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THE  
OLD HOUSE  
AND OTHER TALES BY  
FEODOR SOLOGUB

TRANSLATED FROM  
THE RUSSIAN BY  
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## INTRODUCTION

“Sologub” is a pseudonym—the author’s real name is Feodor Kuzmich Teternikov. He was born in 1864. He completed a scholastic course at Petrograd. His first published story appeared in the periodical “Severny Vïestnik,” in 1894, but it was not until about a dozen years later that he came into his fame, which he has since then further enhanced.

This is all the biographical knowledge we have of a living novelist whose place in Russian literature is secure beyond all question; the scantiness of our knowledge is all the more amazing when one considers that the author is over fifty, and that his complete works are in their twentieth volume.

These include almost every possible form of literary expression—the fairy tale, the poem, the play, the essay, the novel, and the short story. Sologub’s place as a poet is hardly less assured than his place as a novelist.

How little importance Sologub attaches to

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*personal réclame may be gathered from his answer to repeated requests for a nutshell "autobiography," a type of document in vogue in Russia; Maxim Gorky's impressive model, I believe, is quite familiar to English readers.*

*"I cannot give you my autobiography," Sologub wrote to the editor of a literary almanac, "as I do not think that my personality can be of sufficient interest to any one. And I haven't the time to waste on such unnecessary business as an autobiography."*

*At the beginning of his Complete Works, however, there is a poem in prose, a kind of spiritual autobiography in which he insists that all life is a miracle, and that his own surely is also. "I simply and calmly reveal my soul . . . in the hope that the intimate part of me shall become the universal." After such an avowal the reader will know where to look for the author's personality.*

*In studying his work, one finds that he has both realism and fantasy. But while he is sometimes wholly realistic, he is seldom wholly fantastic. His fantasy has always its foundations in reality. His realism is as grey as that of Chekhov, whose logical successor he has been acclaimed by Russian criticism. But it is*

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his prodigious fantasy that makes the point of his departure from the Chekhovian formula. When he combines the two qualities, the strange reconciliation thus effected produces a result as original as it is rich in "the meaning of life." Sologub himself says somewhere :

"I take a piece of life, coarse and poor, and make of it a delightful legend."

This sentence establishes the distinction between the two writers. Life for Chekhov may contain its delightful characters, life itself is seldom a delightful legend.

Actually, Sologub sees life more greyly than Chekhov ; perhaps it is this sense of grief "too great to be borne" that compels him to grope for an outlet, for some kind of relief. Already in his earliest novel one of the characters gives utterance to the significant words :

"Once you prove that life has no meaning, life becomes impossible."

This relief is to be found within oneself, in the "inner life" ; that is in the imagination, "imagination the great consoler," as Renan has said. Imagination is everything ; it is, indeed, the invoker of all beauty ; and admiration of beauty is the one escape out of life. The author,

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“with whatever words he can find, speaks of one thing. Patiently calls towards the one thing. . . .” Writing of the sadness of life, he envelops this sadness in the beauty evoked by his imagination, as in a flame, and withers it up. One finds him rejoicing that there is a life other than “this ordinary, coarse, tedious, sunlight life,” that there is a life that is “nocturnal, prodigious, resembling a fairy tale.”

It may sound like a startling antinomy to say that at his happiest Sologub is a compound of Chekhov and Poe. It could be put in another way: if Poe were a Russian, he might have written as Sologub writes. This is to say that the mystery with which Sologub endows his tales is never there for its own sake, but as a most intense symbol of reality.

Consider a story like “The Invoker of the Beast.” As a story of reincarnation it is a masterpiece of mystery. The reader, anxious for a good tale merely, may let the matter rest there. But can he? Can he listen to Gurov, who, while living through, in his delirium, his previous existence, is so insistent about the “invincibility of his walls”—and yet remain unmoved to the deep meaning of Gurov’s cry? Are not the seemingly imperishable walls, within which Gurov thought



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himself secure from the *Beast*, a symbol of our own subtle insecurity? Is not our own *Beast*—be it some unexpected latent circumstance, or some unlooked-for yet inevitable consequence of a past action, on the part of our ancestors or of ourselves—ready to pounce upon us and ravage our hearts, after a long and relentless pursuit, from which in the end there is no escape?

Again, to one who has read most of Sologub's productions, the story of the *Beast* is interesting, because it contains, as it were, a synthesis of the author's tendencies. Its separate motifs are repeated in variation in many of his other stories. There is the boy *Timarides*, whom the author loves. Why?

Because *Timarides* is a child, because he is beautiful, trustful, and ready to do daring deeds. *Timarides* perhaps stands for the young generation reproaching the old for its neglect, its forgetfulness of its promises, its settling in a groove, its stripping itself of its happiest illusions.

And throughout his work, Sologub reiterates his affection for children and the childlike. When he loves or pities an older person, he endows him with childlike attributes. He does this in the little story, "*The Hoop.*" Does the old man seem

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*absurd to us? If so, it is to be inferred that the fault is with ourselves. We have grown too sophisticated.*

*Here, again, Chekhov and Sologub meet. Chekhov loves the unpractical people, because they are usually more lovable personalities than the successful, practical ones; Sologub loves the absurd, the childlike, the quixotic, for the same reason.*

*Rather than have them grow up and therefore become unlovable, Sologub makes some of his children die young. There is, for example, in one of his stories, sweet Rayechka, who died in a fall, and upon whom the boy, Mitya, recalling her, muses in this fashion: "Had Rayechka lived to grow up, she might have become a housemaid like Darya, pomaded her hair, and squinted her cunning eyes."*

*In "The Old House" it is the children once more who are the revolutionaries—trustful, adorable, and daring. In "The White Mother" the bachelor, Saksaoorov, is redeemed through the boy, Lesha, who resembles his dead sweetheart.*

*Schoolmasters and schoolchildren are among the characters who frequent the pages of Sologub's books. Sologub, it should be remembered, began life as a schoolmaster. The story "Light and*

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*Shadows*” is, perhaps, a reflection upon our educational system which crams the young mind with a multitude of useless facts and starves the imagination; we see the reaction of the system on the delicate organism of a sensitive and imaginative child.

