferently.

“Well, I’m going to ask him about something else,” said the baker’s voice—“how much land he expects to receive from the Duma. What think you, Akim-ushka? Hey?”

“I’m no clever one at interpreting writing,” said Akim. “You can see it better from the dung-heap.”

And the baker must have been disconcerted once more: silence ensued, for a minute.

“He is referring to us, the likes of himself,” remarked Mitrofan. “I happened to mention that in Rostoff the poor folks—the proletariat, that is to say—save themselves in winter time in the manure—”

“They go outside the town,” cut in Akim cheerfully, “and—into the manure with them! They burrow in exactly like the pigs—and there’s no harm done.”

“Fool!” Mitrofan snapped him up, and so sternly that Kuzma turned round. “What are you gobbling about? You stupid fool, you rickety bandy-legs!

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When poverty overtakes you, you'll burrow too."

Akim, dropping his spoon, gazed sleepily at him and, with the same sudden irascibility which he had recently exhibited, opened wide his empty hawk-like eyes and yelled furiously: "A—ah! Poverty! Did you want to work at so much the hour?"

"Of course!" angrily shouted Mitrofan, inflating his Dahomey-like nostrils and staring point-blank at Akim with blazing eyes. "Twenty hours for twenty kopeks?"

"A—ah! But you wanted a ruble an hour? You're a greedy one, devil take you!"

But the wrangle subsided as quickly as it had flared up. A minute later Mitrofan was talking quietly and scolding himself with the porridge: "As if he weren't greedy himself! Why, he, that blind devil, would strangle himself in the sanctuary for the sake of a kopek. If you'll believe it, he sold his wife for fifteen kopeks! God is my witness that I am not jesting. Off yonder in our village of Lipetzk there's a little old man, Pankoff by name, who also used to work as gardener—well, and now he has retired and is very fond of that sort of affair."

"Why, doesn't Akim come from over Lipetzk way?" interrupted Kuzma.

"From Studenko, from the village," said Akim indifferently, exactly as if they were not discussing him at all.

"Right, right," Mitrofan confirmed his statement.

"A peasant from the roots up. He lives with his brother, controls the land and the farmyard in com-

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mon with him, but nevertheless somewhat in the position of a fool; and, of course, his wife has already run away from him. But we learned the reason why she ran away, from the man himself: he made a bargain with Pankoff, for fifteen kopeks, to admit him of a night, instead of himself, into the chamber—and he did it.”

Akim remained silent, tapping the table with his spoon and staring at the lamp. He had already eaten his fill, wiped his mouth, and was now engaged in thinking over something.

“Jabbering is not working, young man,” he said at last. “And what if I did admit him: my wife is withering, isn’t she?” And as he listened to hear what they would say to that, he bared his teeth in a grin, elevated his eyebrows, and his tiny face, which was like a Suzdal holy picture, assumed a joyously sad expression and became covered with large wooden wrinkles. “I’d like to get that fellow with a gun!” he said with a specially strong squeak and twisting of his consonants. “Wouldn’t he go head over heels!”

“Of whom are you speaking?” inquired Kuzma.

“Why, that nightingale—”

Kuzma set his teeth and, after reflection, said: “Well, you are a putrid peasant. A wild beast.”

“Well, and who cares for what you think?” retorted Akim. And, giving vent to a hiccough, he rose to his feet. “Well, what’s the use of burning the lamp for nothing?”

Mitrofan began to roll a cigarette. The baker gathered up the spoons. Crawling from under the

table, he turned his back on the lamp and, hurriedly crossing himself thrice, with a flourish he bent low to the holy picture, in the direction of the dark corner of the hut, shook back his straight hair, which resembled bast, and, raising his face, murmured a prayer. His large shadow fell upon some chests made of boards and broke across them, while he himself seemed to Kuzma even smaller than a short time previously. Kuzma remembered how he had once been called for conscription. Five hundred men had been summoned, only one hundred and twenty being wanted. He had drawn Number 492: yet he had almost been obliged to undress, so many of those naked youths—they resembled sparrows, with arms as thin as whiplashes and huge, solid bellies—had been rejected. Akim hastily crossed himself once more, and once more made a flourishing reverence—and Kuzma gazed at him with a feeling akin to hatred. There was Akim praying—but just try asking him whether he believed in God! His hawk eyes would leap out of their sockets! Evidently he had the idea that no one in all the world believed as he did. He was convinced to the very bottom of his soul that, in order to please God and avoid the condemnation of men, it was necessary to comply in the strictest possible manner with even the smallest fraction of what was appointed in regard to the Church, fasts, feasts, good deeds; that for the salvation of his soul—not out of good feeling, naturally!—those acts must be fulfilled punctually; candles must be placed before the holy pictures, he must eat fish, and oil instead of butter; and on feast-days he

must celebrate, and conciliate the priest with patties and chickens. And every one was firmly convinced that Akim was a profound believer, although Akim himself had never in the whole course of his life wondered what his God was actually like, just as he had never pondered upon either heaven or earth, birth or death. Why should he think? His thinking had been done for him! He knew all the answers—calm answers, prepared a thousand years ago. Didn't he know that in heaven were paradise, angels, the saints; in hell, devils and sinners; on earth, men who cultivate the earth, and build houses, and trade, and accumulate money, and marry, and live for their pleasure? Not all of them, certainly—far from all—but what was to be done about that? All the same, people ought to strive toward that—and when the right time arrived, Akim, too, would show of what he was capable! So said Kuzma to himself, recalling, as always, with amazement and fear, the massacres. Well, and the mystery of birth and death—that did not concern him. After one was born, it was necessary to be baptized, and to live according to our own manner, the Russian manner, not after the manner of dogs—that is, like Turks and Frenchmen. When one died, it was indispensable to receive the Sacrament—otherwise one could not escape hell—and the best of all was to receive the Holy Unction with Oil.¹ That

¹Not Extreme Unction, in the meaning of the Church of Rome. In the Orthodox Catholic Church it is a service of Prayer and Anointment for healing, to be administered and received at any time desired.—TRANS.

was all. There are also on the earth insects, flowers, birds, animals. But Akim did not condescend to think about flowers and insects—he simply crushed them. Among plants he noticed only those which bore fruit or berries or furnished food. Birds fly, sing—and 'tis a most gallant thing to shoot for food those which are fit for such use, but those which are not fit should be shot for amusement. All wild beasts, to the very last one, must be exterminated, but procedure with regard to animals varies: one's own should be kept in good condition, that they may be of service to the owner, but old animals and animals which belong to other people should have their eyes lashed out with a whip, and their legs should be broken.

“And what does he care,” thought Kuzma sadly, “what is it to him, seeing that he has no establishment of his own, that it rains or hails, or that the thunder rumbles for a week, that the lightnings flash; that perchance at this very moment they are lighting up a dead, blue little face in the dark fly-filled hut where that blind girl lies sleeping?”

It seemed as if he had set out from the town a year ago; as if, now, he should never be able to drag himself back to it. His wet cap weighed heavily; his cold feet ached, cramped in his muddy boots. In that one day his face had become weather-beaten and burned. His body had been lamed by the springless cart, by discomfort, by the longing for rest. But sleep—no, one could not get to sleep yet. Rising from the bench, Kuzma went out against the damp gale, to the gate which led into the fields, to the

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waste spaces of the long-abandoned cemetery. A faint light from the hut fell upon the mud; but as soon as Kuzma had taken his departure, Akim blew out the lamp, the light vanished, and night immediately closed in. The bluish lightning flashed out still more vividly and unexpectedly, laid bare the whole sky, the extreme recesses of the orchard to the most distant apple trees, where stood the bath-house, and suddenly inundated everything with such blackness that one's head swam. And once more, somewhere low down, the dull, far-away thunder began to rumble; and from behind the rustling of the trees and the droning of the rain came the abrupt whining, barking, and snarling of the dogs, feasting outside the orchard on a cow which had died. After standing still for a while, until he made out the dim light which filtered under the gate, Kuzma emerged into the road which ran past the earth wall, past rustling ancient lindens and maple trees, and began to stroll slowly to and fro. The rain began to patter down once more on his cap and his hands. But he wanted to think out what he had begun. Suddenly the black darkness was again deeply rent; the raindrops glistened; and on the waste land, in a corpse-like blue light, the figure of a dripping, thin-necked horse stood out in sharp lines. A field of oats, of a pallid, metallic green hue, flashed into momentary sight beyond the waste land, against an inky black background; and the horse raised his head. Dread overpowered Kuzma. The horse was promptly swallowed up in the darkness. But—to whom did he belong? why was he not hob-

bled? why was he thus roaming about without oversight? And Kuzma turned back toward the gate. In the ditch alongside the earthen wall, among the dockweeds and nettles, some one was half growling, half snoring. Stumbling along with his hands outstretched, as if he were a blind man, Kuzma approached the ditch.

“Who’s there?” he shouted.

But the snore was that of a person dead drunk, powerful and choking. Everything else round about was wrapped in profound slumber. The lightning flashes had ceased; the trees, invisible in the darkness, rustled dully and gloomily under the increasing downpour. And when, at last, Kuzma had found his way to the bath-house by the sense of feeling alone, the rain was pouring down upon the earth with such force that he began to be assailed, as he had been in his childhood, by terrible thoughts about the Flood. He struck a match, and beheld a broad sleeping-ledge near the tiny window. Rolling up his overcoat, he threw it on the head end. In the darkness he crawled upon the ledge and with a deep sigh stretched himself out on it; he lay, after the fashion of old people, on his back, and shut his weary eyes. Great God, what a stupid and toilsome journey! And how had he chanced to come hither? In the manor-house also darkness now reigned, and the flashes of lightning were fleetingly, stealthily reflected in the mirrors. In the hut, beneath the heavy downpour of the rain, Akim was sleeping. Here in this bath-house devils had frequently been seen, as a matter of course: did

Akim possess a proper faith in devils? No. People had so believed a thousand years ago, and Akim had merely accepted his heritage mechanically. But, even though he did not believe, he could nevertheless narrate how, once on a time, his deceased grandfather had gone to the grain crib for some bran and had found the devil, as shaggy as a dog, sitting, his legs twisted into a knot, on one of the girders.

Crooking one knee, Kuzma laid his wrist on his forehead and began to doze, sighing and grieving the while.

XI

HE had passed the summer waiting for a place. That night, in the orchard at Kazakovo, it became clear to him that his dreams of orchards were foolish. On his return to the town, after carefully thinking over his situation he began to hunt for a position as a shop or counting-house clerk; then he began to reconcile himself to anything that offered, provided only that it furnished him a morsel of bread. But his searches, efforts, and entreaties were vain. Despair seized upon him. How was it he had failed to see that he had nothing to hope for? In the town he had long borne the reputation of being a very eccentric person. Drunkenness and lack of employment had converted him into a laughing-stock. In the beginning his manner of life had amazed the town; later on, it had come to seem sus-

picious. And, of a truth, who had ever heard of such a thing as a petty burgher at his age living in a lodging-house, being unmarried and poor as an organ-grinder? All his property consisted of a chest and a ponderous old umbrella! Kuzma began to look at himself in the mirror: really, now, what sort of man was the one he beheld before him? He slept in the "common room," among strangers, chance people who came and went; in the morning he crawled in the heat about the bazaar and to the eating-houses, where he picked up rumours concerning jobs; after dinner, he took a nap, then seated himself at the window and read Kostomaroff's History, gazed at the dusty, glaring white street and at the sky, pale blue with sultriness. For whom and for what was he living in the world—that petty burgher, broad of bone though lean, and already grey-haired from hunger and austere thinking; who called himself an anarchist and was not able to explain intelligently what an anarchist is? He sat and read; he sighed and paced to and fro in the room; he squatted down on his heels and unlocked his small chest; he arranged in more orderly fashion his tattered little books and manuscripts, two or three faded shirts, an old long-skirted great-coat, a waistcoat, the much worn certificates of his birth and his baptism. And he dropped his hands forlornly. What meaning was there to all this? Such poverty, such loneliness! And he shuddered at the thought of what lay ahead of him. Tikhon was childless, and rich—but Tikhon wouldn't give so much as a copper coin to bury him. . . .

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The summer stretched out in endless length. The Duma was dissolved, but that did not break the monotony of the long, hot days. A vast revolt in the country districts was expected, but no one so much as lifted an eyebrow so long as absolutely nothing of any magnitude took place. Fresh and savage attacks on the Jews were contrived; day after day executions and shootings took place; but the town ceased to take the slightest interest in them. In the country, at the manor-houses, terror reigned—especially after that famous day when the peasants rose in rebellion at the “order” of some one or other. But what cared the town for the country districts? Kazakoff sent an extra company of kazaks. The local newspaper was closed down three times, and at last they made an end of the whole business by prohibiting the sale of the newspapers from the capitals. Once more poster advertisements began to bear the inscription: “By permission of the Authorities, temporarily in this Town,” and the posters themselves again became abominable. Little Russians arrived, attracted by the presentation of “the famous historical drama ‘Taras Bulba, the murderer of his own son,’” and by the announcement that “the entire company will take part” in the national dance, the Hopak, “in sumptuous costumes,” and that there would be “free presents”—a milch cow and a tea set “worth seventy-five rubles.” Swift runners and fortune-tellers reappeared, as well as certain knaves who exhibited human monstrosities—twins, a bearded lady, a young girl who weighed five hundred and seventy-six pounds, “the marvel of

the XX century—a live freak captured in the Red Sea,” which lay dead in a zinc bathtub behind a cotton print curtain.

“Cursed be the day I was born into this thrice-cursed country!” Kuzma said at times, as he hurled his newspaper on to the table, closed his eyes, and gritted his teeth. “People ought now to be shouting so that it could be heard throughout the whole world: ‘To arms, ye who believe in God.’”

“And you’ll go on shouting until you make yourself heard,” some one quietly answered him.

Then he turned the conversation to the crops, the drought. And Kuzma relapsed into silence: the events which were taking place were so atrocious that the human mind was unable to grasp them.

Rain fell now and then in the countryside, but in town, day after day from May until August, an infernal drought held uninterrupted sway. The lodging-house, a corner building, baked in the sun. At night one’s blood hammered in one’s head from the stifling heat, and every noise which came through the open windows wakened one with a start. It was impossible to sleep in the hayloft because of the fleas, the crowing of the young cocks, and the odour of the manure-yard. Moreover, smoking was prohibited there: the landlord was fat, weak, and nervous as an old woman. All summer long Kuzma never abandoned the hope of getting to Voronezh. Akh, how little he had prized the days of his youth! If now he might only saunter between trains through the streets of Voronezh, gaze at the familiar poplar

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trees, at the tiny blue house outside the town—! But what was the use? Should he spend ten or fifteen rubles, and then have to deny himself a candle or a roll of white bread? More than that, it was shameful for an old man to surrender himself to memories of love. And how about Klasha? Was she really his daughter? He had seen her a couple of years ago: she was sitting at the window, weaving lace; she had a charming, modest face, but resembled only her mother. What could he say to her, even if he should make up his mind to go? How could he look old Ivan Semyonitch in the face?

Time flowed on in intolerable boredom. There were not even any visitors at the inn. During the whole of July the only person who put up there was a youthful deacon, rather a queer fellow, after the pattern of seminary queer sticks. A relative of his came to see him, but the visit ended in nothing: the deacon was absent in the bazaar, and his name, Krasnobaeff, was written up on the board after the Latin fashion: Benedictoff.

As autumn drew near, Kuzma persuaded himself that it was indispensable for him to make a pilgrimage to the holy places, to some monastery, or—to give up the struggle for good and all and take to drinking again in order to spite some one or other. One day, having unlocked his chest, he found Tolstoy's "Confession," opened it, and read the pencilled inscription which he had written while in a state of intoxication, during his services with Kasatkin: "It is impossible to wean all men from vodka." A couple

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of months earlier he would merely have contracted his brows in a frown—what a stupid inscription!—but now he grinned and said to himself: “Why not consign everything to the devil’s mother, burn everything to the last thread, and draw a razor across my throat?”

Autumn set in. In the bazaar there was a fragrance of apples and plums. The schoolboys were brought back to the gymnasium from their vacation in the country. The horse races began. The sun began to set behind Chips Square. If one emerged from the gate in the evening and crossed the intersection of the streets, one was blinded: to the left the whole street, ending at the square in the distance, was flooded with a low, mournful light. The gardens, behind their fences, were full of dust and spiders’ webs. Polozoff came to meet one, wearing a coat with sleeve-flaps, but he had already exchanged his hat for a peaked cap with military insignia. There was not a soul in the town park. The band-stand for the musicians was boarded up; so was the kiosk where, in summer, kumys and lemonade were sold; the wooden refreshment counter was closed. And one day, as he sat near the band-stand, Kuzma was so overwhelmed with depression that he seriously meditated committing suicide. The sun had set; its light was reddish; thin, rose-hued foliage was drifting along the alley; a cold wind was blowing. The cathedral bells were ringing the summons to the All-Night Vigil Service, and one’s soul ached unbearably at this closely set, methodical peal, executed in countrified Saturday fashion.

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All at once, from under the band-stand, a cough became audible, and a clearing of the throat. "Motka," Kuzma said to himself. And sure enough, from under the stairs crawled Duck-Headed Matty. He wore rusty soldier's boots, an extremely long uniform from the shoulders of a second-school boy, besprinkled with flour—evidently the bazaar had been making merry—and a straw hat which had once been run over by wheels. With his eyes still closed, spitting and staggering with intoxication, he stalked past, without so much as asking for a smoke. Kuzma, repressing his tears, shouted to him: "Mot! Come, let's have a chat, and a smoke—"

And Motka turned, seated himself on the bench, began drowsily, with twitching brows, to roll himself a cigarette. But apparently he had only a dim idea as to the identity of the person who was sitting by his side—who it was that was complaining to him about his fate. . . .

On the following day that same Motka brought Tikhon's note to Kuzma. And, once more, the noose which had come near strangling Kuzma broke.

At the end of September he went to Durnovka.

PART THREE

THE estate at Durnovka was arranged after the plan of a farm. In fact, it had originally borne precisely that title. Durnovo had owned several estates and had occupied the chief of them, the one at Zusha. Afanasiy Ilitch, who had hunted the Gipsy with dogs, came only occasionally to Durnovka, on his way from a hunting expedition. Nil Afansaievitch, the Marshal of the Nobility, had no taste for farms: he had spent his whole life in organizing dinners, drinking sherry at his club, glorying in his fat, his appetite, his ringing whisper—he had a silver throat—in his lavishness, his witticisms, and his absence of mind. And his son, also, the Uhlán, who bore the name of his grandfather, rarely looked in at Durnovka. The Uhlán still considered himself a great landed proprietor. On retiring from the service he decided to accumulate millions, to show how an estate ought to be managed. But the Uhlán was not fond of being in the fields, and his passion for making purchases helped to ruin him: he bought almost everything his eye fell upon. His trips to Moscow and his amorous constitution likewise contributed to his ruin. His son, who did not finish at the Lyceum, received as his heritage only two farms—

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Laukhino and Durnovka. And the Lyceum student ruined these to such a point that, during the last year he spent at Durnovka, the duties of watchman were discharged by an old scullery-maid, who went about at night with her mallet, garbed in a rusty raccoon cloak. "Well, never mind," Kuzma said to himself, rejoiced to the verge of tears by Tikhon's proposal, and profoundly concealing his joy. "If 'tis a farm, call it a farm! A good thing, too: 'tis a regular end-of-nowhere, savage as in the Tatar times!"

At one period Ilya Mironoff had lived in Durnovka for a couple of years. At the time Kuzma had been a mere child, and all he retained of it in his memory was, first, the fragrant hemp-fields, which drowned Durnovka, as it were, in a dark-green sea, and, secondly, one dark summer night. There had been not a single light in the village on that night. Past their cottage had filed, their chemises gleaming white in the darkness, "nine maidens, nine women, and the tenth a widow," all bare-foot, with hair flowing free, armed with brooms, oaken cudgels, and pitchforks. A deafening ringing of bells had arisen, and a thumping of oven-covers and frying pans, high above which soared a wild choral chant. The widow dragged a plough; alongside her walked a maiden carrying a large holy picture; while the rest rang bells, and thumped, and when the widow led off in a low tone,

"Thou cow-death,
Enter not our village!"

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the chorus repeated in long-drawn tones, with funereal intonations:

“We plough—”

and mournfully, in throaty tones, took up the refrain,

“With incense, with the cross . . .”

Now the aspect of the Durnovka fields was commonplace. The hemp plantations had vanished, and, even if they had not, the fields would have been bare in autumn, as well as the vegetable patches and the back yards. Kuzma set forth from Vorgol in a cheerful and slightly intoxicated state. Tikhon Ilitch had treated him to liqueur cordial at dinner, and at tea, after dinner, Nastasya Petrovna had treated him to two kinds of preserves. Tikhon Ilitch was very kindly disposed on that day. He recalled his youth, his childhood; how they had eaten buckwheat cakes together, how they had shouted “Tally-ho!” after the Dog’s Pistol, and had studied with Byelkin; he called his wife “auntie” and ridiculed her trips to the nun Polukarpia for the good of her soul; he said, with regard to Kuzma’s salary: “We’ll square that, dear brother, we’ll make that right—I’ll not wrong you!” he referred briefly to the revolution: “That little bird started singing too early—look out, or the cat will eat it!” Kuzma rode a dark brown gelding, and around him lay outspread a sea of dark brown ploughed fields. The sun, almost like that of summer, the transparent air, the clear pale-blue sky, all gladdened him

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and gave promise of prolonged repose. The grey, crooked wormwood, turned up roots and all by the plough, was so plentiful that it was being carried off by the carload. Close to the farm itself, in the ploughed field, stood a wretched little nag, with burdocks in his forelock, and a springless cart, piled high with wormwood; and beside it lay Yakoff, bare-legged, in dusty breeches and a long hempen shirt, his side squeezed against a large grey dog which he was holding by the ear. The dog was growling and darting angry sidelong glances.

“Does he bite?” shouted Kuzma.

“He’s savage—there’s no taming him!” Yakoff made haste to reply, as he raised his slanting beard. “He jumps at the horses’ muzzles.”

And Kuzma burst out laughing with pleasure. The peasant was a regular peasant—and the steppe was a genuine steppe!

The road ran down a hill, and the horizon became narrower. In front the new iron roof of a grain-kiln gleamed green, seeming drowned in the dense low growths of the park. Beyond the park, on the opposite slope, stood a long row of cottages constructed of bricks moulded from clay, and roofed with straw. On the right, beyond the ploughed fields, stretched a large ravine, merging into the one which separated the farm from the village. At the point where the ravines came together, a pond lay sparkling in the sunlight. On the promontory between them the wings of two unsheathed windmills reared themselves aloft, surrounded by several cottages belonging to one-homestead owners—

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the Mysoffs,¹ as Oska had dubbed them—and the whitewashed schoolhouse gleamed white on the pasture land.

“Well, and do the children get schooling?” inquired Kuzma.

“’Tis obligatory,” said Oska. “They have a scholar who is a terror!”

“What scholar are you talking about? Do you mean a teacher?”

“Well, then, teacher, it’s all the same. The way he has educated those brats—I tell you, ’tis fine. He’s a soldier. He beats them unmercifully, but on the other hand he has them well trained in all sorts of ways. Tikhon Ilitch and I happened to drop in one day—and if they didn’t all leap to their feet and bark out: ‘We wish you health!’ just as well as if they were soldiers!”

And once more Kuzma broke into a laugh.

But when he had passed the threshing-floor, had descended by the defective road past the cherry orchard and turned to the left, to the long farmyard, lying well dried and golden-hued in the sun, his heart actually began to beat violently. Here he was, at home, at last. And as he mounted the porch and stepped across the threshold, Kuzma gave vent to a sigh, and, making the sign of the cross on brow and breast, he bowed low before the dark holy picture in the corner of the ante-room. . . .

¹ Thus manufacturing a family name out of “*Mys*,” a promontory.—TRANS.

And for a long time he cared not whether the Russian people had a future or not. He roamed about the manor estate, the village; he sat for hours at a time on the doorsteps of the cottages, on the threshing-floors—watching the inhabitants of Durnovka, enjoying the possibility of breathing pure air, of chatting with his new neighbours.

II

OPPPOSITE the house, with their rear to Durnovka, to the wide ravine, stood the storehouses. From the porch, half of the village was visible, and beyond the storehouses the pond and a part of the promontory—one windmill and the schoolhouse. The sun rose to the left, beyond the fields, beyond the railway line on the horizon. In the morning the pond glittered with a bright, fresh exhalation, and from the park behind the house was wafted an odour of foliage from evergreens and leaf trees, steppe grass, apples, and dew. The rooms were small and empty. In the study, papered with old music sheets, rye was stored; in the hall and the drawing-room no furniture was left save a few Viennese chairs with broken seats and a large extension table. The windows of the drawing-room overlooked the park, and during almost the entire autumn Kuzma passed the night in it, on a broken-down couch, without closing the windows. The floor was never swept: the widow Odnodvorka lived there

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temporarily, in the capacity of cook; she had been the mistress of young Durnovo, and was obliged to run after her small children and prepare food, after a fashion, for herself, Kuzma, and the labourer. Kuzma himself prepared the samovar in the morning, after which he sat at the window in the hall and drank tea and ate apples.

Through the early glitter, beyond the brilliant mist over the ploughed fields, the railway train dashed past in the morning; and, above, rose-coloured wreaths floated behind it. Dense smoke hung over the roofs of the village. The garden was freshly fragrant; silvery hoar-frost lay upon the storehouses. At noon the sun stood over the village; it was hot out of doors; in the park the maples and lindens grew thin, quietly dropping their leaves; the vast spaces and the transparent dry air of the fields were filled with silence and with peace. The doves, warmed up by the sun, dozed all day long on the sloping roof of the kitchen, whose new straw roof gleamed yellow against the clear blue sky. The labourer rested after his dinner. Odnodvorka went off to her own home.

But Kuzma roamed about. He went to the threshing-floor, rejoicing in the sun, the firm road, the withered steppe grass, the beet-tops which had turned dark brown, the charming late flower of the blue chicory, and the down of the cotton thistle floating quietly through the air. The ploughed spaces in the fields gleamed in the sunlight with the silken threads of barely visible spiders' webs, which extended to an immense distance. In the vegetable garden,

goldfinches perched on the dry stalks of the burdocks. Upon the threshing-floor, amid the profound stillness in the sultry heat, grasshoppers diligently emitted their hoarse cry.

From the threshing-floor Kuzma climbed across the earthen well and returned to the manor-house through the orchard and the fir plantation. In the orchard he chatted with the petty burghers, the lessees of the orchard, with the Bride and the Goat, who were gathering up the windfalls, and forced his way, in their company, into the nettle patch where lay the ripest fruit of all. Sometimes he wandered to the village, to the schoolhouse. He became freshened up, sun-burned; he felt himself almost happy.

The Goat amazed him by her health, her cheery stupidity, her senselessly brilliant Egyptian eyes. The Bride was handsome and strange. With him, as with Tikhon, she remained silent; not a word was to be got out of her. But when one went away she gave vent to a harsh laugh, indulged in bawling conversations with the petty burghers, and would suddenly strike up:

“Let them thrash me, curse me—
My pretty eyes will twinkle more . . .”

The soldier-teacher, born stupid, had lost in the service what small wits he had ever possessed. In appearance he was the most commonplace sort of peasant, about forty years of age. But he always spoke in such an extraordinary manner, and uttered such

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nonsense, that all one could do was to throw up one's hands in despair. He was for ever smiling with the greatest appearance of slyness at something or other; he looked down upon his interlocutor condescendingly, with his eyes screwed up, and never replied to any question immediately.

"How am I to address you?" Kuzma asked him the first time he visited the school.

The soldier blinked and considered the matter. "The sheep without a name might be a ram," he said at last, at his leisure. "But I will ask you something also. Is Adam a name, or is it not?"

"It is."

"Very well. And about how many people, for example, have died since then?"

"I don't know," said Kuzma. "Why do you inquire?"

"Simply because that's one of the things we never were born to understand. Now, take any busybody you like. Do you indulge in revolt? Do it, my dear man: perhaps you will become a *fit*-marshal! Only, at best, that they may stretch you out without your breeches for a flogging. Are you a peasant? Till the soil. Are you a cooper? In that case, equally, attend to your business. I, for example, am a soldier and a veterinary. Not long ago I was passing through the Fair, and what should I see but a horse with the glanders? I went at once to the policeman: 'Thus and so,' says I, 'Your High Well-born.' 'But can you kill that horse with a feather?' 'With the greatest pleasure!'"

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"With what sort of a feather?" inquired Kuzma.

"Why, a goose feather. I took it, sharpened it, jabbed it into his spinal cord, blew a little—into the feather, I mean—and the thing was done. 'Tis a simple matter, to all appearance, but just try to do it!" And the soldier winked craftily and tapped his brow with his finger: "Understanding is needed here."

Kuzma shrugged his shoulders and made no reply. And as he passed Odnodvorka's cottage he found out from her boy Senka what the soldier's name was. It turned out to be Parmen.

"And what's your task for to-morrow?" added Kuzma, gazing with curiosity at Senka's fiery red mop of hair, his lively green eyes, his pock-marked face, his rickety little body, and his hands and feet all cracked with mud and chaps.

"The tasks are verses," said Senka, grasping his uplifted foot in his right hand and hopping up and down on one spot.

"What sort of tasks?"

"Counting the geese. A flock of geese has flown past—"

"Ah, I know," said Kuzma. "And what else?"

"Also mice—"

"They are to be counted too?"

"Yes. Six mice were walking along carrying six copper coins," mumbled Senka rapidly, casting a side-long glance at Kuzma's silver watch chain. "One mouse, which was bigger, carried two coins. How many does that make in all—?"

"Splendid. And what are the verses?"

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Senka released his foot.

"The verses are 'Who is he?'"

"Have you learned them?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, then, say them."

And Senka muttered still more rapidly about a horseman who was riding above the Neva through the forests, where there were only—

"'Firs, pine-trees, and green moss. . . .'"

"Grey," said Kuzma, "not green."

"Well, then, grey," assented Senka.

"And who was that horseman?"

Senka considered the matter. "Why, a sorcerer," said he.

"Exactly. Now, tell your mother that she ought to cut your hair, on your temples at least. 'Tis all the worse for you as it is, when the teacher pulls it."

"Then he'll find my ears," said Senka unconcernedly, again grasping his foot, and off he hopped on the pasture common.

III

THE promontory and Durnovka lived in a state of perpetual enmity and mutual disdain, as adjoining villages always do. The promontory dwellers regarded the Durnovka folk in the light of bandits and beggars, while the Durnovka people returned the compliment precisely and in full measure.

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Durnovka was "gentry property," while on the promontory dwelt "boors," one-farm petty owners—more properly speaking, the remains of the one-farm people who had emigrated to the Tomsk Government. Odnodvorka was the only person who was not included in this enmity, these quarrels. Small, thin, dependable, she was lively, even-tempered, and agreeable in intercourse; and she was observant. She knew every family on the promontory and in Durnovka as well as if it were her own; she was the first to inform the manor-house of every smallest happening in the life of the village. And every one was also thoroughly well acquainted with her life.

She never concealed anything from anybody; she talked calmly and simply about her husband and Durnovo and stated that she had become a procuress when he went away. "What could I do?" she said, with a faint sigh. "I was dreadfully poor; I had not enough bread even after the new harvest. My good husband loved me, to speak the plain truth, but one has to submit, you know. The master gave three whole carloads of rye for me. 'What can I do?' I said to my husband. 'Twas plain, I must go, he said. He went for the rye, dragged home measure after measure, and his tears drip-dripped, drip-dripped all the while."

And, after a moment's thought, she added:

"Well, and later on, when the master went away, and my husband went to Rostoff, I began to bring people together, as chance occurred. You're immoral dogs, the Lord forgive you!"

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By day she toiled, never pausing for a moment; by night she mended, sewed, stole snow-screens from the railway. Once late at night, when Kuzma was driving to Tikhon Ilitch, he ascended a hillock and halted paralyzed with fright: across the ploughed land, half deluged in darkness, on a faintly smouldering strip of the sunset, something black, huge, sprang up and bore down smoothly on Kuzma.

"Who's that?" he shouted feebly, tugging at his reins.

"Oï!" feebly and in affright shouted that which had so swiftly and smoothly sprung up against the sky; and it disappeared with a crash.

Kuzma recovered himself—and instantly recognized, in the darkness, Odnodvorka. She had been running toward him on her light, unshod feet, all bent together with the weight of two screens a fathom long—the sort that are set up, in winter, along the railway line, to protect it from snowdrifts. And, having rearranged herself, she whispered, with a quiet laugh:

"You frightened me to death. When one runs off somewhere of a night, one is all a-tremble, but what can one do? The whole village uses these for fire-wood, and that's the only way we save ourselves from freezing."

The farm-hand Koshel, on the other hand, was a man not devoid of interest. There was nothing one could talk about with him, and he was not loquacious by nature. Like the majority of the Durnovka people, he merely repeated antiquated, insignificant apophthegms, reasserted that which had been known for

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many a long year. If the weather turned bad he cast an eye at the sky: "The weather's spoiling. Rain is what the growing green things most need at the present moment." The fields were ploughed a second time, and he remarked: "If you won't give a second ploughing you'll be left without bread. That's what the old people have always said."