Mothers share the author’s affection for their children; but, like schoolmasters, mothers, unfortunately, are of two kinds. The world has its “black mammas” as well as its “white mammas.”

There are few writers who are so subtle, so insinuating, and so seductive, in their power to make the reader think; few writers who give so great a stimulus to the imagination.

With Chekhov, Russian fiction turns definitely to town life for its material; nevertheless, the changes which the modern industrial system has brought about have in no wise weakened the mystic force of Russian literature. Sologub is a mystic, a mystic of Russian tradition; and Sologub is a product of Petrograd.

JOHN CURNOS





## THE OLD HOUSE \*

### I

It was an old, large, one-storied house, with a mezzanine. It stood in a village, eleven versts from a railway station, and about fifty versts from the district town. The garden which surrounded the house seemed lost in drowsiness, while beyond it stretched vistas and vistas of inexpressibly dull, infinitely depressing fields.

Once this house had been painted lavender, but now it was faded. Its roof, once red, had turned dark brown. But the pillars of the terrace were still quite strong, the little arbours in the garden were intact, and there was an Aphrodite in the shrubbery.

It seemed as if the old house were full of memories. It stood, as it were, dreaming, recalling, lapsing finally into a mood of sorrow at the overwhelming flood of doleful memories.

Everything in this house was as before, as in those days when the whole family lived

\* In collaboration with Anastasya Cheboterevskaya.

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there together in the summer, when Borya was yet alive.

Now, in the old manor, lived only women: Borya's grandmother, Elena Kirillovna Vodolenskaya; Borya's mother, Sofia Alexandrovna Ozoreya; and Borya's sister, Natalya Vasiljevna. The old grandmother, and the mother, and the young girl appeared tranquil, and at times even cheerful. It was the second year of their awaiting in the old house the youngest of the family, Boris. Boris who was no longer among the living.

They hardly spoke of him to one another; yet their thoughts, their memories, and their musings of him filled their days. At times dark threads of grief stole in among the even woof of these thoughts and reveries; and tears fell bitterly and ceaselessly.

When the midday sun rested overhead, when the sad moon beckoned, when the rosy dawn blew its cool breezes, when the evening sun blazed its red laughter—these were the four points between which their spirits fluctuated from evening joy to high midday sorrow. Swayed involuntarily, all three of them felt the sympathy and antipathy of the hours, each mood in turn.

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The happiness of dawn, the bright midday sadness, the joy of dusk, the pale pining of night. The four emotions lifted them infinitely higher than the rope upon which Borya had swung, upon which Borya had died.

### II

At pale-rose dawn, when the merrily green, harmoniously white birches bend their wet branches before the windows, just beyond the little patch of sand by the round flower-bed; at pale-rose dawn—when a fresh breeze comes blowing from the bathing pond—then wakes Natasha, the first of the three.

What a joy it is to wake at dawn! To throw aside the cool cover of muslin, to rest upon the elbow, upon one's side, and to look out of the window with large, dark, sad eyes.

Out of the window the sky is visible, seeming quite low over the white distant birches. A pale vermilion sunrise brightly suffuses its soft fire through the thin mist which stretches over the earth. There is in its quiet, gently joyous flame a great tension of young fears and of half-conscious desires; what tension, what happiness, and what sadness! It smiles

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through the dew of sweet morning tears, over white lilies-of-the-valley, over the blue violets of the broad fields.

Wherefore tears ! To what end the grief of night !

There, close to the window, hangs a sprig of sweet-flag, banishing all evil. It was put there by the grandmother, and the old nurse insists on its staying there. It trembles in the air, the sprig of sweet-flag, and smiles its dry green smile.

Natasha's face lapses into a quiet, rosy serenity.

The earth awakes in its fresh morning vigour. The voices of newly-roused life reach Natasha. Here the restless twitter of birds comes from among the swaying damp branches. There in the distance can be heard the prolonged trill of a horn. Elsewhere, quite near, on the path by the window, there are sounds of something walking with a heavy, stamping tread. The cheerful neighing of a foal is heard, and from another quarter the protracted lowing of sullen cows.

### III

Natasha rises, smiles at something, and goes quickly to the window. Her window looks



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down upon the earth from a height. It is in three sections, in the mezzanine. Natasha does not draw the curtains across it at night, so as not to hide from her drowsing eyes the comforting glimmer of the stars and the witching face of the moon.

What happiness it is to open the window, to fling it wide open with a vigorous thrust of the hand! From the direction of the river the gentlest of morning breezes comes blowing into Natasha's face, still somewhat rapt in sleep. Beyond the garden and the hedges she can see the broad fields beloved from childhood. Spread over them are sloping hillocks, rows of ploughed soil, green groves, and clusters of shrubbery.

The river winds its way among the green, full of capricious turnings. White tufts of mist, dispersing gradually, hang over it like fragments of a torn veil. The stream, visible in places, is more often hidden by some projection of its low bank, but in the far distance its path is marked by dense masses of willow-herb, which stand out dark green against the bright grass.

Natasha washed herself quickly; it was

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pleasant to feel the cold water upon her shoulders and upon her neck. Then, child-like, she prayed diligently before the ikon in the dark corner, her knees not upon the rug but upon the bare floor, in the hope that it might please God.

She repeated her daily prayer :

“ Perform a miracle, O Lord ! ”

And she bent her face to the floor.

She rose. Then quickly she put on her gay, light dress with broad shoulder-straps, cut square on the breast, and a leather belt, drawn in at the back with a large buckle. Quickly she plaited her dark braids, and deftly wound them round her head. With a flourish she stuck into them horn combs and hairpins, the first that came to her hand. She threw over her shoulders a grey, knitted kerchief, pleasantly soft in texture, and made haste to go out onto the terrace of the old house.