He had been a soldier in his day—had been in the Caucasus—but the military life had left no traces on him. He was unable to pronounce the word "post-office" properly: he called it "spost-office." He could tell absolutely nothing whatsoever about the Caucasus, with the exception of the facts that mountain followed mountain there, and that terribly hot and strange waters spurted out of the ground. If you placed a piece of mutton in them, it was boiled in one minute, and if you didn't take it out at the proper time, it got raw again. And he was not in the least proud of the fact that he had seen the world; he even bore himself with scorn toward people who knew the world. It is well understood that people only "rove about" because they are forced to do so, or through poverty. He never believed a single rumour—"all lies!"—but he did believe, and swore to it as a fact, that not long ago a witch had rolled in the form of a wheel through the twilight shades near Basovka, and that one peasant, who was no fool, had taken and caught hold of that wheel and thrust his belt through the hub and tied it fast.

"Well, and what happened next?" asked Kuzma.

"What?" replied Koshel. "That witch waked up

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early in the morning, and, lo and behold, that belt was sticking out her mouth and behind, and was tied fast over her stomach."

"But why didn't she untie it?"

"Evidently, the knot had had the sign of the cross made over it."

"And aren't you ashamed to believe such nonsense?"

"What is there for me to be ashamed of? People lie, and I let them talk."

So Kuzma only liked to hear the man's songs. As he sat in the darkness at the open window, without a light anywhere, with the village barely discernible like a black spot on the other side of the ravine, it was so quiet round about that the apples could be heard falling from the wild apple trees beyond the corner of the house. And Koshel walked slowly about the farmyard with his mallet, and with a serene melancholy hummed to himself in his falsetto voice: "Cease your song, canary, little bird." He kept watch over the manor until morning and slept by day. He had hardly anything to do: Tikhon Ilitch had made haste to settle up Durnovka affairs betimes that year, and out of all the cattle only one horse and a cow remained. So things were quiet, even rather bore-some, at the manor-house. The clear days were followed by colder days, bluish-grey, soundless. The goldfinches and tomtits began to whistle in the bare park, the cross-bills to pipe in the fir trees, the cedar-birds made their appearance, bullfinches, and some sort of leisurely tiny birds which hopped in flocks from place to place on the threshing-floor, whose supports

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were already sprouting with bright green new growths; sometimes a very silent, light little bird of that sort perched all alone on a spear of grass in the field. In the vegetable gardens behind Durnovka, the last potatoes were being dug among the sheaves. And at times, as evening drew on, some one of the peasants would stand there for a long space, absorbed in thought and gazing at the fields, as he bore on his back a plaited basket filled with ears of grain. Darkness began to fall early, and at the manor-house they said: "How late the train passes by nowadays!" although there had been no change in the schedule of the trains. Kuzma sat near the window and read newspapers all day long; he had written down his spring trip to Kazakovo and his conversations with Akim; he had jotted down remarks in an old account book—all he had seen and heard in the village. What occupied his attention most of all was Syery, the Grey Man.

IV

THE village was deserted. Many had gone away to work on the clover. Trifon had died in mid-August, at Assumption-tide—he had choked himself, as he broke the fast, on a bit of raw ham. At the beginning of September Komar, one of the chief rioters, renowned for his strength, his cleverness, and his daring in his dealings with the members

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of the gentry class, had entered a distillery near Eletz, fallen into the malt-kiln while in a state of intoxication, and been suffocated. No one had known that he was there, and the door had been bolted. Komar had bent the door in his efforts to escape into the air, but evidently such a death had been written in his fate. Another rebel, Vanka Krasny, had again betaken himself to the Donetz mines. The harness-maker was working about on different estates. Rodka was working on the railway. Deniska had disappeared somewhere. And everybody hypocritically pitied Syery, taking advantage of the opportunity to ridicule both son and father. Yakoff's hands trembled when he began to talk about Syery. And what could they do but tremble? What had that Syery done with the land which Yakoff was ready to "devour in handfuls"? No one in all Durnovka suffered the hundredth part of what Yakoff suffered when rumours became current about rebellions, cases of arson, and the expropriation of land. He merely held his peace—thanks to that subterranean secretiveness which thousands of his forebears had sucked in with their mothers' milk. And, indeed, his breath would have failed him had he tried to speak. Now, when the rumours became more and more desperate, he even became reconciled to his son Vaska, for the sake of the land. His son was a pock-marked, rough, thickset young fellow, all overgrown with a beard at the age of twenty, broad-shouldered, curly-haired, and so strong that even pincers could not have pulled out a single one of his hairs. The son, with that beard,

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his head closely clipped, garbed in a red shirt, resembled a convict, but he dressed his wife in the style of a petty citizen of the towns. He had turned out the image of his father so far as greed was concerned, and had already begun to trade secretly in vodka, coarse tobacco, soap, and kerosene. And Yakoff became reconciled, in the hope of satisfying his land-hunger by the aid of his son—in the hope that he might become rich and begin to lease it. Why did Syery make peace with Deniska, who had repeatedly given him “a healthy drubbing”? What was he hoping for, that he thus altered his course, like the poorest beggar? He had leased his land, he did not live out on jobs. He sat at home cold and hungry and had no thought for anything save how he might procure the wherewithal for a smoke: he could not get through the day without his pipe. He attended all the village assemblies, but always arrived just as they were coming to an end. He never missed a single wedding or baptism or funeral, although he huddled up against the door; and when he extended his hand to the host, who was serving refreshments to his guests, he not infrequently received nothing but rough denunciations. Syery did not care greatly for liquor, but no drinking to seal a bargain ever passed off without his presence: he intruded himself not only into all the community drinking-bouts, but also into all those of his neighbours—after purchases, sales, and exchanges. And his neighbours had grown so accustomed to this that they were not even surprised

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when Syery presented himself. And he really was entertaining to listen to.

"He is valiant, so far as words go," people said of Syery. And it was true: if he were at ease in his mind—and he was at ease when his pouch was filled with tobacco—what an active, serious peasant Syery could appear to be!

"Well, now, 'tis time to marry off my son," he argued in leisurely fashion, as he held his pipe between his teeth and ground the stalks of the coarse tobacco by strong rubbing in his palms. "If he gets married, he'll bring every kopek home, he will become eager for work, he'll take to digging round about the house as a beetle burrows in a dung-heap. And we're not afraid of work, brother! Only give us a chance!"

But Syery almost never had either peace of mind or work. His appearance justified his nickname: he was grey, lean, of medium stature, with sloping shoulders; his short coat was extremely short, tattered, and dirty; his felt boots were broken and their soles were made of rope; as for his cap, it is not worth mentioning at all. As he sat in his cottage, with this cap eternally on his head, his pipe never removed from his mouth, and anxiously meditated upon something or other, he had the appearance of living in imminent vague expectation. But, according to his own statement, he had devilish bad luck. Nothing worth while ever came his way. Well, and he didn't care about playing jackstraws—taking chances. Every one was on the watch to condemn a man, of

course. "'Tis well known that the tongue can break bones, though it has none itself," Syery was wont to remark. "Do you first place the job in my hand, and then you can jabber."

He had a fairly large amount of land—three desyatini. But he was taxed for ten. And Syery no longer put a hand to his land: "You simply have to give it up, that land: dear heart, it ought to be kept in proper order, but where's the order here?" He himself planted no more than half a field, and even the grain in that he sold standing—he "got rid of the unwelcome for the welcome." And again he had a reason ready: "Only wait to see what comes of it—just you try it!"

"'Tis always better, for example, to await the upshot of anything," muttered Yakoff with a sidelong glance and a malicious laugh.

But Syery laughed also, sadly and scornfully. "Yes, 'tis better!" he grinned. "It's all well enough for you to chatter nonsense: you've got a husband for your girl, and married off your son. But just look at me and the lot of small children who sit in the corner at my house. They don't belong to other folks, you see. And I keep a goat for them, and I'm fattening a young pig. They have to have food and drink, don't they?"

"Well, but a goat is nothing new, for example, in such cases," retorted Yakoff, getting angry. "The trouble with you is, for example, that you think of nothing but vodka and tobacco, tobacco and vodka." And, in order to avoid a senseless quarrel with his neighbour, he hastened to get away from Syery.

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But Syery calmly and practically shouted after him: "A drunkard will come to his senses, brother, but a fool never will."

After sharing his property with his brother, Syery had wandered about for a long time, living in hired lodgings, and had got jobs in the town and on divers estates. He also went to work on the clover. And, on that job, luck one day came his way. An organized gang of workmen which Syery had joined engaged themselves to get in a large crop at eighty kopeks a pud,¹ but behold, the crop turned out twice as heavy as had been calculated. They winnowed it, and Syery was hired to run the machine. He drove some of the grain out through the waste-spout and bought it. And he grew rich: that same autumn he built a brick cottage. But his calculations had been faulty: it turned out that the cottage must be heated. And where was the money to come from? that was the question. Why, there was not even enough to provide food. So it became necessary to burn the top of the cottage; and there it stood, roofless, for a year, and turned completely black. And the chimney went for the price of a horse-collar. There were no horses as yet, it is true; but, naturally, one must begin to fit oneself out some time or other. And Syery let his arms fall by his side in despair: he decided to sell the cottage, to build a cheaper one of beaten clay. His argument ran as follows: There must be in the cottage—well, at the very least, ten thousand bricks; he could sell them for five or even six rubles a thousand; the sum-

¹ Thirty-six pounds.—TRANS.

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total, of course, would be about one hundred and fifty rubles. But it turned out that there were only three thousand five hundred bricks, and he was forced to accept two rubles and a half for each girder, instead of five rubles. And for a long time a bare mound of rubbish occupied the site of the splendid cottage, solidifying under the rain: there was no money available for clearing it away, and one's hands simply refused to undertake the task. Yakoff harrangued on the subject: "Matters ought, for example, to have been more cheaply managed from the start." "But, devil take it," Syery said to himself, "a cheap thing doesn't last long, does it?" And, much troubled in mind, he proceeded to look up a new cottage—and spent a whole year in bargaining for precisely those which were beyond his means. He had reconciled himself to his present domicile merely in the firm expectation of a future cottage which should be strong, spacious, and warm.

"I simply don't intend to live on here!" he snapped one day.

Yakoff stared at him attentively and shook his cap. "Exactly so. That means you are expecting your ships to come in?"

"They'll come, all right," replied Syery mysteriously.

"Oi, drop your nonsense," said Yakoff. "Get yourself a place somewhere—anywhere you can—and keep your teeth, for example, in their proper place."

But the thought of a fine farmstead, good order,

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some suitable, real work, poisoned Syery's entire life. He got bored when working in a place.

"Evidently, working at home isn't as sweet as honey, either," said his neighbours.

"Never you mind, it might be honey-sweet if the house were managed sensibly!"

"Just so. And will you take a place by the month, or until the working season?"

"I'll get one, never fear. Oversight is needed at home, isn't it?"

"But all you do is to sit in the house and smoke your pipe."

"What am I to do, then? can't I even smoke?"

And Syery, suddenly becoming animated, jerked the cold pipe out of his mouth and began his favourite story: how, while still a bachelor, he had lived two full years honestly and nobly at the house of a priest near Eletz. "Yes, and if I were to go there this minute, they would fairly tear me to pieces with joy!" he exclaimed. "I need say only one word: 'I've come, papa, to work for you—will you take me or not?' 'But why do you ask that, light of my life? Don't I know you? Yes, good Lord, live here with us for ever and ever, if you will!'"

"Well, and you might go there, for example—"

"I might go there! Look at them—all those brats in the corner! We know all about that; 'tis another man's grief, I'll not meddle. But a man is being wasted here, in vain."

V

SYERY was being wasted, in vain, this year also. He had sat at home all winter long, with care-worn countenance, without light, cold and hungry. During the Great Fast (Lent), he had managed somehow or other to get a place with Rusanoff, near Tula: no one in his own neighbourhood would any longer give him a place. But before the month was out, Rusanoff's establishment had become more repulsive to him than a bitter radish.

"Oï, young fellow!" the manager once remarked to him. "I can see right through you: you are picking a quarrel so that you can take to your heels. Here, you dog, here's your money in advance, and now be off with you into the bushes!"

"Perhaps some sort of vagabond might take himself off, but not me," retorted Syery sharply.

But the manager did not understand the hint. And it became necessary to adopt more decisive means. One day Syery was set to hauling in some husks for the cattle. He went to the threshing-floor and began to load a cart with straw. The manager came along:

"Didn't I tell you, in good plain Russian, to load up with husks?"

"'Tis not the right time to load them," replied Syery firmly.

"Why not?"

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"Sensible farmers give husks for dinner, not at night."

"And how do you come to be a teacher?"

"I don't like to starve the cattle. That's all there is to my being a teacher."

"But you are hauling straw."

"One must know the proper time for everything."

"Stop loading this very minute."

Syery turned pale. "No, I won't stop my work. I can't stop my work."

"Hand me over that fork, you dog, and get out, lest worse happen."

"I'm no dog, but a baptized Christian man. When I've driven in this load, I'll get out. And I'll go for good."

"Well, brother, that's not likely! You'll go away, and pretty soon you'll be back again—and get locked up in the county jail."

Syery leaped from the cart and hurled his pitchfork into the straw: "I'm going to be locked up, am I?"

"Yes, you are!"

"Hey, young fellow, see that you don't get locked up yourself! As if we didn't know something about you! The master has nothing good to say about you, either, brother—"

The manager's fat cheeks became suffused with dark blood, his eyeballs protruded until they seemed all whites. With the back of his wrist he thrust his peaked cap over on the nape of his neck and, drawing a deep breath, he rapidly ejaculated: "A—ah! So that's the

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way of it! Hasn't a good word to say of me? Tell me, if that's the case—why not?"

"I have nothing to say," mumbled Syery, feeling his legs instantaneously grow cold with fear.

"Yes, you have, brother: you're talking nonsense—you'll tell!"

"Well, and what became of the flour?" suddenly shouted Syery.

"The flour? What flour?"

"The stolen flour. From the mill."

The manager seized Syery by the collar in a death-like grip, fit to suffocate him, and for the space of a moment the two stood stock still.

"What do you mean by it—grabbing a man like that, by his shirt?" calmly inquired Syery. "Do you want to choke me?" Then, all of a sudden, he began to squeak furiously: "Come on, thrash me, thrash while your heart is hot!" And with a jerk he wrenched himself free and seized his pitchfork.

"Come on, men!" the manager yelled, although there was no one anywhere in the vicinity. "Help the manager! Hearken to this: he tried to stab me to death, the dog!"

"Don't come near me, or I'll break your nose," said Syery, balancing his pitchfork. "Don't forget, times are not what they used to be!"

But at this point the manager made a wide sweep with his arm, and Syery flew headlong into the straw.

The melancholy which had once more begun to take powerful effect on Kuzma along with the change in weather, went on constantly increasing in force in pro-

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portion to his closer acquaintance with Durnovka, with Syery. At first the latter was merely sad and ridiculous: what a stupid man! Then he became irritating and repulsive: a degenerate! All summer long he had sat on the doorstep of his cottage smoking, waiting for favours from the Duma. All the autumn he had roamed from farmstead to farmstead, in the hope of attaching himself to some one who was bound for the clover work. On a hot, sunny day a new grain-rick on the edge of the village took fire. Syery was the first person to present himself at the conflagration, where he shouted himself hoarse, singed his eye-lashes off, and got drenched to the skin directing the water-carriers and the men who, pitchforks in hand, flung themselves into the huge rosy-golden flame, dragging out in all directions the blazing thatches, and those who merely dashed about in the midst of the fire, the crackling flames, the gushing water, the uproar, the holy pictures, casks, and spinning-wheels heaped up near the cottages, the sobbing women, and the showers of blackened leaves scattered abroad from the burnt bushes. But what did he do that was practical? In October, when, after inundating rains and an icy storm, the pond froze over and a neighbour's boar-pig slipped from an ice-clad mound, broke through the ice, and began to drown, Syery was the first to arrive at full speed, leap into the water, and save it. But why? In order that he might be the hero of the day, that he might have the right to rush from the pond into the servants' hall, demand vodka, tobacco, and a bite to eat. At first he was all purple; his teeth were chatter-

ing; he could barely move his white lips as he dressed himself from head to foot in some one else's clothes—Koshel's. Then he became animated, got intoxicated, began to brag—and once more narrated how he had served honestly, nobly, at a priest's, and how cleverly he had married off his daughter several years previously. He sat at the table greedily devouring chunks of raw ham and announcing in self-satisfied wise:

“Good. Matriushka, my girl, you see, had been making up to that Yegor. Well, she made eyes at him and made up to him. Nothing happened. One evening I was sitting, so, near the window, when I saw Yegor walk past the cottage once, then again—and that daughter of mine keeps diving, diving toward the window. That signifies, says I to myself, that they've settled matters. And I said to my wife: ‘Do you go give the cattle their fodder: I'm off, summoned to the village assembly.’ I set myself down on the straw behind the cottage, and there I sat and waited. And the first snow began to fall. And I saw Yegorka come sneaking along again. And she was on hand too. They went behind the cellar-house; then—they whisked into the cottage, the new empty one alongside. I waited a bit—”

“A nice story!” remarked Kuzma, with an embarrassed laugh.

But Syery took that for praise, for enthusiasm over his cleverness and craft. And, feeling himself a hero, he went on, now raising his voice, now viciously lowering it: “So there I sat and listened, and waited to find out what would happen next. So, as I was say-

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ing, I waited a bit—then after them I went. I leaped over the threshold—and straight at her, and seized her! Weren't they frightened, though—horribly! He tumbled flat on the floor, as limp as a sack—helpless enough for any one to cut his throat—while she went off in a faint—lay there like a dead duck. 'Well,' says he, 'now thrash me.' That was what he said. 'I don't ne-ed to thrash you,' says I. I took his coat, and I took his waistcoat, too—left him in his drawers only—pretty nearly in the condition when his mother gave him birth. 'Now,' says I, 'get out, go wherever you please.' And I myself set out for my house. I looked round—and he was behind me. The snow was white, and he was white, and he was sniffing. He had no place to go—whither could he run? But my Matryona Mikolavna rushes off to the fields the minute I am out of the cottage! She went at a lively pace—a woman neighbour had difficulty in grabbing her by the sleeve when she had got almost to Basovka, and brought her to me. I let her rest a while, then I said: 'We are poor folks, ain't we?' She said never a word. 'And your mother—is she a poor wretch, or is she a decent woman?' No answer. 'You've put us to shame. Hey, haven't you? What do you mean by it—are you thinking you'll fill my house with that sort, with your bastards—and I'm to shut my eyes to what's going on? Seeing how poor we are, you ought to watch what you're about, and not make us a laughing-stock, dragging your maiden braids all over the place—you trash!' Then I began to tan her hide—I had a fine suitable little whip on hand. Well, to say it simply,

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I cut up her whole body to such a degree that she slid down at my feet and kissed my felt boots, while he sat up on the bench and yelled. Then I began on him, the dear man—”

“And did he marry her?” inquired Kuzma.

“I should say he did!” exclaimed Syery; and, conscious that intoxication was getting the better of him, he began to scrape up the fragments of ham from the platter and stuff them into the pockets of his breeches. “And what a wedding we made of it! As for the expense, I don’t have to blink my eyes over that, brother!”

VI

“WELL, that was a fine tale!” Kuzma meditated within himself, for a long time after that evening. And the weather turned bad, to boot. He did not feel like writing; his melancholy increased in strength. The poverty and lack of practical common sense on the part of Syery and Deniska amazed him: the village was rotting! The beastly tale of the Bride’s experience in the orchard, the death of Rodka, stupefied him. The life of Tikhon Ilitch astonished him. And it certainly took a good deal to astonish him! Didn’t he know his country, his people? With grief and anger he poured out his heart to Tikhon Ilitch, exhorted him, stung him. But if Tikhon Ilitch had only known with what joy Kuzma

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rushed to the window when he espied on the porch his overcoat, his peaked cap, and his grey beard! How afraid he was lest his brother would not spend the night with him, how he tried to detain him as long as possible, dragged him into discussions, reminiscences! Kuzma found the situation tiresome late in the autumn; ugh, how boresome! The sole joy he had was when some one presented himself with a petition. Gololoby from Baskova came several times—a peasant with a perfectly bald head and a huge cap—to write a complaint against his daughter's father-in-law for breaking his collar-bone. The widow Butylotchka came from the promontory to have a letter written to her son; and she was a mass of rags, wet through and icy cold with the rain. She was tearful when she began to dictate.

“Town of Serpukhoff, at the Nobility Bath-Zheltukhin house—”

Here she burst out weeping.

“Well, what next?” asked Kuzma, sorrowfully gazing sidewise at Butylotchka, after the fashion of old people, over his eye-glasses. “Well, I've written that. What more?”

“What more?” inquired Butylotchka in a whisper, and, making an effort to control her voice, she went on: “Write further, my dear, in your very best style: To be given to Mikhail Nazarytch Khlusoff—into his own hands, you understand—” Then she began—now with pauses, now entirely without: “A letter to our dear and beloved son, Misha, why have you forgotten us, Misha, we haven't had a word from you. You

know yourself that we are living in lodgings, and now they are turning us out, and where are we to go now. Our dear little son Misha, we beg you, for the Lord God's sake, that you will come home as fast as you can—" And once more, through her tears, in a whisper: "Then you and we will dig out an earthen hut, and so we shall be in a home of our own. . . ."

The storms and icy downpours of rain, the days that seemed all twilight, the mud at the manor-farm, all besprinkled with the fine yellow foliage of the acacias, the boundless ploughed fields and fields of winter grain round about Durnovka, and the dark clouds which endlessly hung over them—all began once more to oppress him with a fierce hatred for this accursed country where there were eight months of snow-storms and four of rain-storms; where for the commonest needs of nature one was forced to go to the barn or the cherry-shed. When the bad weather set in it became necessary to board up the drawing-room closely and move into the hall, so as to sleep all winter long there, and dine, and smoke, and pass the long evenings by the light of a dim kitchen lamp, pacing from corner to corner, muffled up in overcoat and cap, which barely protected one from the cold and the wind that blew in through the crevices. Sometimes it happened that they forgot to renew the supply of kerosene, and Kuzma passed the twilight hours wholly without a light; and at times, of an evening, he lighted a candle end merely for the purpose of supping off potato soup and warm wheat groats, which the Bride served in silence and with a stern countenance.

"Whither can I go?" Kuzma said to himself, once in a while.

There were only three neighbours in the immediate vicinity: old Princess Shakova, who did not receive even the Marshal of Nobility, because she regarded him as ill-bred; the retired gendarme Zakrzhevsky, a hæmorrhoidally vicious and self-conceitedly stupid man who would not have permitted Kuzma to cross his threshold; and, finally, a member of the gentry, Basoff, a petty landed proprietor who lived in a peasant cottage, had married the dissipated widow of a soldier, and could talk of nothing but horse-collars and cattle. Father Petr, the priest from Kolodeza, of which Durnovka was a parish, called once upon Kuzma. But neither the one nor the other cared to continue the acquaintance. Kuzma entertained the priest with nothing stronger than tea—and the priest laughed harshly and awkwardly when he saw the samovar on the table. "A samovar-man! Capital! You, I see, are no match for your good brother—you're not lavish in your entertainment!" Kuzma announced frankly that he never went to church, out of conviction. The priest began to shout with laughter in more amazement than ever, and still more harshly and loudly: "A—ah! Those nice little new ideas! Capital! And it's cheaper, too!" Laughter was not in the least becoming to him: it was as if some one else were laughing for that tall, lean man with the big cheek-bones and coarse black hair, the furtive greedy eyes—anxiously absent-minded eyes, for ever meditating something offensive and tactlessly free of manner. "But at

night, surely, at night you cross yourself, nevertheless—you get scared?” he said, loudly and hurriedly, as he put on his coat and overshoes in the ante-room, amazing Kuzma by his queries concerning the management of the farm, and suddenly beginning to address him as “thou.”

“Yes, I make the sign of the cross,” admitted Kuzma, with a melancholy smile. “But, you know, fear is not faith, and I don’t cross myself to your God.”

Kuzma did not go often to visit his brother. And the latter came to him only when he was perturbed over something. Altogether, the loneliness was so desperate that at times Kuzma called himself Dreyfus on Devil’s Island. He compared himself to Syery. Ah, and he too, like Syery, was poor, weak of will, forced out of his proper course, and all his life had been waiting for some happy days, for work.

An unpleasant memory lingered of drunken Syery’s bravery, his story, his boastfulness. But, ordinarily, Syery was not like that, even when he was intoxicated: he was merely loquacious, troubled by something, and merry in a timid way. Moreover, he did not have an opportunity to get drunk more than five times in the course of a year. He was not eager for liquor—not at all as he was for tobacco. For the sake of tobacco he was ready to endure any and all humiliations; ready to sit for hours by the side of a man who was smoking, agree with everything he said, flatter him, do anything in order that he might, after awaiting a favourable moment, say as if quite accidentally: “Pray, gossip, give me a filling for my pipe.” He was passionately

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fond, also, of cards, long conversations, evening reunions in the cottages—in those cottages where there were large families, where it was warm, and where a light was burning; where itinerant wool-carders prepared the wool, and roving tailors made winter coats. But people were not, as yet, assembling thus in the cottages, and Syery sat at home. After Kuzma had been to see him a few times he felt that it was not right to bear malice toward Syery or to make fun of him. Syery lived on what was earned by day-labour during the working season—by his wife, a peaceable, silent, rather crack-brained woman—and on what he managed to beg from Deniska (who now and then made his appearance in Durnovka with his valise, white bread, and sausage, of which he was inordinately fond, cursing the Tsar and the gentry without the slightest restraint). At the first snowfall Syery went away somewhere and was gone for a week. He returned home in a gloomy mood.

“Have you been at Rusanoff’s again?” the neighbours inquired.

“Yes, I have,” replied Syery.

“Why?”

“He was urging me to hire with him.”

“Just so. You did not consent?”

“More stupid than he I have never been and never shall be, for ever and a day. You don’t suppose I signed the contract with my own blood?”

And Syery sat there on the bench for a long time, without removing his cap. And the mere sight of his cottage in the twilight made one sad at heart. In the

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twilight, beyond the broad snow-covered ravine, Durnovka lay in melancholy blackness, with its grain-ricks and bushes in the back yards. But when darkness fully descended, and the little lights began to twinkle, it seemed as if all were peaceful and cosy in the cottages. Syery's hut alone remained disagreeably black. It was dull, dead. Kuzma knew all about it: if you entered its half-open ante-room, you felt almost as if you were on the threshold of some wild beast's lair. There was an odour of snow; through the holes in the roof the gloomy sky was visible; the wind rustled the manure and the dry branches which had been tossed at haphazard upon the rafters; if, by feeling about, you found the slanting wall and opened door, you would encounter cold, darkness, a frost-covered little window barely discernible through the gloom. No one was to be seen, but one could guess how things were: the master of the house was sitting on the bench—his pipe glowed with a tiny fire; the housewife was quietly rocking a squeaking cradle in which a pale child with the rickets, and drowsy with hunger, was jolting about. The brood of small children had taken refuge on top of the oven, which was barely warm, and were vivaciously narrating something to one another in a whisper. In the rotten straw beneath the sleeping-board, the goat and the suckling pig, which were great chums, were rustling about. It was necessary to bend down terribly, in order to avoid knocking one's head on the ceiling. Then, too, you could not turn about without taking precautions: the distance

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between the threshold and the opposite wall was not more than five paces.

"Who's there?" a low voice resounded from the darkness.

"I."

"It can't be Kuzma Ilitch, can it?"

"'Tis he himself."

Syery moves aside, makes room on the bench. Kuzma sits down and lights his pipe. Oppressed by the darkness, Syery is simple, sad, confesses to his weaknesses. Now and then his voice quivers.

VII

THE long, snowy winter set in.

The plain, gleaming palely white beneath a bluish lowering sky, appeared broader, more spacious, and even more deserted than ever. The cottages, sheds, bushes, grain-ricks stood out sharply against the new-fallen snow. Then the blizzards began and swept the country, burying it under so much snow that the village assumed a bleak northern aspect and began to show as its black points only the doors and tiny windows, which hardly peeped out from beneath white snow caps pulled well down, from amid the white masses of the earthen banks around the houses. Following the blizzards, across the concealed grey surface of the frozen crust on the fields swept

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cruel winds which tore away the last remaining light-brown foliage from the unsheltered oak scrub in the ravines. And then the one-farm owner, Taras Milyaeff, who resembled a native Siberian and was as keen on hunting as a real Siberian, set forth, plunging deep into the impenetrable snowdrifts, all dotted with the footprints of hares, and the water barrels were converted into frozen blocks, and slippery ice-coated hillocks formed around the water-holes; the roads wound among snowdrifts—and the ordinary winter conditions reigned. Epidemic diseases broke out in the villages: smallpox, typhus, scarlet fever, croup. But those maladies had existed uninterruptedly in the countryside since time immemorial, during the winter season, and people had become so used to them that they made no more mention of them than they did of changes in the weather. Around the holes cut in the ice, at which all Durnovka drank, over the fetid dark bottle-green water, the peasant women stood for days at a time, bent low, with their petticoats tucked up higher than their bare blue knees: they were in wet bast-slippers, and their heads were hugely muffled. Out of their iron kettles of ashes they dragged their own grey hempen chemises, patched to the waist with calico; their husbands' heavy breeches; their children's soiled swaddling-cloths—rinsed them out, beat them with clothes-mallets, and screamed at one another, imparting the information that their hands were "numbed from the steam," that at Makaroff's homestead his wife was dying of the typhus, that Yakoff's daughter-in-law had got her throat stopped

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up. The little girls capered out of the cottages, straight from the stoves, with nothing on but their tiny chemises, and round the corner on the mounds of hardened snow. The little boys, dressed in their fathers' old clothes, slid down the hills on their rude sleds, flew head over heels, screeched, were racked with terrible coughs, and returned home at evening in a state of fever, with heavy, bewildered heads. They were so chilled that they could barely move their lips as they begged for a drink, and, after drinking, they crept tearfully upon the oven. But even the mothers paid no attention to those who were ill. And darkness settled down at three o'clock, and the shaggy dogs sat on the roofs, almost on a level with the snow-drifts. Not a soul knew on what food those dogs existed. Nevertheless they were lively, even ferocious.

People woke early in the manor-house. At day-break in the blue darkness, when the lights began to twinkle from the cottages, they made the fires in the stoves, and through the crevices under the eaves slowly poured the thick milky smoke. In the wing, with its frozen grey window, it became as cold as in the vestibule. Kuzma was awakened by the banging of doors and the rustling of frozen, snow-coated straw which Koshel was dragging from the truck-sledge. His low, hoarse voice became audible—the voice of a man who had risen earlier than any one else, working on an empty stomach, and chilled through. The pipe of the samovar began to rattle, and the Bride conversed with Koshel in a stern whisper. She did not sleep in the servants' quarters, where the roaches bit arms and

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legs until they drew blood, but in the ante-room—and the whole village was convinced that there was a good reason for this. The village knew well what the Bride had undergone in the autumn: how she had been overwhelmed with disgrace—Rodka's death—how her mother had gone away on a begging expedition, having locked up the empty cottage. Silent, crushed by the burden of her sorrow, the Bride was more severe and mournful than a cloistered nun. But what cared the village for other people's woes? Kuzma had already heard, from Odnodvorka, what was being said in the village, and, as he woke, he always recalled it with shame and disgust. He pounded on the wall with his fist and, clearing his throat, began to smoke a cigarette: this quieted his heart and relieved his chest. He slept under his sheepskin coat, and, loath to part with the warmth, he continued to smoke, and said to himself: "A shameless people! Why, I have a daughter almost as old as she is. . . ." The fact that a young woman slept on the other side of the partition wall excited only paternal tenderness in him. By day she was taciturn and serious, niggardly of words, shy with the modesty of a young maiden. And when she was asleep, there was even something child-like, sad, and lonely about her. One day she fell asleep after dinner on her chest in the ante-room, her head wrapped in a hempen shawl, her legs drawn up and one knee revealed. Her feet, in their bark shoes, lay in womanly wise, and the chilled knee gleamed white like that of a little girl. And Kuzma, as he passed her, turned away and called to her, so

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that she woke up and covered it. But would the village believe that? Even Tikhon Ilitch did not believe it: he laughed in a very peculiar way, at times. Indeed, he always had been distrustful, suspicious, coarse in his suspicions; and now he had completely lost his head. Say what you would to him, he had one answer for everything.

“Have you heard, Tikhon Ilitch? They say that Zakrzhevsky is dying of catarrh: they have taken him to Orel.”

“Stuff and nonsense. We know what that catarrh really is!”

“But the medical man told me.”

“Believe him if it suits you—”

“I want to subscribe to a newspaper,” you would say to him. “Please let me have ten rubles of my wages on account.”