The narrow inner staircase creaked gently under Natasha's light step. It was pleasant to feel the contact of the cold hard floor of planks under her warm feet.

When Natasha descended and passed down the corridor and through the dining-room, she walked on tip-toe so as to awaken neither her

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mother nor her grandmother. Upon her face was a sweet expression of cheerful preoccupation, and between her brows a slight contraction. This contraction had remained as it was formed in those other days.

The curtains in the dining-room were still drawn. The room seemed dark and oppressive. She wanted to run through quickly, past the large drawn-out table. She had no wish to stop at the sideboard to snatch something to eat.

Quicker, quicker! Toward freedom, toward the open, toward the smiles of the careless dawn which does not think of wearisome yesterdays.

### IV

It was bright and refreshing on the terrace. Natasha's light-coloured dress suddenly kindled with the pale-rose smiles of the early sun. A soft breeze blew from the garden. It caressed and kissed Natasha's feet.

Natasha seated herself in a wicker chair, and leant her slender rosy elbows upon the broad parapet of the terrace. She directed her gaze toward the gate between the hedges beyond

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which the grey silent road was visible, gently serene in the pale rose light.

Natasha looked long, intently, with a steady pensive gaze in her dark eyes. A small vein quivered at the left corner of her mouth. The left brow trembled almost imperceptibly. The vertical contraction between her eyes defined itself rather sharply. Equal to the fixity of the tremulous, ruby-like flame of the rising sun, was the fixed vision of her very intent, motionless eyes.

If an observer were to give a long and searching look at Natasha as she sat there in the sunrise, it would seem to him that she was not observing what was before her, but that her intent gaze was fixed on something very far away, at something that was not in sight.

It was as though she wished to see some one who was not there, some one she was waiting for, some one who will come—who will come to-day. Only let the miracle happen. Yes, the miracle!

### V

Natasha's grey daily routine was before her. It was always the same, always in the same



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place. And as yesterday, as to-morrow, as always, the same people. Eternal unchanging people.

A *muzhik* walked along with a monotonous swing, the iron heels of his boots striking the hard clay of the road with a resounding clang. A peasant woman walked unsteadily by, softly rustling her way through the dewy grass, showing her sunburnt legs. Regarding the old house with a kind of awe, a number of sweet, sunburnt, dirty, white-haired urchins ran by.

Past the house, always past it. No one thought of stopping at the gate. And no one saw the young girl behind that pillar of the terrace.

Sweet-briar bloomed near the gate. It let fall its first pale-rose petals on the yellow sandy path, petals of heavenly innocence even in their actual fall. The roses in the garden exhaled their sweet, passionate perfume. At the terrace itself, reflecting the light of the sky, they flaunted their bright rosy smiles, their aromatic shameless dreams and desires, innocent as all was innocent in the primordial paradise, innocent as only the perfumes of roses are innocent upon this earth. White tobacco plants and red poppies bloomed in one



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part of the garden. And just beyond a marble Aphrodite gleamed white, like some eternal emblem of beauty, in the green, refreshing, aromatic, joyous life of this passing day.

Natasha said quietly to herself: "He must have changed a great deal. Perhaps I shan't know him when he comes."

And quietly she answered herself: "But I would know him at once by his voice and his eyes."

And listening intently she seemed to hear his deep, sonorous voice. Then she seemed to see his dark eyes, and their flaming, dauntless, youthfully-bold glance. And again she listened intently and gave a searching look into the great distance. She bent down lightly, and inclined her sensitive ear toward something while her glance, pensive and motionless, seemed no less fixed. It was as though she had stopped suddenly in an attitude, tense and not a little wild.

The rosy smile of the now blazing sunrise timidly played on Natasha's pale face.

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### VI

A voice in the distance gave a cry, and there was an answering echo.

Natasha shivered. She started, sighed, and then rose. Down the low, broad steps she descended into the garden, and found herself on the sandy path. The fine grey sand grated under her small and narrow feet, which left behind their delicate traces.

Natasha approached the white marble statue.

For a long time she gazed upon the tranquil beauty of the goddess's face, so remote from her own tedious, dried-up life, and then upon the ever-youthful form, nude and unashamed, radiating freedom. Roses bloomed at the foot of the plain pedestal. They added the enchantment of their brief aromatic existence to the enchantment of eternal beauty.

Very quietly Natasha addressed the Aphrodite.

“If he should come to-day, I will put into the buttonhole of his jacket the most scarlet, the most lovely of these roses. He is swarthy, and his eyes are dark—yes, I shall take the most scarlet of your roses!”

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The goddess smiled. Gathering up with her beautiful hands the serene draperies which fell about her knees, silently but unmistakably she answered, "Yes."

And Natasha said again: "I will plait a wreath of scarlet roses, and I will let down my hair, my long, dark hair; and I will put on the wreath, and I will dance and laugh and sing, to comfort him, to make him joyous."

And again the goddess said to her, "Yes."

Natasha spoke again: "You will remember him. You will recognize him. You gods remember everything. Only we people forget. In order to destroy and to create ourselves and you."

And in the silence of the white marble was clear the eternal "Yes," the comforting answer, "Yes."

Natasha sighed and took her eyes from the statue. The sunrise blazed into a flame; the joyous garden smiled with the radiations of dawn's ever-youthful, triumphant laughter.

## VII

Then Natasha went quietly toward the gate. There again she looked a long time down the

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road. She had her hand on the gate in an attitude of expectation, ready, as it were, to swing it wide open before him who was coming, before him whom she awaited.

Stirring the grey dust of the road the refreshing early wind blew softly into Natasha's face, and whispered in her ears persistent, evil and ominous things, as though it envied her expectation, her tense calm.

O wind, you who blow everywhere, you know all, you come and you go at will, and you pursue your way into the endless beyond.