“Hm! Why does a man want to stuff his head with lies? Well, and to tell the truth, I haven’t more than fifteen or twenty kopeks in my pocket—”

The Bride would enter the room, with downcast eyes: “We have hardly any flour on hand, Tikhon Ilitch—”

“How comes that? Hardly any? Oï, you’re talking nonsense, woman!” And he would contract his brows in a frown. And while he was proving that the flour ought to last for another three days, at least, he kept darting swift glances now at Kuzma, now at the Bride. Once he even inquired, with a grin: “And how do you sleep—all right? are you warm?”

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And the Bride, who was embarrassed already by his visits, blushed deeply and, bowing her head, left the room, while Kuzma's fingers turned cold with shame and wrath.

"Shame on you, brother Tikhon Ilich," he blurted out, turning away to the window. "And especially after what you told me yourself—"

"But then why did she blush?" inquired Tikhon Ilich maliciously, with a perturbed and awkward smile.

VIII

THE most unpleasant thing in the morning was —washing oneself. A frosty atmosphere was brought into the ante-room with the straw; ice that was like broken glass floated in the wash-basin. Kuzma sometimes began to drink his tea after having washed only his hands and, thus fresh from his slumbers, appeared truly an old man. Thanks to lack of cleanliness and the cold, he had grown extremely thin and grey since the autumn. His hands had grown thinner, and the skin on them had become more delicate, shiny, and covered with certain tiny purplish spots.

"The old grey horse has gone down a steep hill," he said to himself.

It was a grey morning. Beneath the crusted grey snow the village also had become quite grey in hue

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by St. Philip's Day. The frozen household linen hung like grey boards from the rafters under the roofs of the sheds. Everything round about the cottages was frozen—they poured out the slops and threw out the ashes. Tattered little urchins hurried through the streets between the cottages and sheds to school, ran up the snowdrifts and slid down them on their bark slippers; all of them had heavy crash bags containing slates and bread. From the opposite direction came aged, ailing dark-faced Tohugunok,¹ with not a trace of his former agility remaining, clad in his thin little overcoat, and bowed beneath the weight of his yoke, from which hung two buckets; stumbling along in his hideous felt boots, which had turned stiff as oaken boards, and were bound with pigskin. From drift to drift a horse dragged the water-cask, plugged with straw, rocking and splashing as it went; and behind it ran white-eyed Kobyljai—the stammerer. Women passed, on their way to borrow from one another salt, millet, a scoop of flour for griddlecakes, or a hasty pudding. The threshing-floors were deserted. Only at Yakoff's place was smoke issuing from the gate of the kiln: in imitation of the rich peasants, he threshed during the winter. And beyond the threshing-floors, beyond the bare bushes in the back yards, beneath a low-hanging whitish sky, stretched the grey snow-covered plain, a waste of snow-crust frozen in the semblance of waves. It was in truth more cosy in the village, but the place seemed infected with the

¹ The Little Kettle.—TRANS.

plague: almost every household had a case of small-pox or spotted typhus.

Occasionally Kuzma went to eat luncheon with Koshel in the servants' quarters—potatoes as hot as fire itself, or the remains of the sour cabbage soup left over from the previous day. He recalled the town where he had lived all his life, and was amazed to find that he had no longing whatsoever to go back there. The town was Tikhon's cherished dream; he scorned and hated the country with all his soul. Kuzma only tried to hate it. He now reviewed his existence with more terror than ever. He had grown thoroughly wild and unsociable in Durnovka; he did nothing, was bored, was distressed by his own idleness; frequently he omitted to wash himself; he did not take off his undercoat; he ate greedily out of one bowl with Koshel. But the worst of it all was that, while alarmed at his mode of existence, which was aging him not merely from day to day but actually from hour to hour, he was conscious that it was nevertheless agreeable to him; that he seemed to have got back into precisely that rut which, possibly, had rightly belonged to him from the day of his birth. Not for nothing, apparently, did the Durnovka blood flow in his veins! Nevertheless, that interminable Durnovka winter oppressed him to the point of pain—those cottages, the holes in the ice of the pond, the horrid little boys, the dogs on the roofs, the cold, the dirt, the sickness, the animal-like laziness of the peasant men. Nearly every day he called to mind Menshoff, Akim, Syery. . . .

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After luncheon he sometimes took a stroll over the manor-farm or in the village. He went also to Yak-off's threshing-floor, or dropped in at the cottage of Syery or that of Koshel, whose old woman lived alone, was reputed to be a witch, was tall and frightfully emaciated, and had teeth as intrusively conspicuous as those of a skull. She spoke roughly and decisively, like a man, and smoked a pipe: she would make a fire in the stove, seat herself on the sleeping-board, and set to smoking, all by herself, swinging back and forth as she did so her long, thin leg in its heavy black bark shoe. During the entire Fast Kuzma went away from the farm only twice—once to the post-office, and once to see his brother. And those little trips were pleasant, but painful; Kuzma got so thoroughly chilled that he could not feel whether he had any feet or not. At the beginning of the autumn he had still possessed a firm glance, a tidy appearance. But the firmness of the glance had vanished, and his clothing had grown dilapidated. The collar of his shirt was reduced to a fringe, and the elbows of his coat wore through; his calfskin boots had become fairly red with rust, thin, and, in places, gaping. His sheepskin coat had served him so long that it was dotted all over with bald spots. And the wind on the plain was savage. After sitting in the house so long at Durnovka he was not able to endure the strong, fresh winter air. After prolonged inspection of the village the snowy grey expanse came as a surprise; the far distance, enveloped in blue tints of winter, seemed as a picture so beautiful that one could never gaze one's fill. The horse dashed along

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smartly in the face of the harsh wind, snorting as he went; frozen lumps of snow flew from beneath his shod hoofs against the dashboard of the sledge. Koshel, with a blackish-purple frost-bitten cheek, briskly clearing his throat, sprang from the box at the slopes and leaped back into the sledge sidewise, on the run. But the wind pierced straight through him; his feet, tucked into straw that was all mixed with snow, ached and stiffened; his forehead and cheekbones were racked with rheumatic pains. And it was so boresome in the low-ceiled post-office at Ulianovka—boresome as it can be only in official offices in the wilds. There was an odour of mildew, of sealing-wax. The ragged postman was pounding with his stamp. Grumpy Sakharoff, who resembled a gorilla, was roaring at the peasants, raging because it had not occurred to Kuzma to send him half a dozen fowls or, at least, a pud of flour; and he inquired: "What's your name, and your khamily name?"—and, after rummaging in the closet, he announced with decision: "Nothing for you." In the vicinity of Tikhon Ilitch's house Kuzma was upset by the stench of manure fumes, which reminded him that in the world exist towns, people, newspapers, news. It was agreeable, also, to chat with his brother, to rest at his house and get warm.

But the chat never was a success. His brother was called off every minute to the shop, or about some detail of domestic management, and, besides, he could talk of nothing but his property matters, the lies, craftiness, and malice of the peasants—about the sheer necessity of getting rid of the estate as speedily as

possible. Nastasya Petrovna was pitiable. Evidently she had come to fear her husband most terribly; she burst into the conversation at unseasonable moments, at equally unseasonable moments she praised him—his intelligence, his keen managerial eye, the fact that he entered into everything, every minute detail of the business, himself.

“And he’s so accessible to every one, so approachable!” she said—and Tikhon Ilitch roughly cut her short, while Kuzma did not know what to say, fearing to get mixed up in a quarrel. They had exchanged roles: now it was not he who suggested alarm, but his brother who frightened and exhorted him; it was not he but his brother who demonstrated that it was impossible to live in Russia. After an hour of that sort of conversation, Kuzma began to long to get home, to get back to the manor. “What is to become of me?” he thought in alarm, as he listened to his brother discussing the sale of the estate. And was it possible that that dreadful marriage between Deniska and the Bride would come off? And why did Tikhon so obstinately insist that the marriage must take place? “He has gone mad, he certainly has gone mad!” muttered Kuzma on his way home, as he called to mind Tikhon’s surly and malevolent face, his uncommunicativeness, his suspiciousness, and his wearisome repetition of one and the same thing over and over. He began to shout at Koshel, at the horse, feeling in a hurry to hide in his little house his sadness, his old, cold clothing, his loneliness, and his tenderness at the thought of the Bride’s sweet, sorrowful face, her womanliness and—

her taciturnity. "Ekh, and how could she fail to go to ruin here!" he said sadly to himself, as he gazed through the twilight gloom at the meagre lights in Durnovka.

IX

DURING the Christmas holidays Ivanushka, from Basovka, dropped in to see Kuzma. He was an old-fashioned peasant who had grown foolish from old age, although once on a time he had been renowned for his bear-like strength. Thickset, bent into a bow, he never lifted his shaggy dark brown head. He always walked with his toes turned inward. And he amazed Kuzma even more than had Menshoff, Akim, and Syery. In the cholera year of 'ninety-two, the whole of Ivanushka's huge family had died. All he had left was a son, a soldier, who was now working for the railway as a line-guard, about five versts from Durnovka. Ivanushka might have passed his declining days with his son, but he preferred to roam about and ask alms. He strode lightly, in his bandy-legged way, across the farmyard, with his cap and his staff in his left hand, a bag in his right, and his head, on which the snow shone white, uncovered—and for some reason or other the sheep dogs did not growl at him. He entered the house, mumbled "May God bless this house and the master of this house," and seated himself on the floor against the wall. Kuzma dropped his book

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and in amazement stared timidly at him over his eyeglasses, as if he had been some wild beast from the steppe, whose presence inside a house was a prodigy.

Silently, with downcast lashes and a slight amiable smile, the Bride made her appearance, walking lightly in her bark-slippers, gave Ivanushka a bowl of boiled potatoes and the entire corner crust of a loaf, all grey with salt, and remained standing at the door-jamb. She wore bark-slippers; she was broad and robust in the shoulders; and her handsome, faded face was so simple and old-fashioned, in the peasant style, that it seemed as if she could not possibly address Ivanushka otherwise than as "grandfather." And, smiling for him and him alone, she did indeed say softly: "Eat, eat, grandfather."

And he, without raising his head, and recognizing her kindness from her voice alone, quietly wailed in reply, at times mumbling: "The Lord save ye, granddaughter!" then crossed himself broadly and awkwardly, as if his hand had been a paw, and eagerly fell to on the food. The snow melted on his dark brown hair, supernaturally thick and coarse. The water streamed down from his bark-shoes on to the floor. From his ancient dark brown fitted coat, worn over a dirty hemp-crash shirt, emanated the smoky odour of a chimneyless hovel. His hands were deformed by long toil, and his horny unbending fingers fished up the potatoes with difficulty.

"You must feel cold in that thin coat, don't you?" inquired Kuzma, in a loud tone.

"Hey?" answered Ivanushka in a faint wail, hold-

ing his hand to his ear, which was all overgrown with hair.

“You are cold, aren’t you?”

Ivanushka thought it over. “Why cold?” he replied, pausing between his words. “Not a bit cold. ’Twas a lot colder in days gone by.”

“Lift up your head; put your hair in order!”

Ivanushka slowly shook his head.

“I can’t raise it naow, brother. It drags earthward.” And with a dim smile he made an effort to lift his dreadful face, all overgrown with hair, and his tiny screwed-up eyes.

When he had finished eating he heaved a sigh, made the sign of the cross, collected the crumbs from his knees and chewed them up; then he felt about at his sides, in search of his bag, stick, and cap, and, having found them, and recovered his equanimity, he began a leisurely conversation. He was capable of sitting silent for the whole day, but Kuzma and the Bride plied him with questions, and he answered, as if asleep and from a far distance. He narrated in his clumsy, ancient language that the Tsar was made entirely of gold; that the Tsar could not eat fish—’twas exceeding salt—that once on a time the Prophet Elijah broke through the sky and tumbled down on the earth—“he was exceeding heavy”—that John the Baptist was as shaggy as a ram when he was born, and that at his baptism he beat his godfather over the head with his iron crutch, in order that the man might “come to his senses”; that every horse, once a year, on St. Flor and St. Lavr’s Day, seeks an opportunity to

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kill a man. He told how in days of yore the rye had grown up so densely that it was impossible for a snake to crawl through it; how in those times they reaped at the rate of two desyatini a day for each man; how he himself had owned a gelding which was kept "on a chain," so powerful and terrible was it; how one day sixty years ago he, Ivanushka, had had a shaft arch stolen from him for which he would not have accepted two rubles. He was firmly convinced that his family had died, not of cholera, but because after a fire they had gone to a new cottage and had passed the night in it without having first let a cock pass the night there, and that he and his son had been saved solely by accident: he had slept on the grain-rick.

Toward evening Ivanushka rose and walked away, without paying the slightest heed to what the weather was like and without yielding to all their admonitions to remain until the morrow. And he caught his death cold, and on Epiphany Day he died in his son's guard-box. His son urged him to receive the Sacrament. Ivanushka would not consent; he said that once you received the Communion you would surely die, whereas he was firmly determined not to "yield to death." For whole days at a time he lay unconscious; but even in his delirium he begged his daughter-in-law to say that he was not at home if Death should knock at the door. Once, at night, he came to himself, collected his forces, crept down from the top of the oven, and knelt down in front of the holy picture, illuminated by a shrine-lamp. He sighed heavily, mumbled for a long

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time, kept repeating: "O Lord—Dear Little Father—forgive my sins." Then he became thoughtful and remained silent for a long time, with his head bowed on the floor. Then, all of a sudden, he rose to his feet and said firmly: "No. I will not yield!" But the next morning he noticed that his daughter-in-law was rolling out the dough for patties and heating the oven hot.

"Are you preparing for my funeral?" he asked, in a quavering voice.

His daughter-in-law made no reply. Again he collected his forces, again crawled down from the oven, and went out into the vestibule. Yes, it was true: there, upright against the wall, stood a huge purple coffin, adorned with white eight-pointed crosses. Then he remembered what had happened thirty years before, to his neighbour old Lukyan: Lukyan had fallen ill, and they had bought a coffin for him—it, too, was a fine, expensive coffin—and brought from the town flour, vodka, salted striped bass; but Lukyan went and got well. What was to be done with the coffin? How were they to justify the outlay? They cursed Lukyan about it for the space of five years thereafter, made life unendurable with their reproaches, tortured him with hunger, drove him frantic with lice and dirt. Ivanushka, recalling this, bowed his head and submissively went back into the cottage. And that night, as he lay on his back, unconscious, he began, in a trembling, plaintive voice, to sing, ever more and more softly. And suddenly he shook his knees, hiccoughed, raised

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his chest high with a sigh, and, with foam on his parted lips, grew cold in death. . . .

X

KUZMA lay in his bed for almost a month, because of Ivanushka. On Epiphany morning people declared that a bird would freeze stiff as it flew, and Kuzma did not even possess felt boots. Nevertheless, he went to take a last look at the dead man. His hands, folded and rigid below his vast chest on a clean hempen shirt, deformed by calloused growths in the course of full eighty years of rudimentarily heavy toil, were so coarse and dreadful that Kuzma hastily turned his eyes away. And he was unable to cast even so much as a sidelong glance at Ivanushka's hair and his dead wild-beast face. He drew the white calico up over him as speedily as possible. And from beneath the calico there suddenly was wafted a suffocatingly repulsive sweetish odour. . . .

With a view to warming himself up, Kuzma drank some vodka and seated himself in front of the hotly flaming oven. It was warm there in the guardsman's box, and neat as for a festival. Over the head of the spacious purple coffin, covered with calico, twinkled the golden flame of a small wax candle affixed to the dark holy picture in the corner; and a cheap wood-

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cut, manufactured by the Josif Brothers, glared forth in vivid colours. The soldier's courteous wife easily lifted on her oven-fork and thrust into the oven kettles weighing at least a pud, chatted cheerfully about government, supplied fuel, and kept entreating him to remain until her husband should return from the village. But Kuzma was shaking with fever; his face burned from the vodka, which, coursing like poison through his chilled body, began to induce causeless tears to well up in his eyes. And without having got warm, he drove away across the white, strong billows of the plain, to Tikhon Ilitch. Covered with hoar-frost, the whitish-curly gelding trotted swiftly along, emitting roaring and quacking sounds, like a drake, ejecting from his nostrils columns of grey vapour. The sledge squeaked; its iron runners screeched sonorously over the hard snow. Behind Kuzma, in frozen circles, the low-hanging sun shone yellow; in front, from the North, came a wind which scorched one and cut short one's breath. The branches which marked out the road bent under a thick, curly coating of rime; the big grey gold-hammers flew in flocks ahead of the horse, scattered over the glistening road, pecked at the frozen manure, again took flight, and again dispersed. Kuzma gazed at them through his heavy white eyelashes, feeling that his face had turned to wood, and that, with his beard and mustache like white curls, he had come to resemble a Christmastide mask. The sun was setting; the snowy billows gleamed with a death-like green in the orange glow, and blue shadows extended from

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their crests and crenellations. Kuzma turned his horse sharply about and drove it back, in the direction of home. The sun had set; a faint light glimmered in the house with its grey, neglected panes; the blue twilight hung over it, and it looked cold and unsociable. The bullfinch which had hung in a cage near the window, overlooking the orchard, had died—in all probability from the coarse, strong tobacco—and lay with its legs sticking up, its feathers ruffled, and its crimson beak a-gape.

“Done for!” said Kuzma, and picked up the bullfinch to throw out.

Durnovka, overwhelmed with frozen snow, was so far from all the world on that mournful evening, in the heart of the steppe winter, that he suddenly felt frightened by it. All was over! His burning head was confused and heavy. He would take to his bed at once, and never rise from it again.

The Bride, her bark-shoes screeching on the snow as she walked, approached the porch, carrying a pail in her hand.

“I am ill, Duniushka!” said Kuzma caressingly, in the hope of hearing from her lips a caressing word.

But the Bride replied indifferently, drily: “Shall I bring in the samovar?” And she did not even inquire what was the matter with him. Neither did she ask anything about Ivanushka.

Kuzma returned to the dark house and, shivering all over and wondering with alarm where he could now go when need compelled, lay down on the divan. And the evenings slipped into nights and the nights

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slipped into days, and he lost all count of them.

About three o'clock on the first night he woke up and pounded on the wall with his fist, in order to ask for a drink: he had been tormented in his sleep by thirst and the thought, had they thrown out the bullfinch? No one answered his knocking: the Bride had gone off to the servants' quarters to pass the night. And Kuzma, conscious now, remembered that he was sick unto death, and he was overpowered by such melancholy as would have seized him in a tomb. Obviously the vestibule, which smelled of snow and straw and horse-collars, was empty! Obviously he, sick and helpless, was utterly alone in that dark, ice-cold little house, where the windows gleamed dim and grey amid the winter night, with that useless cage hanging beside them!

"O Lord, save and have mercy; O Lord, help in some way," he murmured, pulling himself up and fumbling with trembling hands through his pockets.

He wanted to strike a match. But his whisper was feverish; something rustled and reverberated in his burning head; his hands and feet were icy cold. Klasha came, quickly threw open the door, placed his head on the pillow, and sat down on a chair by the side of the couch. She was dressed like a young lady, in a velvet cloak and a little cap and muff of white fur; her hands were scented with perfume, her eyes shone, her cheeks had turned crimson with the frost. "Ah, how well everything has come out!" some one whispered. But what was not nice was that Klasha, for some reason, had not lighted the lamp; that she had come, not to see him, but to go to Ivanushka's funeral; that she suddenly

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began to sing, accompanying herself on a guitar: "Haz-Bulat, the dauntless, thy mountain hut is poor." . . . Then, all at once, the whole thing vanished; he opened his eyes—and not a trace remained of that mysterious, agitating, and alarming affair which had filled his head with nonsense. Again he beheld the dark, cold room, the grey gleaming windows; he comprehended that everything around him was plain and simple, too simple—that he was ill and quite, quite alone. . . .

In the deadly melancholy which poisoned his soul at the beginning of his illness, Kuzma had raved about the bullfinch, Klasha, Voronezh. But even in his delirium the thought had never left him that he must tell some one that they must show pity on him in one respect—they must not bury him in Kolodezy. But, my God! was it not madness to hope for pity in Durnovka? Once he came to himself in the morning, when the fire was being made in the stove—and the simple, quiet voices of Koshel and the Bride seemed to him pitiless, alien, and strange, as the life of well people always appears pitiless, alien, strange to a sick person. He tried to call out, to ask for the samovar—but remained dumb and almost fell to weeping. The angry whisper of Koshel became audible—discussing him, the sick man, of course—and the Bride's abrupt reply: "Well, all's up with him! He'll die—and be buried. . . ."

Then his melancholy began to abate. The sun, declining to the west, shone through the windows, athwart the bare branches of the acacias. The tobacco

smoke hung in a blue cloud. Beside the bed sat the aged medical man, redolent of drugs and frosty freshness, pulling icicles from his mustache. On the table the samovar was bubbling, and Tikhon Ilitch, tall, grey, severe, was brewing aromatic tea as he stood by it. The medical man drank eight or ten glasses, talked about his cows, the price of flour and butter; Tikhon Ilitch described how wonderful, how expensive, Nastasya Petrovna's funeral had been, and how glad he was that at last he had found a purchaser for Durnovka. Kuzma understood that Tikhon Ilitch had just come from the town, that Nastasya Petrovna had died there suddenly, on her way to a railway station; he understood that the funeral had cost Tikhon Ilitch frightfully dear, and that he had already taken earnest-money for Durnovka—and he was completely indifferent.

XI

ONE day he awakened very late and, feeling neither weakness nor trembling in his legs, sat up to drink his tea. The day was overcast, warm, and much snow had fallen. Syery passed the window, making on the new snow imprints of his barkshoes, sprinkled with tiny crosses. The sheep dogs were running beside him, sniffing at his tattered coattails. And he was leading by the bridle a tall horse of a dirty light bay colour, hideously old and skinny, its

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shoulders abraded by the collar; it had an in-curving back and a thin, unclean tail. The horse was limping on three legs and dragging the fourth, which was broken below the knee. Then Kuzma recalled that two days previously Tikhon Ilitch had been there, and had said that he had ordered Syery to give the dogs a treat—to find and kill an old horse; that Syery had in former days been engaged in that occupation at times—the purchase of dead or worthless cattle for their hides. A terrible thing had recently happened to Syery, Tikhon Ilitch had said: in making ready to kill a mare, Syery had forgotten to hobble her—he had merely bound her and turned her muzzle to one side—and the mare, as soon as, crossing himself, he had plunged the thin small knife into her jugular vein, had uttered a scream and, screaming, had hurled herself upon her assassin, her yellow teeth laid bare in pain and rage, streams of black blood spurting out upon the snow, and had pursued him for a long time, exactly as if she had been a man—and would have caught him but that, “luckily, the snow was deep.”

Kuzma had been so deeply impressed by this incident that now, as he glanced through the window, he felt the heaviness returning in his legs. He began to gulp down the boiling hot tea, and gradually recovered himself. He lighted his cigarette and sat for a while smoking. At last he rose, went into the ante-room, and looked out at the bare, sparse orchard through the window, which had thawed. In the orchard, on the snow-white pall of the meadow, a high-ribbed, bloody carcass with a long neck and a crushed head stood out

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redly. The dogs, their backs all hunched up and their paws braced on the meat, were greedily tearing out and dragging away the entrails. Two aged blackish-grey crows were hopping sidewise toward the head, and had started to fly thither, when the dogs, snarling, darted upon them; and once more they alighted on the virginally pure snow. "Ivanushka, Syery, the crows—" Kuzma said to himself. "Perhaps those crows can recall the times of Ivan the Terrible. O Lord, save and show mercy—take me away from here!"

Kuzma's indisposition did not leave him for another fortnight. The thought of spring affected him both mournfully and joyfully; he longed to get away from Durnovka as speedily as possible. He knew that the end of winter was not yet in sight; but the thaw had already set in. The first week of February was dark and foggy. The fog covered the plain and devoured the snow. The village turned black; water stood between the dirty snowdrifts; the village policeman drove through the village one day, his horses hitched tandem, all spattered with horse droppings. The cocks took to crowing; through the ventilators penetrated a disturbing spring-like dampness. He wanted to go on living; to go on living and wait for the spring, his removal to the town; to live on, submitting to fate, and to do any sort of work whatsoever, if only to earn a single bit of bread. And to work, of course, for his brother—regardless of what he was like. Why, his brother had proposed to him while he was ill that they should move over to Vorgol. "Why should I turn you out of doors?" he had said after pondering

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the matter.—“I’m giving up the shop and the homestead on the first of March: let’s go to the town, brother, as far as possible from these cutthroats.”

And it was true: cutthroats they were. Odnodvorka had come in and imparted the particulars of a recent encounter with Syery. Deniska had returned from Tula, and had been knocking about without work, gabbling about the village that he wanted to marry; that he had no money, but would soon earn some of first-class quality. At first the village had pronounced these tales absurd nonsense; then, following Deniska’s hints, it had come to understand the drift of the matter and had believed him. Syery, too, had believed him, and began to curry favour with his son. But after slaying the horse and receiving a ruble from Tikhon Ilitch and securing half a ruble for the skin, he had begun to chatter incautiously and had gone on a spree. He drank for two days, and lost his pipe, and lay down on the oven to recover. His head ached, and he had nothing in which to put tobacco for a smoke. So, to make cigarettes, he began to peel the ceiling, which Deniska had pasted over with newspapers and divers pictures. He did his peeling on the sly, of course; but nevertheless, one day, Deniska caught him at it. He caught him and began to roar at him. Syery, being intoxicated, began to roar in return. Thereupon, Deniska pulled him off the oven and thrashed him within an inch of his life, until the neighbors rushed in. Peace was concluded on the evening of the following day, it is true, over cracknels and vodka; but, as Kuzma said to himself, was not Tikhon Ilitch a cut-

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throat also when he insisted, with the obstinacy of a crazy man, on the marriage of the Bride to one of these cutthroats?

When Kuzma first heard about that marriage, he firmly made up his mind that he would not permit it. What a horror, what folly! But later on, when he recovered consciousness during his illness, he actually rejoiced over this foolish idea. He had been surprised and impressed by the indifference which the Bride had displayed toward him, a sick man. "A beast, a savage!" he had said to himself; and, calling to mind the wedding, he had added spitefully: "And that's capital! That's exactly what she deserves!" Now, after his illness, both his decision and his wrath disappeared. He managed to get into conversation with the Bride about Tikhon Ilitch's intentions; and she replied calmly:

"Well, yes, I did have some talk about that affair with Tikhon Ilitch. God grant him good health for such a fine idea!"

"A fine idea?" said Kuzma in amazement.

The Bride looked at him and shook her head. "Well, and why isn't it fine? Great heavens, but you are queer, Kuzma Ilitch! He offers money, and takes the expense of the wedding on himself. Then again, he has not picked out some widower or other, but a young, unmarried man, without vices—neither rotten nor a drunkard—"

"But he's a sluggard, a bully, a downright fool," added Kuzma.

The bride dropped her eyes and made no reply.

Heaving a sigh, she turned and went toward the door.

"As you like," she said, her voice trembling. "'Tis your affair. Break it off—God help you—"

Kuzma opened his eyes very wide and shouted: "Stop! have you lost your senses? Do you think I wish you ill?"

The Bride turned round and halted. "And isn't it wishing me ill?" she said hotly and roughly, her cheeks flushing and her eyes blazing. "What is to become of me, according to your idea? Am I to go on for ever as an outcast, at the thresholds of other people's houses? Eating the crusts of strangers? Wandering about, a homeless beggar? Or am I to hunt up some old widower? Haven't I swallowed tears enough already?"

And her voice broke. She fell to weeping and left the room. In the evening Kuzma tried to convince her that he had no intention of breaking up the affair, and at last she believed him and smiled a friendly, reserved smile.

"Well, thank you," she said in the pleasant tone which she used to Ivanushka.

But at this point the tears began to quiver on her eyelashes, and once more Kuzma gave up in despair. "What's the matter now?" said he.

And the Bride answered softly: "Well, perhaps Deniska is not much of a joy—"

Koshel brought from the post-office a newspaper nearly six weeks old. The days were dark and foggy, and Kuzma read from morning till night, seated at the window.

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And when he had finished and had made himself dizzy with the number of fresh executions, he was benumbed. Heretofore he had been suffocated with rage when he read the newspapers—futile rage, because human receptivity was unequal to taking in what one read there. Now his fingers grew cold—nothing more. Yes, yes, there was nothing to get excited about. Everything went as if according to programme. Everything fitted together perfectly. He raised his head: the sleet was driving in white slanting lines, falling upon the black, miserable little village, on the muddy roads with their hillocks and hollows, on the horse-dung, the ice, and the pools of water. A twilight mist concealed the boundless plain—all that vast empty space with its snows, forests, settlements, towns—the kingdom of cold and of death.

“Avdotya!” shouted Kuzma, as he rose to his feet. “Tell Koshel to harness the horse to the sledge. I’m going to my brother’s. . . .”

XII

TIKHON ILITCH was at home. In a Russian shirt of cotton print, huge and powerful, swarthy of countenance, with white beard and grey frowning brows, he was sitting with the samovar and brewing himself some tea.

“Ah! how are you, brother?” he exclaimed in welcome, but with his brows still contracted. “So you

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have crawled out through God's snow? Look out: isn't it rather early?"

"I was so deadly bored, brother," replied Kuzma, as they kissed each other.

"Well, if you were bored, come and warm yourself and we'll have a chat. . . ."

After questioning each other as to whether there were any news, they began in silence to drink tea, after which they started to smoke.

"You are growing very thin, dear brother!" remarked Tikhon Ilitch as he inhaled his smoke and scrutinized Kuzma with a sidelong glance.

"One does get thin," replied Kuzma quietly. "Don't you read the newspapers?"

Tikhon Ilitch smiled. "That nonsense? No, God preserve me."

"If you only knew how many executions there are!"

"Executions? That's all right. Haven't you heard what happened near Eletz? At the farm of the Bykoff brothers? Probably you remember—those fellows who can't pronounce their letters right? Well, those Bykoffs were sitting, just as you and I are sitting together now, playing checkers one evening. Suddenly—what was it? There was a stamping on the porch and a shout of 'Open the door!' Well, brother, and before those Bykoffs had time to blink an eye, in rolls their labourer, a peasant after the pattern of Syery, and behind him two scalawags of some breed or other—hooligan adventurers, in a word. And all of them armed with crowbars. They brandished their crowbars and began to yell: 'Put up your hands, curse

your mother's memory!' Of course, the Bykoffs were thoroughly scared—scared to death—and they leaped to their feet and shouted: 'What's the meaning of this?' And their nice little peasant yells, 'Put 'em oop, put 'em oop!'" Here Tikhon Ilitch smiled, became thoughtful, and stopped talking.

"Well, tell the rest of it," said Kuzma.

"There's nothing more to tell. They stuck up their hands, as a matter of course, and asked: 'What do you want?' 'Give us some ham! Where are your keys?' 'Damn you! As if you didn't know! There they are yonder, on the door lintel, hanging on the nail.'"

"And they said that with their hands raised?" interrupted Kuzma.

"Of course they had their hands raised. And those men are going to pay heavily for those upraised hands! They'll be hanged, naturally. They are already in jail, the dear creatures—"

"Are they going to hang them on account of the ham?"

"No! for the fun of it, Lord forgive me for my sin," retorted Tikhon Ilitch, half angrily, half in jest. "For the love of God, do stop talking balderdash and trying to pretend you're a Balashkin! 'Tis time to drop that."

Kuzma pulled at his grey beard. His haggard, emaciated face, his mournful eyes, his left brow, which slanted upward, all were reflected in the mirror, and as he looked at himself he silently assented.

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"Talking balderdash? Truly it is time—I ought to have dropped that long ago. . . ."

Then Tikhon Ilitch turned the conversation to business. Evidently he had been thinking things over a little while previously, during the story, merely because something far more important than executions had occurred to him—a bit of business.

"Here now, I've already told Deniska that he is to finish off that music as soon as possible," he began firmly, clearly, and sternly, sifting tea into the teapot from his fist. "And I beg you, brother, to take a hand in it also—in that music. It is awkward for me, you understand. And after it is over, you can move over here. 'Twill be comfortable, brother! Once we have made up our mind to change our entire investment, down to the last scrap, there's no sense in your stopping on there with nothing to do. It only doubles the expense. And once we have removed elsewhere, why, get into harness alongside me. Once we have shifted the burden from our shoulders, we'll go off to the town, God willing, to amass grain, and we'll get into real business. And then we'll never come back to this hole of a place again. We'll shake the dust of it from our feet, and it may go to hell for all I care. I don't propose to rot in it! Bear in mind," he said, contracting his brows in a frown, stretching out his arms, and clenching his fists, "you can't wrest things out of my grasp yet a while. 'Tis too early for me to take to lying on top of the oven! I'm still capable of ripping the horns off the devil himself!"

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Kuzma listened, staring almost in terror at his fixed, fairly crazed eyes, at his mouth set awry, at his words distinctly uttered in a rapacious sort of way—listened and held his peace. Later on he inquired: “Brother, tell me, for Christ’s sake, what profit to you is there in this marriage? I don’t understand; God is my witness, I don’t understand it. I can’t bear even the sight of that Deniska of yours. That’s a new type—new Russia will be worse than all the old types. Don’t you make any mistake, thinking he is bashful and sentimental and only pretends to be a fool: he’s an extremely cynical beast. People are saying of me that I am living with the Bride—”

“Well, you don’t know moderation in anything,” interrupted Tikhon Ilitch with a frown. “You’re for ever hammering away at the same thing: ‘an unhappy nation, an unhappy nation!’ And now—you call them brutes!”