O wind, you who blow everywhere, perchance you have flown into the regions where he is? Perchance you have brought tidings of him?

If you would but bring hither a single sigh from him, or bear one hence to him; if but the light, pale shadow of a word.

When the early wind blows a flush comes to Natasha's face, and a flame to her eyes; her red lips quiver, a few tears appear, her slender form sways slightly—all this when the wind blows, the cool, the desolate, the unmindful, the infinitely wise wind. It blows, and in its blowing there is the sense of fleeting, irrevocable time.



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It blows, and it stings, and it brings sadness, and pitilessly it goes on.

It goes on, and the frail dust falls back in the road, grey-rose yet dim in the dawn. It has wiped out all its traces, it has forgotten all who have walked upon it, and it lies faintly rose in the dawn.

There is a gnawing at the heart from the sweet sadness of expectation. Some one seems to stand near Natasha, whispering in her ear : "He will come. He is on the way. Go and meet him."

### VIII

Natasha opens the gate and goes quickly down the road in the direction of the distant railway station. Having walked as far as the hillock by the river, one and a half versts away, Natasha pauses and looks into the distance.

A clear view of the road is to be had from this hillock. Somewhere below, among the meadows, a curlew gives a sharp cry. The pleasant smell of the damp grass fills the air.

The sun is rising. Suddenly everything becomes white, bright, and clear. Joyousness



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fills the great open expanse. On the top of the hillock the morning wind blows more strongly and more sweetly. It seems to have forgotten its desolation and its grief.

The grass is quite wet with dew. How gently it clings to her ankles. It is resplendent in its multi-coloured, gem-like, tear-like glitter.

The red sun rises slowly but triumphantly above the blue mist of the horizon. In its bright red flame there is a hidden foreboding of quiet melancholy.

Natasha lowers her glance upon the wet grass. Sweet little flowers! She recognizes the flower of faithfulness, the blue periwinkle.

Here also, quite near, reminiscent of death, is the black madwort. But what of that? Is it not everywhere? Soothe us, soothe us, little blue flowers!

“I will not pluck a single one of you; not one of you will I plait into my wreath.”

She stands, waiting, watching.

Were he to show himself in the road she would recognize him even in the distance. But no—there is no one. The road is deserted, and the misty distances are dumb.

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### IX

Natasha remains standing a little while, then turns back. Her feet sink in the wet grass. The tall stalks half wind themselves round her ankles and rustle against the hem of her light-coloured dress. Natasha's graceful arms, half hidden by the grey knitted kerchief, hang subdued at her sides. Her eyes have already lost their fixed expression, and have begun to jump from object to object.

How often have they walked this road, all together, her little sisters, and Borya! They were noisy with merriment. What did they not talk about! Their quarrels! What proud songs they sang! Now she was alone, and there was no sign of Borya.

Why were they waiting for him? In what manner would he come? She did not know. Perhaps she would not recognize him.

There awakens in Natasha's heart a presentiment of bitter thoughts. With a heavy rustle an evil serpent begins to stir in the darkness of her wearied memory.

Slowly and sorrowfully Natasha turns her steps homeward. Her eyes are drowsy and seem to look aimlessly, with fallen and fatigued

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glances. The grass now seems disagreeably damp, the wind malicious; her feet feel the wet, and the hem of her thin dress has grown heavy with moisture. The new light of a new day, resplendent, glimmering with the play of the laughing dew, resounding with the hum of birds and the voices of human folk, becomes again for Natasha tiresomely blatant.

What does a new day matter? Why invoke the unattainable?

The murmur of pitiless memory, at first faint, grows more audible. The heavy burden of insurmountable sorrow falls on the heart like an aspen-grey weight. The heart feels proudly the pressure of the inexpressibly painful foreboding of tears.

As she nears the house Natasha increases her pace. Faster and yet faster, in response to the growing beat of her sorrowful heart, she is running over the dry clay of the road, over the wet grass of the bypath, trodden by pedestrians, over the moist, crunching, sandy footpaths of the garden, which still treasure the gentle traces left by her at dawn. Natasha runs across the warm planks, as yet unswept of dust and litter. And she no longer tries to step lightly and inaudibly. She stumbles across

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the astonished, open-mouthed Glasha. She runs impetuously and noisily up the stairway to her room, and throws herself on the bed. She pulls the coverlet over her head, and falls asleep.

### X

Borya's grandmother, Elena Kirillovna, sleeps below. She is old, and she cannot sleep in the morning; but never in all her life has she risen early; so even now she is awake only a little later than Natasha. Elena Kirillovna, straight, thin, motionless, the back of her head resting on the pillow, lies for a long time waiting for the maid to bring her a cup of coffee—she has long ago accustomed herself to have her coffee in bed.

Elena Kirillovna has a dry, yellow face, marked with many wrinkles; but her eyes are still sparkling, and her hair is black, especially by day, when she uses a cosmetic.

The maid Glasha is habitually late. She sleeps well in the morning, for in the evening she loves to stroll over to the bridge in the village. The harmonica makes merry there, and on holidays all sorts of jolly folk and maidens dance and sing.



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Elena Kirillovna rings a number of times. In the end the unanswering stillness behind the door begins to irritate her. Sadly she turns on her side, grumbling. She stretches her dry, yellow hand forward and with a kind of concentrated intentness presses her bent, bony finger a long time on the white bell-button lying on the little round table at her head.

At last Glasha hears the prolonged, jarring ring above her head. She jumps quickly from her bed, and anxiously gropes about for something or other in her narrow quarters under the stairway of the mezzanine ; then she throws a skirt over her head, and hurries to her old mistress. While running she arranges somehow her heavy, tangled braids.

Glasha's face is angry and sleepy. She reels in her drowsiness. On the way to her mistress's bedroom the morning air refreshes her a little. She faces her mistress looking more or less normal.

Glasha has on a pink skirt and a white blouse. In the semi-darkness of the curtained windows her sunburnt arms and strong legs seem almost white. Young, strong, rustic and impetuous, she suddenly appears before her old mistress's



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bed, her vigorous tread causing the heavy metal bed with its nickelled posts and surmounting knobs to rattle slightly, and the tumbler on the small round table to tinkle against the flagon.

### XI

Elena Kirillovna greets Glasha with her customary observation :

“ Glasha, when am I to have my coffee ? I ring and ring, and no one comes. You, girl, seem to sleep like the dead.”

Glasha's face assumes a look of astonishment and fear. Restraining a yawn, she bends down to put a disarranged rug in order, and puts a pair of soft, worn slippers closer to the bed. Then assuming an excessively tender, deferential tone which old gentlewomen like in their servants, she remarks :

“ Forgive me, *barinya*,\* it shan't take a minute. But how early you are awake to-day, *barinya* ! Did you have a bad night ? ”

Elena Kirillovna replies :

“ What sort of sleep can one expect at my

\* Means “gentlewoman,” and is a common form of salutation from servant to mistress.

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age ! Get me my coffee a little more quickly, and I will try to get up.”

She now speaks more calmly, despite the capricious note in her voice.

Glasha replies heartily :

“ This very minute, *barinya*. You shall have it at once.”

And she turns about to go out.

Elena Kirillovna stops her with an angry exclamation :

“ Glasha, where are you going ? You seem to forget, no matter how often I tell you ! Draw the curtains aside.”

Glasha, with some agility, thrusts back the curtains of the two windows and flies out of the room. She is rather low of stature and slender, and one can tell from her face that she is intelligent, but the sound of her rapid footsteps is measured and heavy, giving the impression that the runner is large, powerful, heavy, and capable of doing everything but what requires lightness. The mistress grumbles, looking after her :

“ Lord, how she stamps with her feet ! She spares neither the floor nor her own heels ! ”

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### XII

At last the sound of Glasha's feet dies away in the echoing silence of the long corridor. The old lady lies, waiting, thinking. She is once more straight and motionless under her bed-cover, and very yellow and very still. Her whole life seems to be concentrated in the living sparkle of her keen eyes.

The sun, still low, throws a subdued rosy light on the wall facing her. The bedroom is lit-up and quiet. Swift atoms of dust are dancing about in the air. There is a glitter on the glass of the photographic portraits which hang on the wall, as well as on the narrow gilt rims of their black frames.

Elena Kirillovna looks at the portraits. Her keen, youthfully sparkling eyes carefully scrutinize the beloved faces. Many of these are no longer upon the earth.

Borya's portrait is a large one, in a broad dark frame. It is a young face, the face of a seventeen-year-old lad, quite smooth and with dark eyes. The upper lip shows a small but vigorous growth of hair. The lips are tightly compressed and the entire face gives the impression of an indomitable will.

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Elena Kirillovna looks long at the portrait, and recalls Borya. Of all her grandsons she loved him best. And now she is recalling him. She sees him as he had once looked. Where is he now? Before long Borya will return. She will be overjoyed, her eyes will have their fill of him. But how soon?

It comforts the old woman to think, "It can't be very long."

Some one has just run past her window, giving a shrill cry.

Elena Kirillovna, turning in her bed, looks out of the window.

The white acacia trees before the window, gaily rustling their leaves, smile innocently, naïvely and cheerily. Behind them, looming densely, are the tops of the birches and of the limes. Some of the branches lean toward the window. Their harsh rustle evokes a memory in Elena Kirillovna.

If Borya were but to cry out like that! He had loved this garden. He had loved the white bloom of the acacia trees, and he had loved to gather the little field flowers. He used to bring her some. He liked cornflowers specially.



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### XIII

At last Glasha has come with the coffee. She has placed a silver tray on the little round table near the bed. Above the broad blue-and-gold porcelain cup rises a thin bluish cloud of steam.

Elena Kirillovna draws her scant body higher upon the pillows, and sits upright in her bed; she seems straight, dry, and thin in her white night-jacket. With trembling hands she very fastidiously rearranges the ribbons of her white ruffled nightcap.

Glasha, with great solicitude and skill, has placed a number of pillows at her back, and these piled up high make a soft wall of comfort.

The little silver spoon held by the old dry fingers rings with fragile laughter, as it stirs the sugar in the cup. Afterwards out of a small milk-jug comes a generous helping of boiled milk. And Glasha, having shifted somewhat to the side in order to catch a stealthy look of herself in the mirror, goes out.

Elena Kirillovna sips her coffee slowly. She breaks a sugared biscuit, throws half of it in the cup, and leaves it there for a time. Then, when it is completely softened; she carefully takes it out with the little spoon.



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Elena Kirillovna's teeth are still quite strong. She is very proud of this ; nevertheless she has preferred of late to eat softer things. She munches away at the wet biscuit. Her face expresses gratification. Her small, keen eyes sparkle merrily.

When the coffee is finished Elena Kirillovna lies down again. She dozes for half an hour on her back, under the bed-cover. Then she rings again and waits.

### XIV

Glasha comes in. She has had time to comb her hair and to put on a pink blouse, and this makes her seem even thinner. As she is in no haste her footfalls sound even heavier than before.

Glasha approaches her mistress's bed and silently throws the bed-cover aside. She helps Elena Kirillovna to sit on the bed, holding her up under the arm. Then, getting down on her knees, she helps her mistress to put on her long black stockings and her soft grey slippers.

Elena Kirillovna holds on to Glasha's shoulder with her trembling, nervous hands. She envies Glasha's youth, strength, and naïve simplicity. Grumbling under her breath at her unfortunate

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lot, Elena Kirillovna imagines in her dejection that she would be willing to sacrifice all her comfort to become like Glasha, a common servant-maid with coarse hands and feet red from rough usage and the wet—if she could but possess the youth, the cheerfulness, the sang-froid, and the happiness attainable upon this earth only by the stupid.