“Yes, I do hammer at that idea, and I shall go on hammering at it!” Kuzma broke in hotly. “But I’ve lost my wits completely! Nowadays I don’t understand at all: whether it is an unhappy nation, or—Come now, listen to me. You know you hate that man yourself, that Deniska! You both hate each other! He never speaks of you except to call you a ‘blood-sucker who has gnawed himself into the very vitals of the people,’ and here you are calling *him* a blood-sucker! He is boasting insolently about the village that now he is the equal of the king!”

“Well, I know that,” Tikhon Ilitch again interrupted.

“But do you know what he is saying about the

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Bride?" went on Kuzma, not listening to him. "She's handsome—she has, you know, such a white, delicate complexion—but he, the stupid animal—do you know what he is saying about her? 'She's all enameled, the trollop!' And, by this time, you must understand one thing: he certainly will not live in the village. You couldn't keep that vagabond in the country now with a lasso. What sort of a farmer and what sort of a family man do you suppose he'll be? Yesterday, I heard, he was roaming about the village and singing in a lewd voice: 'She's beautiful as an angel from heaven, as sly as a damon from hell.'"

"I know it!" yelled Tikhon Ilitch. "He won't live in the country—not for any consideration on earth, he won't! Well, and devil take him! And as for his being no sort of a farmer, you and I are nice farmers ourselves, ain't we? I remember how I was talking to you about business—in the eating-house, do you remember?—and all the while you were listening to that quail. Well, go on; what comes next?"

"What do you mean? What has the quail to do with it?" inquired Kuzma.

Tikhon Ilitch began to drum on the table with his fingers and said sternly, uttering each word with great distinctness: "Bear in mind: if you grind water, you'll be left with just water as the result. My word is sacred to ages of ages. Once I have said I'll do a thing—I'll do it. I won't set a candle before the holy picture in atonement for my sin, but I'll do a good deed instead. Although I may give only a mite, the Lord will remember me for that mite."

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Kuzma sprang from his seat. "The Lord, the Lord!" he cried, in a falsetto tone. "What has the Lord to do with that affair of yours? What can the Lord mean to Deniska, to Akimka, to Menshoff, to Syery, to you, or to me?"

"Eh?" inquired Tikhon Ilitch severely. "What Akimka is that you're talking about?"

"When I lay there dying," pursued Kuzma, paying no heed to him, "did I think very much about Him? I thought just one thing: 'I don't know anything about Him, and I don't know how to think!'" shouted Kuzma. "I'm an ignorant man!"

And glancing about him with roving, suffering eyes, as he buttoned and unbuttoned his coat, he strode across the room and halted directly in front of Tikhon Ilitch.

"Remember this, brother," he said, his cheek-bones reddening. "Remember this: your life and mine are finished. And no candles on earth will save us. Do you hear? We are—Durnovka folk. We're neither candle for God nor oven-fork for the devil." And, unable to find words in his agitation, he fell silent.

But Tikhon Ilitch had again thought of something, and suddenly assented: "Correct. 'Tis a good-for-nothing people! Just you consider—" And, animated, carried away by his new idea:

"Just you consider: they've been tilling the soil for a whole thousand years—what am I saying? for longer than that!—but how to till the soil properly not a soul of them understands! They don't know how to do their one and only business! They don't know the

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proper time to begin field work! Nor when to sow, nor when to reap! 'As the people always have done, so will we always do'—that's the whole story. Note that!" Contracting his brows, he shouted sternly, as Kuzma had recently shouted at him. "'As the people always have done, so will we always do!' Not a single peasant woman knows how to bake bread—the top crust is burned as black as the devil and falls off, and underneath that crust—there's nothing but sour water!"

Kuzma was dumbfounded. His thoughts were reduced to a jumble. "He has lost his senses!" he said to himself, with uncomprehending eyes watching his brother, who was lighting the lamp.

But Tikhon Ilitch, giving him no time to recover himself, continued wrathfully: "The people! Lewd, lazy, liars, and so shameless that not one of them believes another! Note this," he roared, not perceiving that the lighted wick was smoking and the soot billowing up almost to the ceiling. "'Tis not us they refuse to trust, but one another! And they are all like that—every one of them!" he shouted in a tearful voice, as he jammed the chimney on the lamp with a crash.

The outdoor light was beginning to filter blue through the windows. New, fresh snow was fluttering down on the pools of water and the snowdrifts. Kuzma gazed at it and held his peace. The conversation had taken such an unexpected turn that even Kuzma's eagerness had vanished. Not knowing what to say, unable to bring himself to look at his brother's furious eyes, he began to roll himself a cigarette.

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"He has gone crazy!" he said to himself despairingly. "Well, so be it! It makes no difference! Nothing—nothing makes any difference. Enough!"

He began to smoke, and Tikhon Ilitch also began to calm down. He seated himself and, staring at the lamp, muttered softly: "You were talking about 'Deniska.' Have you heard what Makar Ivanovitch, that pilgrim fellow, has been up to? He and that friend of his caught a peasant woman on the road and dragged her to the sentry-box at Kliutchiki, and kept her there for four days, visiting her in turn. Well, and now they are in jail—"

"Tikhon Ilitch," said Kuzma amiably, "why do you talk nonsense? What's the object? You must be feeling ill. You keep jumping from one thing to another; now you assert one thing, a minute later you assert something different. Are you drinking too much, perhaps?"

Tikhon Ilitch remained silent for a while. He merely waved his hand, and tears trembled in his eyes, which were riveted on the flame of the lamp.

"Are you drinking?" repeated Kuzma quietly.

"Yes, I am," quietly replied Tikhon Ilitch. "And 'tis enough to make any one take to drink! Has it been easy for me to acquire this golden cage, think you? Do you imagine that it has been easy for me to live like a chained hound all my life, and with my old woman into the bargain? I have never shown any pity to any one, brother. Well, and has any one shown the least pity on me? Do you think I don't know how I am hated? Do you think they wouldn't

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have murdered me in some fashion if those peasants had once got the breeching under their tail in proper style? If they had had luck in that revolution? Wait a bit, wait— There'll be something doing; it's coming! We have cut their throats!"

"And they are to be hanged—on account of a little ham?" asked Kuzma.

"Well, as for the hanging," replied Tikhon Ilitch in agonized tones, "why, I just said the first thing that came to my tongue—"

"But they certainly will hang them!"

"Well—and that's no affair of ours. They must answer for that to the Most High." And, frowning, he fell into thought and closed his eyes. "Ah!" he said contritely, with a profound sigh. "Ah, my dear brother! Soon, very soon, we also must appear before His throne for judgment! I read the Trebnik¹ of an evening, and I weep and I wail over that same book. I am greatly amazed; how was it possible to invent such sweet words? But here, wait a minute—"

And he rose hastily, drew from behind the mirror a thick book in ecclesiastical binding, with trembling hands donned his spectacles, and with tears in his voice began to read, hurriedly, as if he feared to be interrupted.

"I weep and I wail when I think upon death, and

¹The Trebnik contains the Services for events in daily life: Baptism, Marriage, Confession, the Burial Rites, and so forth. What Tikhon Ilitch quotes and reads is from the magnificent Burial Service. See the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church.—TRANS.

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behold our beauty, fashioned after the image of God, lying in the tomb disfigured, dishonoured, bereft of form. . . .

“Of a truth, all things are vanity, and life is but a shadow and a dream. For in vain doth every one who is born of earth disquiet himself, as saith the Scriptures: when we have acquired the world, then do we take up our abode in the grave, where kings and beggars lie down together. . . .’

“‘Kings and beggars!’” repeated Tikhon Ilitch with ecstatic melancholy, and shook his head. “Life is over, dear brother! I had, you understand, a dumb cook; I gave her, the stupid thing, a kerchief from foreign parts; and what does she do but *take and wear it completely to rags, wrong side out!* Do you understand? Out of stupidity and greed. She begrudged wearing it right side out on ordinary days—and when a feast-day came along nothing was left of it but rags. And that’s exactly the way it is with me and with my life. ’Tis truly so!”

On returning to Durnovka Kuzma was conscious of only one feeling—a certain dull agony. And all the last days of his stay at Durnovka were passed in that dull agony.

XIII

DURING those days snow fell, and they were only waiting for that snow at Syery’s farmstead, so that the road might be in order for the celebration of the wedding.

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On the twelfth of February, towards evening, in the gloom of the cold entrance lobby, a low-toned conversation was in progress. Beside the stove stood the Bride, a yellow kerchief besprinkled with black polka-dots pulled well down on her forehead, staring at her bark-shoes. By the door stood short-legged Deniska, hatless, in a heavy undercoat, with drooping shoulders. He, too, was gazing downward, at some women's high shoes with metal tips, which he was twisting about in his hands. The boots belonged to the Bride. Deniska had mended them, and had come to receive five kopeks for his work.

"But I haven't got it," the Bride was saying, "and I think Kuzma Ilitch is taking a nap. Just you wait until to-morrow."

"I can't possibly wait," replied Deniska in a sing-song, meditative voice, as he picked at the metal tip with his finger nail.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?"

Deniska reflected, sighed, and, shaking back his thick hair, suddenly raised his head. "Well, and what's the good of wagging one's tongue for nothing?" he said loudly and decisively, without glancing at the Bride, and mastering his shyness. "Has Tikhon Ilitch said anything to you?"

"Yes, he has," replied the Bride. "He has down-right bored me with his talk."

"In that case I will come at once with my father. It won't hurt Kuzma Ilitch to get up immediately and drink tea—"

The Bride thought it over. "That's as you like—"

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Deniska set the shoes on the window-sill and went away, without making any further mention of money. And half an hour later the knocking of bark-shoes coated with snow became audible on the porch. Deniska had returned with Syery—and Syery, for some unknown reason, was girt about the hips, over his kazak coat, with a red belt. Kuzma came out to receive them. Deniska and Syery crossed themselves for a long time toward the dark corner, then tossed back their hair and raised their faces.

“Matchmaker or not, yet a fine man!” began Syery without haste, in an unusually easy and pleasant tone. “You have an adopted daughter to marry off. I have a son who wants a wife. In good agreement, for their happiness, let us discuss the matter between us.”

“But she has a mother, you know,” said Kuzma.

“Her mother is no housewife; she’s a homeless widow, her cottage is dilapidated, and no one knows where she is,” replied Syery, still maintaining his tone. “Consider her as an orphan!” And he made a low, stately reverence.

Repressing a sickly smile, Kuzma ordered the Bride to be summoned.

“Run, hunt her up,” Syery commanded Deniska, speaking in a whisper as if they were in church.

“Here I am,” said the Bride, emerging from behind the door in back of the stove and bowing to Syery.

Silence ensued. The samovar, which stood on the floor, its grating glowing red through the darkness, boiled and bubbled. Their faces were not visible, but it could be felt that all of them were perturbed.

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"Well, daughter, how is it to be? decide," said Kuzma.

The Bride reflected.

"I have nothing against the young man—"

"And how about you, Deniska?"

Deniska also remained silent. "Well, anyhow, I've got to marry some time or other. Possibly, with God's aid, this will go all right—"

Thereupon the two matchmakers exchanged congratulations on the affair's having been begun. The samovar was carried away to the servants' hall. Odnodvorka, who had learned the news earlier than all the rest and had run over from the promontory, lighted the small lamp in the servants' hall, sent Koshel off for vodka and sunflower seeds, seated the bride and the bridegroom beneath the holy pictures, poured them out tea, sat down herself alongside Syery, and, in order to banish the awkwardness, started to sing in a high, sharp voice, glancing the while at Deniska and his long eyelashes:

"When in our little garden,
Amid our grape vines green,
There walked and roamed a gallant youth,
Comely of face, and white, so white . . ."

But Kuzma wandered to and fro from corner to corner in the dark hall, shaking his head, wrinkling up his face and muttering: "Aï, great heavens! Aï, what a shame, what folly, what a wretched affair!"

On the following day, every one who had heard from Syery about this festival grinned and offered him

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advice: "You might help the young couple a bit!" Koshel said the same: "They are a young couple starting life, and young people ought to be helped!" Syery went off home in silence. Presently he brought to the Bride, who was ironing in the ante-room, two iron kettles and a hank of black bread. "Here, dear little daughter-in-law," he said in confusion, "take these; your mother-in-law sends them. Perhaps they may be of use. I haven't anything else—if I had had, I would have jumped out of my shirt with joy!"

The Bride bowed and thanked him. She was ironing a curtain, sent by Tikhon Ilitch "in lieu of a veil," and her eyes were wet and red. Syery tried to comfort her, saying that things weren't honey-sweet with him, either; but he hesitated, sighed, and, placing the kettles on the window-sill, went away. "I have put the thread in the littlest kettle," he mumbled.

"Thanks, batiushka," the Bride thanked him once more, in that same kindly and special tone which she had used only toward Ivanushka; and the moment Syery was gone she suddenly indulged in a faint ironic smile and began to sing:

"When in our little garden . . ."

Kuzma thrust his head out of the hall and looked sternly at her over the top of his eyeglasses. She subsided into silence.

"Listen to me," said Kuzma. "Perhaps you would like to drop this whole business?"

"It's too late, now," replied the Bride in a low voice. "As it is, one can't get rid of the disgrace. Doesn't

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everybody know whose money will pay for the feast? And we have already begun to spend it."

Kuzma shrugged his shoulders. It was true: Tikhon Ilitch, along with the window-curtain, had sent twenty-five rubles, a sack of fine wheaten flour, millet, a skinny pig. But there was no reason why she should ruin her life simply because they had already killed the pig!

"Okh!" said Kuzma. "How you have tortured me! 'Disgraced'! 'we've spent it'— Are you cheaper than the pig?"

"Whether I'm cheaper or not, what is done is done—the dead are not brought back from the cemetery," firmly and simply replied the Bride; and, sighing, she folded the warm, freshly-ironed curtain neatly. "Will you have your dinner immediately?" Her face was calm.

"Well, that settles it! You can do nothing with her!" thought Kuzma, and he said: "Well, manage your affairs as you see fit—"

XIV

AFTER he had dined he smoked and looked out of the window. It had grown dark. He knew that in the servants' wing they were already baking the twisted buns of rye flour—the "ceremonial patties." They were making ready to boil two kettles of fish in jelly, a kettle of vermicelli-paste, a kettle of

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sour cabbage soup, a kettle of buckwheat groats—all fresh from the slaughter-house. And Syery was making himself very busy on a hillock of snow between the storehouses and the shed. On the snow-mound, in the bluish shades of twilight, there blazed with an orange-coloured flame the straw with which they had surrounded the slaughtered pig. Around the fire, awaiting their prey, sat the sheep dogs. Their muzzles shone white; their breasts were of a silky rose hue. Syery, stamping through the snow, ran hither and thither, mending the fire, swinging his arms at the dogs. He had tucked up high the tails of his coat, thrusting them into his belt, and kept pushing his cap to the back of his head with the wrists of his right hand, in which glittered a knife. Fleeting and brilliantly illuminated, now from this side, now from that, Syery cast a huge, dancing shadow on the snow—the shadow of a pagan. Then, past the storehouse along the footpath leading to the village, ran Odnodvorka, and disappeared beneath the snow-mound—to summon the women for the ceremonial rites and to ask Domashka for the fir-tree, carefully preserved in her cellar and passed on from one bride's party to another on the eve of the wedding. And when Kuzma, after brushing his hair and changing his round jacket with the ragged elbows for the conventional long-tailed frock coat, had donned his overcoat and emerged upon the porch, all white with the falling snow in the soft grey gloom, a large crowd of children, little girls and boys, were still outlined blackly against the lighted windows; they were screaming and talking, and three

accordions were being played simultaneously, and all playing different tunes. Kuzma, his shoulders hunched, picking at his fingers and cracking them, stepped up to the crowd, pushed his way through it, and, bending low, disappeared into the darkness of the ante-room. It was full of people, crowded even, in that entry-way. Small urchins darted about between people's legs, were seized by the scruff of the neck and thrust outside—whereupon they promptly crawled back again.

"Come now, let me in, for God's sake!" said Kuzma, who was squeezed tightly in the doorway.