The old woman grumbles often at her fate, but is quite unwilling to give up a single one of her gentlewoman's habits.

Glasha says, "All ready, *barinya*."

"Now my capote, Glasha," Elena Kirillovna says as she gets up.

But Glasha herself knows what is wanted. She deftly puts on Elena Kirillovna's shoulders a white flannel robe.

"Now you may go, Glashenka. I will ring if I want you again."

### XV

Glasha goes. She hurries to the veranda staircase.

Here she washes herself a second time in a clay turn-over basin, which is attached by a rope to one of the posts of the veranda; she

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quickly plunges her face and hands in the water that had been left there overnight. She splashes the water a long way off on the green grass, on the lilac-grey planks of the staircase and on her feet, which are red from the early morning freshness and from the tender contact with the dewy grass in the vegetable garden. She laughs happily at herself—because she is a young, healthy girl, because the early morning freshness caresses the length of her strong, swift body with brisk cool strokes ; and finally, because not far away, in the village, there is a lively and handsome young fellow, not unlike herself, who pays attention to her and whom she is rather fond of. It is true that her mother scolds her on his account, because the young man is poor. But what's that to Glasha ? Not for nothing is there an adage :

“Without bread 'tis very sad,  
Still sadder 'tis without a lad.”

Glasha laughs loudly and merrily.

Stepanida cries at her from the kitchen window : “ Glash, Glash, why do you neigh like a horse ? ”

Glasha laughs, makes no reply, and goes off. Stepanida puts her simple, red face out of

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the window and asks : “ I wonder what’s the matter with her.”

She receives no answer, for there is no one to reply. Out of doors all is deserted. Only somewhere from behind the barn the languid voices of working-men can be heard.

### XVI

In the meantime Elena Kirillovna kneels down with a sigh before the ikon in her bedroom. She prays a long time. Conscientiously she repeats all the prayers she knows. Her dry, raspberry-coloured lips stir slightly. Her face has a severe, concentrated expression. All her wrinkles seem also austere, weary, callous.

There are many words in her prayers—holy, lofty, touching words. But because of their frequent repetition their meaning has become, as it were, hardened, stereotyped and ordinary ; the tears which appear in her eyes are habitual tears wrung out by her antique emotion, and have no relation to the secret trepidation of impossible hopes which have stolen into the old woman’s heart of late.

Diligently her lips murmur prayers each day for the forgiveness of sins, voluntary and



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involuntary, committed in deed, in word, or in thought; prayers for the purification of our souls of all defilement; and again words concerning our impieties, our evil actions, our disregard of commandments, our general unworthiness, our worldly frailty, and the temptations of Satan; and again concerning the accursed soul and the accursed body and the sensual life; and her words embrace only universal evil and all-pervading depravity. Surely these prayers were composed for Titans, created to reconstruct the universe, but who, out of shamefaced indolence, are attending to this business with their arms hanging at their sides.

And not a word does she utter of her own, her personal affliction, of what is in her soul.

The old, dried-up lips mumble of mercy, of generosity, of brotherly love, of the holy life—of all those lofty regions pouring out their bounty upon all creation. And not a word of the miracle, awaited eagerly and with trepidation.

But here are words for those who are in prison and in exile; it is a prayer for their liberation, for their redemption.

Here is something at last about Borya.



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Freedom and redemption. . . .

But the prayer runs on and on, and it is again for strangers, for distant people, for the universal; only for an instant, and then lightly, does she pause to put in something for herself, for her desire, for what is in her heart.

Then for the dead—for those others, the long since departed, the almost forgotten, the resurrected only in word in the hour of these strangers, prayed for in this easy, gliding way all the world over where piety reigns.

The prayers are ended. Elena Kirillovna lingers for a moment. She has an air of having forgotten to say something indispensable.

What else? Or has she said all?

“All”—some one seems to say simply, softly and inexorably.

Elena Kirillovna rises from her knees. She goes to the window. Her soul is calm and self-contained. The prayer has not left her in a mood of piety, but has relieved her weary soul for a brief time of its material, matter-of-fact existence.

## XVII

Elena Kirillovna looks out of the window. She is returning as it were, once more from some

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dark, abstract world to the bright, profusely-coloured, resonant impressions of a rough, cheery, not altogether disagreeable life.

Small white clouds tinged with red float slowly in the heights and merge imperceptibly in the vivid blue. Ablaze like a piece of coal at red heat their soul seems to fuse with their cold white bodies, to consume them as well as itself with fire, and to sink exhausted in the cold blue heights. The sun, as yet invisible behind the left wing of the house, has already begun to pour upon the garden its warm and glowing waves of laughter, joy and light, animating the flowers and birds.

“Well, it’s time to dress,” Elena Kirillovna says to herself.

She rings.

Soon Glasha appears and helps Elena Kirillovna to dress.

At last she is ready. She casts a final look in the mirror to see that everything is in order.

Elena Kirillovna’s hair is very neatly combed, and lightly brushed down with a cosmetic. This makes it shine and appear as though it were glued together. At her every movement in the light there is visible, from right to left, a slender silver thread, due to the reflection of

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light at the parting of the smoothed coiffure. Her face shows slight traces of powder.

Elena Kirillovna's dress is always of a light colour, when not actually white, and of the simplest cut. The small soft ruffle of the broad collar hides her neck and chin. She has already substituted for her dressing slippers a pair of light summer shoes.

### XVIII

Elena Kirillovna enters the dining-room. She looks on as the table is being laid for breakfast. She always notes the slightest disorder. She grumbles quietly as she picks up something from one place on the table and puts it in another.

Then she goes into the large, unused front room, with its closed door on to the staircase of the front façade. She walks along the corridor to the vestibule and to the back staircase. She stops on the high landing, wrinkles up her face from the sun, and looks down to see what is going on in the yard. Small, quite erect, like a young school-girl with a yellow, wrinkled face which expresses at the moment a severe domestic concern, she stands, looks on,

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and is silent; she is, it seems, unnecessary here. No one pays her the slightest attention.

“Good morning, Stepanida,” she calls out.

Stepanida, a buxom, red-cheeked maid in a bright red dress, under which is visible a strip of her white chemise and her stout sunburnt legs, is attending to the samovar at the bottom of the stairs, and is vigorously blowing to set the fire going. Upon her head is a neatly-arranged green kerchief, which hides her folded braids of hair like a head-dress.

The bulging sides of the samovar glow radiantly in the sun. Its bent chimney sends out a curl of blue smoke, which smells sharply, pungently, and not altogether disagreeably, of juniper and tar.

In answer to the old mistress's greeting Stepanida raises her broad, cheerfully-pre-occupied face, with its small, dark brown eyes, and says in prolonged caressing tones, sing-song fashion :

“Good morning to you, *matushka barinya*.\* It's a fine morning, to be sure. How warm it is, by the grace of God! And you're up early, *matushka barinya!*”

Her words are indeed honeyed, and above

\* Literally: “Little mother—gentlewoman.”



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in the sweet air an early, shaggy bee hovers, with a thick buzzing, tremulously golden in the clear, fluid haze of the early, gentle sun. Silent again, Stepanida is once more busy with the samovar ; the disenchanted bee flies away, its buzzing growing less and less audible behind the fence.

The pungent smell of tar causes Elena Kirillovna to frown. She says :

“ What makes the thing smell so strongly ? You had better leave it for a while, or you will get giddy.”

Stepanida, without moving, answers languidly and indifferently :

“ It’s nothing, *barinya*. We are used to it. It’s but a slight smell, and it is the juniper.”

Through the blue, curling smoke of juniper her sweet voice seems dull and bitter. There is a tickling at Elena Kirillovna’s throat. There is a slight giddiness in her head. Elena Kirillovna makes haste to go. She descends the staircase, and proceeds upon her customary morning stroll.

### XIX

Glasha soon overtakes her. With an exaggerated loudness she runs stamping down the

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stairs, showing a wing-like glimmer of her strong legs from under the pink skirt, set a-flutter by her vigorous movement. She calls out in a clear, solicitously joyous voice :

“*Barinya*, you have come out ! The sun will scorch you. I’ve fetched your hat.”

The yellow straw hat, with its lavender ribbon, glimmers in Glasha’s hands like some strange, low-fluttering bird.

Elena Kirillovna, as she puts the hat on, says : “ Why do you run about in such disorder ! You ought to tidy yourself—you know whom we are expecting.”

Glasha is silent, and her face assumes a compassionate expression. For a long time she looks after her strolling mistress, then she smiles and walks back.

Stepanida asks her in a loud whisper : “ Well, is she still expecting her grandson ? ”

“ Rather ! ” Glasha replies compassionately. “ And it’s simply pitiful to look at them. They never stop thinking about him.”

In the meanwhile Elena Kirillovna makes her way across the vegetable garden, past the labourers and the servants in the stockyard, and then across the field. Near the garden fence she enters the road.

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There, not far from the garden, in the shade of an old, spreading lime, stands a bench—a board upon two supports, which still shows traces of having been once painted green. From this place a view is to be had of the road, of the garden, and of the house.

Elena Kirillovna seats herself upon the bench. She looks out on the road. She sits quietly, seeming so small, so slender, and so erect. She waits a long time. She falls into a doze.

Through the thin haze of slumber she can see a beloved, smooth face smiling, and she can hear a quiet, dear voice calling :

“ Grandma ! ”

She gives a start and opens her eyes. There is no one there. But she waits. She believes and waits.

## XX

There is a lightness in the air. The road is radiant and tranquil. A gentle, refreshing breeze softly passes and repasses her. The sun is warming her old bones, it is caressing her lean back through her dress. Everything round her rejoices in the green, the golden, and the blue. The foliage of the

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birches, of the willows, and of the limes in full bloom is rustling quietly. From the fields comes the honeyed smell of clover.

Oh, how light and lovely the air is upon the earth !

How beautiful thou art, my earth, my golden, my emerald, my sapphire earth ! Who, born to its heritage would care to die, would care to close his eyes upon thy serene beauties and upon thy magnificent spaces ? Who, resting in thee, damp Mother Earth, would not wish to rise, would not wish to return to thy enchantments and to thy delights ? And what stern fate shall drive one who is aflame with life-thirst to seek the shelter of death ?

Upon the road where once he walked he shall walk again. Upon the earth, which still preserves his footprints, he shall walk again. Borya, the grandmother's beloved Borya, shall return.

A golden bee flies by. It seems to say, the golden bee, that Borya will return to the quiet of the old house and will taste the fragrant honey—the sweet gift of the wise bees, buzzing under the sun upon the beloved earth. The old grandmother, in her joy, will place before



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the ikon of the Virgin a candle of the purest bees'-wax—a gift of the wise bees, buzzing away among the gold of the sun's rays—a gift to man and a gift to God.

Women and girls of the village pass by with their sunburnt, wind-swept faces. They greet the *barinya* and look at her with compassion. Elena Kirillovna smiles at them, and addresses them in her usual gentle manner :

“ Good morning, my dears ! ”

They pass by. Their loud voices die away in the distance, and Elena Kirillovna soon forgets them. They will pass by once more that day, when the time comes. They will pass by. They will return. Upon the road, where their dusty footprints remain, they will pass by once more.

### XXI

Elena Kirillovna suddenly awoke from her drowse and looked at the things before her with a perplexed gaze. Everything seemed to be clear, bright, free from care—and relentless.

Inevitably the triumphant sun rose higher in the heavens' dome. Grown powerful, wise and resplendent, it seemed indifferent now to

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oppressive earthly melancholy and to sweet earthly delights. And its laughter was high, joyless, and sorrowless.