They squeezed him all the harder—and some one jerked open the door. Surrounded by jets of vapour, he crossed the threshold and came to a halt at the jamb. At that point the better-class people were congregated—maidens in flowered shawls, children in complete new outfits. There was an odour of woven goods, fur coats, kerosene, cheap tobacco, and ever-greens. A small green tree, decorated with scraps of red cotton cloth, stood on the table, its branches outstretched above the dim tin lamp. Around the table beneath the moist little windows, which had thawed out, along the damp blackened walls, sat the ceremonial women, festively adorned, their faces coarsely painted red and white. Their eyes flashed. All wore silk and woolen kerchiefs on their heads, with drooping rainbow-tinted feathers from the tail of a drake stuck into their hair at the temples. Just as Kuzma entered, Domashka, a lame girl with a dark, malicious, and intelligent face, sharp black eyes, and black eye-

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brows which met over her nose, had struck up in a rough, hoarse voice the ancient "exaltation" song:

"At our house in the evening, fully evening,
At the very last end of the evening,
At Avdotya's betrothal feast . . .

In a dense, discordant chorus the maidens repeated her last words. And all turned toward the Bride. She was sitting, in accordance with custom, by the stove, her hair flowing loose, her head covered with a large dark shawl; and she was bound to answer the song with loud weeping and wailing: "My own dear father, my own mother dear, how am I to live forevermore thus grieving with woe in marriage?" But the Bride uttered never a word. And the maidens, having finished their song, involuntarily regarded her askance. They began to whisper among themselves, and, frowning, they slowly, in a drawling tone, struck up the "orphan's song":

"Heat yourself hot, you little bath,
Ring out, you sonorous bell!"

And Kuzma's tightly clenched jaws began to quiver; a chill darted through his head and his legs; his cheekbones ached agreeably, and his eyes were filled and dimmed with tears.

"Stop that, you girls!" some one shouted.

"Stop it, my dear, stop it!" cried Odnodvorka, slipping down from the bench. "'Tis unseemly."

But the girls did not obey:

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“Ring out, you sonorous bell,
Awaken my father dear. . . .”

And the Bride began, with a groan, to fall face down on her knees, on her arms, and choked with tears. She was led away at last, trembling, staggering, and shrieking, to the cold summer half of the cottage, to be dressed.

After that was done, Kuzma bestowed the blessing on her. The bridegroom arrived with Vaska, Yakoff's son. The bridegroom had donned the latter's boots; his hair had been freshly clipped short; his neck, encircled by the collar of a blue shirt with lace, had been shaved to redness. He had washed himself with soap, and appeared much younger; he was even not at all ill looking, and, conscious of that fact, he had drooped his dark eyelashes in dignified and modest fashion.

Vaska, his best man, in red shirt and knee-length fur coat worn unbuttoned, with his hair close-cut, pock-marked, robust, resembled a convict, as usual. He entered, frowned, and darted a sidelong look at the ceremonial girls.

“Stop that yowling!” he said roughly and peremptorily. “Get out of here. Begone!”

The girls answered him in chorus: “Without the Trinity a house cannot be built, without four corners the cottage cannot be roofed. Place a ruble at each corner, a fifth ruble in the middle, and a bottle of vodka.” Vaska pulled a bottle out of his pocket and set it on the table. The girls took it and rose to their feet. The crowd had become more dense than ever.

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Once more the door flew open, once more there were steam and cold. Odnodvorka entered, carrying a tinsel-adorned holy picture and thrusting the people out of her way, followed by the Bride in a blue dress with a basque. Every one uttered an exclamation of admiration, she was so pale, gentle, quiet, and lovely. Vaska, with the back of his fist, administered a resounding blow on the forehead of a broad-shouldered, big-headed urchin whose legs were as crooked as those of a dachshund; then he flung upon the straw in the centre of the cottage some one's old short fur coat. Upon it the bride and groom were placed. Kuzma, without lifting his head, took the holy picture from the hands of Odnodvorka. It became so quiet that the whistling breath of the inquisitive big-headed lad was audible. Bride and bridegroom fell on their knees simultaneously and bowed down to Kuzma's feet. They rose, and once more knelt down. Kuzma glanced at the Bride; and in their eyes, which met for an instant, there was a flash of horror. Kuzma turned pale, said to himself in terror: "In another minute I shall throw this holy picture on the floor." But his hands mechanically made the sign of the cross with the ikona in the air; and the Bride, barely touching her lips to it, fastened them on his hand and timidly reached up to his lips. He thrust the holy picture into the hands of some one beside him, grasped the Bride's head with paternal pain and tenderness, and, as he kissed her new, fragrant headkerchief, burst into sweet tears. Then, seeing nothing because of his tears, he turned away and, thrusting the people out of his

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path, strode into the vestibule. It was already deserted. The snow-laden wind beat in his face. The snow-covered threshold shone white through the darkness. The roof was humming. Beyond the threshold an impenetrable blizzard was raging; and the snow, falling out of the tiny window recesses from the sheer weight of the drifts, hung like columns of smoke in the air.

XV

WHEN morning came the blizzard was still raging. In that grey whirling tempest neither Durnovka nor the windmill on the promontory was visible. Once in a while it grew brighter, once in a while the light became like that at nightfall. The orchard was all white, and its roar mingled with the roar of the wind, in which one kept imagining the peal of bells. The sharp-pointed apexes of the snowdrifts were smoking. From the porch, on which, with eyes screwed up, scenting athwart the chill of the blizzard the savoury aroma from the chimney of the servant's wing, sat the watchdogs, all coated with snow. Kuzma was barely able to make out the dark, misty forms of the peasants, their horses, sledges, the jingling of the sleighbells. Two horses had been hitched to the bridegroom's sledge; one horse was allotted to that of the bride. The sledges were covered with kazan felt lap robes with black patterns

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on the ends. The participants in the ceremonial procession had girt themselves with sashes of divers hues. The women, who had donned wadded coats and wrapped their heads in shawls, walked to the sledges circumspectly, taking tiny steps, ceremoniously remarking: "Heavens, God's daylight is not visible!" Rarely was a woman garbed in her own clothes: everything had been collected among the neighbours. Accordingly, special caution was needed not to fall, and they lifted their long skirts as high as possible. The bride's fur coat and her blue gown had been turned up over her head, and she sat in the sledge protected only by her white petticoat. Her head, adorned with a small wreath of paper flowers, was enveloped in undershaws. She had become so weak from her weeping that she saw as in a dream the dark figures through the blizzard, heard its roar, the conversation, and the festive pealing of the small bells. The horses laid their ears flat and tossed their muzzles from side to side to escape the snow-laden gale; and it bore away the chatter and the shouts of command, glued eyes tightly together, whitened mustaches, beards, and caps, and the groomsmen had difficulty in recognizing one another in the darkness and gloom.

"Ugh, damn it all!" exclaimed Vaska as he ducked his head, gathered up the reins, and took his seat beside the bridegroom. And he shouted roughly, indifferently, into the teeth of the storm: "Messrs. boyars, bestow your blessing on the bridegroom, that he may go in search of his bride!"

Some one made answer: "May God bless him."

Then the sleighbells began to wail, the runners to screech; the snowdrifts, as the runners cut through them, turned to smoke and small whirlwinds; the forelocks, manes, and tails of the horses were blown to one side. . . .

At the church-warden's house in the village, where they warmed themselves up while waiting for the priest, all became well suffocated. In the church, also, there was the odour of fire-gas, cold, and gloom, thanks to the blizzard, the low ceilings, and the gratings in the windows. Lighted candles were held only by the bridegroom and the bride and in the hand of the swarthy priest. He had big cheek-bones, and he bent low over his book, which was all bespattered with wax-droppings, and read hurriedly through his spectacles. On the floor stood pools of water—much snow had been brought in on their boots and bark-shoes. The wind from the open door blew on their backs. The priest glanced sternly now at the door, again at the groom and bride—at their tense forms, prepared for anything that might present itself; at their faces, congealed, as it were, in obedience and submission, illuminated from below by the golden gleam of candles. From habit, he pronounced some words as if he felt them, making them stand out apart from the touching prayers; but in reality he was thinking not at all of the words or of those to whom they were applied.

“O God most pure, the Creator of every living thing,” he said hastily, now lowering, now raising his voice. “Thou who didst bless Thy servant Abra-

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ham, and, opening the womb of Sarah . . . who didst give Isaac unto Rebecca . . . who didst join Jacob unto Rachel . . . vouchsafe unto these Thy servants. . . .’”

“Name—?” he interrupted himself in a stern whisper, without altering the expression of his countenance, addressing the lay reader. And, having caught the answer, “Denis, Avdotya,” he continued, with feeling:

“‘Vouchsafe unto these Thy servants, Denis and Evdokia, a peaceful life, length of days, chastity. . . . grant that they may behold their children’s children . . . and give them of the dew of heaven from on high. . . . Fill their houses with wheat and wine and oil . . . exhalt thou them like unto the cedars of Lebanon. . . .’”

But even if those who were present had listened to him and understood, they would have been thinking of the blizzard, the strange horses, the return home through the twilight to Durnovka, Syery’s house—and not of Abraham and Isaac. And they would have grinned at comparing Deniska to a cedar of Lebanon. And it was awkward for Deniska himself, his short legs encased in borrowed boots, his body clad in an old undercoat, to admit that the bride was taller than he; it was awkward and terrible to bear on his motionless head the imperial crown¹—a huge brass crown with a cross on top, resting far down on his very ears. And the hand of the Bride, who looked more beautiful

¹ In the marriage service crowns are used for bride and groom, but generally they are held a short distance above the heads, by best men standing behind.—TRANS.

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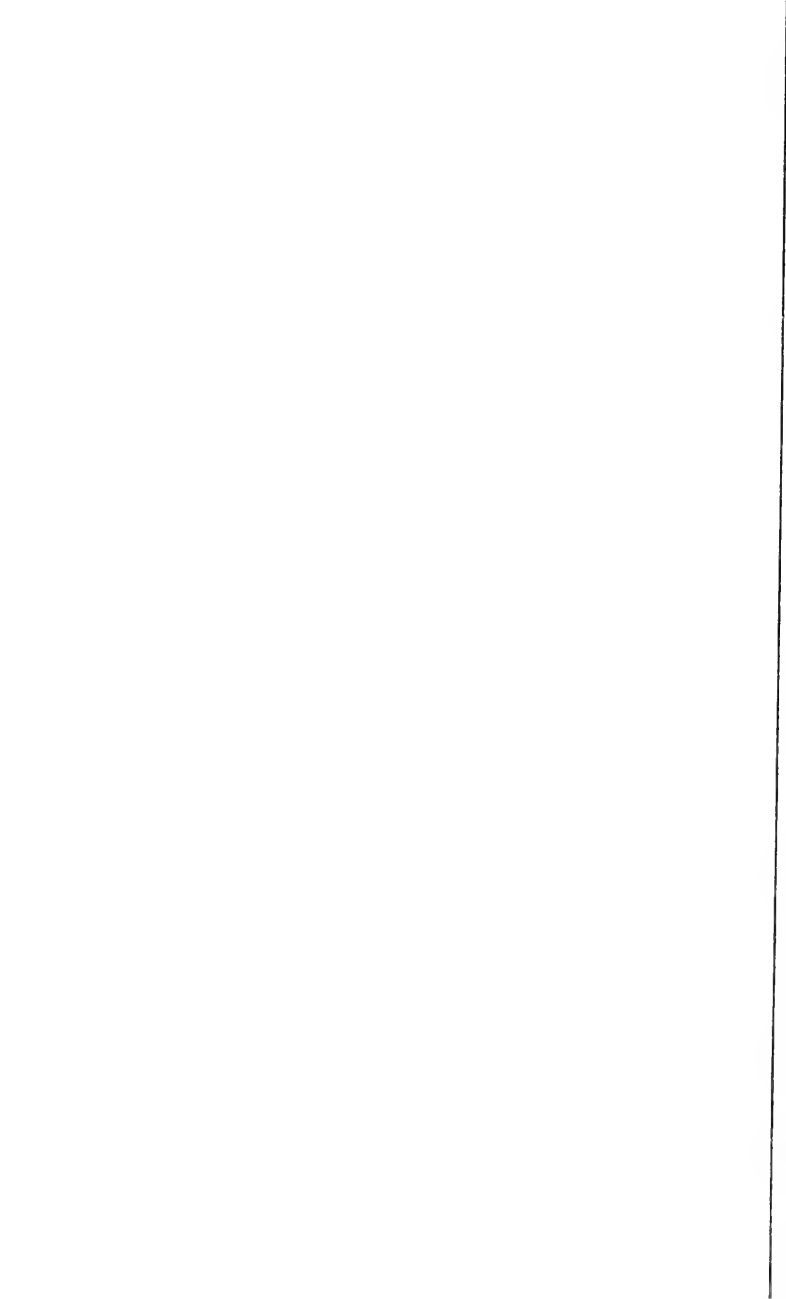
and more lifeless than ever in her crown, trembled, and the wax of the melting candle dripped down on the flounce of her blue gown. . . .

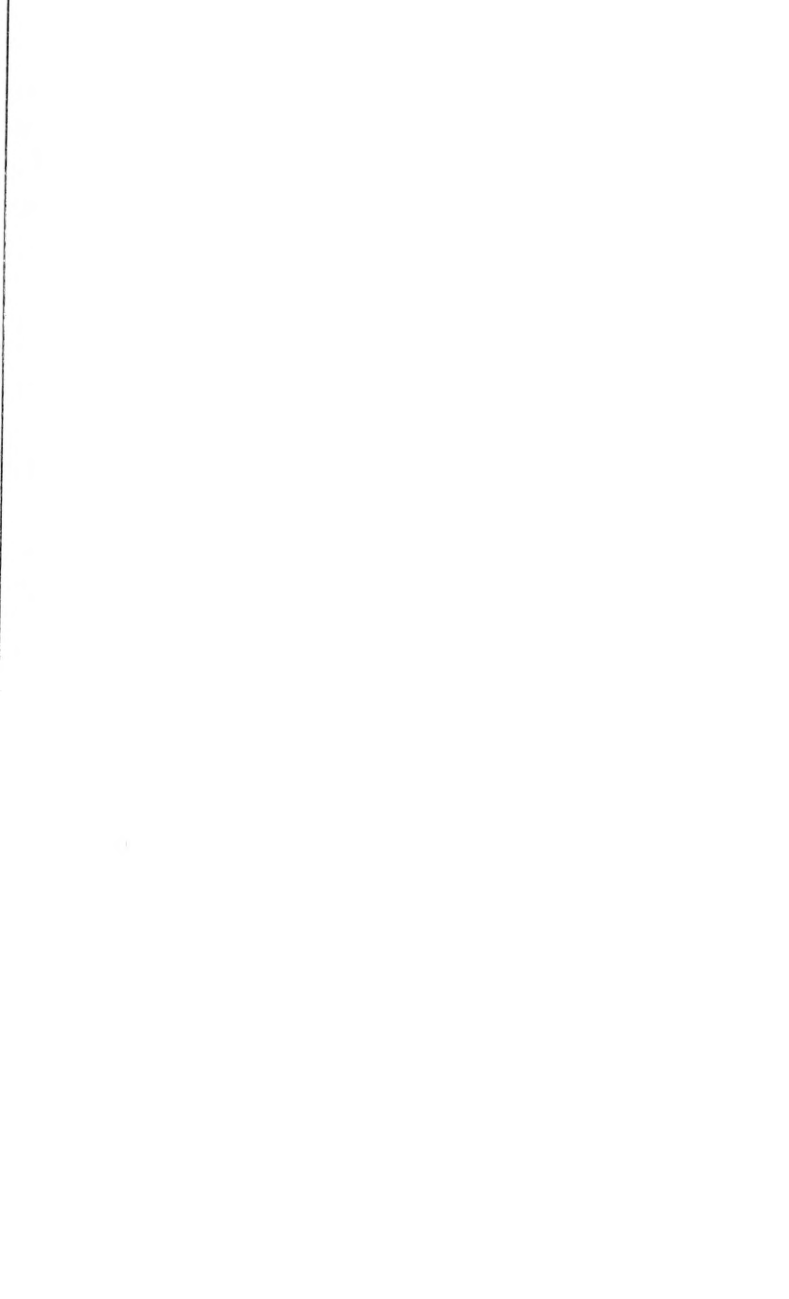
The return home was more comfortable. The blizzard was even more terrible in the twilight, but they were cheered by the consciousness that a burden had been removed from their shoulders: whether for good or for evil, the deed had been done. So they whipped up their horses smartly, dashing ahead at random, trusting solely to the ill-defined forms of the small trees which marked out the road. And the loud-mouthed wife of Vanka Krasny stood upright in the leading sledge and danced, flourishing her handkerchief and screeching to the gale, through the dark, raging turmoil, through the snow which whipped against her lips and drowned her wolf's voice:

"The dove, the grey dove,
Has a head of gold."

Moscow, 1909.









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