Everything as before was green, blue and gold, many-toned and vividly tinted; truly all the objects of nature showed the real colour of their souls in honour of this feast of light. But the fine dust upon the silent road had already lost its rose tinge, and stirred before the wind like a grey, depressing veil. And when the wind calmed down, the dust slowly fell back upon the road, like a grey, blind serpent which, trailing its fat, fantastic belly, falls back exhausted, gasping its last breath.

All monotony had become wearisome. This inevitable recurrence of lucid moments began to torment Elena Kirillovna with the grey foreboding of sadness, of bitter tears, of unanswered prayers, and of a profound hopelessness.

### XXII

Glasha appeared at the garden gate. She glanced cheerfully along both sides of the road. Walking more slowly she approached Elena Kirillovna deferentially.

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Glasha looked quite ordinary now, stiff-mannered and stupid. There was nothing to envy in her. Her dress too was quite commonplace. Her braids were arranged upon her head quite like a young lady's, and held fast by three combs of transparent bone. Her blouse was light-coloured—pink stripes and lavender flowers on a ground of white—its short sleeves reached the elbows. She wore a neat blue skirt and a white apron.

Elena Kirillovna asked :

“ Well, what is it, Glashenka ? Is Sonyushka up yet ? ”

Glasha replied in a respectful voice :

“ Sofia Alexandrovna is getting up. She wants me to ask you if we shall lay the table on the terrace ? ”

“ Yes, yes, let it be on the terrace. And how is Natashenka ? ” asked Elena Kirillovna, looking anxiously at Glasha.

“ The young lady is asleep, ” answered Glasha. “ To-day again, quite early, she went out for a walk straight from bed, without so much as a bite of something. Her skirt's wet with dew. She might have caught a cold. And now she sleeps. If you'd but talk to her. ”

Elena Kirillovna said irresolutely :

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“Very well. I had better be going. All right, Glasha.”

Glasha goes. Elena Kirillovna rises slowly from the bench, as though she regretted moving from the spot where she saw Borya in a half-dream. Slowly she walks toward the house.

Having reached the gate she pauses, and again looks for some moments down the road, in the direction of the station.

A cart rumbles by noisily over the travelled road. The *muzhik* barely holds the reins and rocks from side to side sleepily. The harnessed horse swings its tail and its head. A white-haired urchin, in broad blue breeches, lets his brown feet hang over the edge of the cart and stares with his bright hazel eyes at a gaunt, evil-looking dog which runs after, barking hoarsely.

Elena Kirillovna gives a sigh—there is as yet no Borya—and enters the garden.

Glasha's light-coloured blouse glimmers on the terrace. There is a rattle of dishes. The grumbling chatter of Borya's old nurse is also audible.



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### XXIII

The last to awake, with the sun quite high and scorching, is Borya's mother, Sofia Alexandrovna. Through the thin bright curtains, drawn for the night across the windows, the light fills her bedroom.

Sofia Alexandrovna awakes with a start, as though some one had touched her suddenly or had called to her. With her right hand she impetuously throws aside her light white bed-cover. Quickly she sits up in bed, holding her hands over her bent knees. For a moment she looks before her at a bare place in the simple pattern of the bright green hangings.

Sofia Alexandrovna's eyes are dark, wide open, with black, fiery pupils which seem lost in the abysmal depths of their own sorrowful gaze. Her face is long, its skin smooth and colourless, though quite fresh and almost free of wrinkles. The lips are a vivid red.

Sofia Alexandrovna's expression is like that of one faced suddenly with a tragic apparition. She rocks herself back and forward.

Then, abruptly, she jumps out of bed with a single spring. She runs to the washing-

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basin of marble mounted on a red stand. She washes herself quickly, as though in haste to go somewhere. Now she is at the window. The curtains are flung violently aside. She peers anxiously to see what the outlook is—whether there are any clouds in the sky that might bring rain and make the road muddy, the road upon which Borya would return home.

The heavens are tremulously joyous. The birches are rustling quietly. The sparrows are twittering. Everything is green, bright, quivering; everything palpitates under the tension of hopes and anticipations. Voices are audible; cries of good cheer and sounds of laughter. One of the laughers runs by, as though making haste to live.

A torrent of tears floods Sofia Alexandrovna's eyes. Her breast heaves visibly under the white linen chemise.

### XXIV

Sofia Alexandrovna goes to the image. She thrusts aside with her foot the small velvet rug which Glasha had purposely laid there the day before. She throws herself down on her knees before the image. You hear her knees strike

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the floor softly. Sofia Alexandrovna quietly crosses herself, bends her face to the floor, and mutters passionately :

“ O Lord, Thou knowest, Thou knowest all, Thou canst do all. Do this, O Lord, return him to us, to his mother, return him to-day.”

Her prayer is warm and passionate, quite unlike a prayer. Its words are disconnected, and they fall confusedly, like small, broken tears. Her naked feet come in contact with the cold, painted floor. And the entire, warm, prostrate body of the weeping woman is throbbing and trembling on the boards. Her head repeatedly strikes the boards, loosening her dark braids of hair.

She does not pray long. The torrents of tears have cleansed her soul, as it were ; and she becomes at once cheerful and tranquil.

She rises quite as suddenly, and rings. She seats herself on the edge of the bed, and dries her tears with a soft handkerchief. Then she laughs silently. She swings one of her feet impatiently, striking the rug in front of the bed with the toes. Her eyes wander about the room, but seem to observe nothing.

Glasha had only just begun to dress, and she had only tied the strings of her apron

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round her slender waist. The sharp impatient ring causes her to start. She runs to the *barinya*, seizing quickly at the same time a pair of blackened boots and some clothes from the laundry.

Sofia Alexandrovna cries in an urgent voice :

“ Now be quick, Glasha. Help me on with my things.”

She looks on impatiently as Glasha puts down her burden.

The daily ceremony is gone through quickly. Sofia Alexandrovna dresses herself. Glasha only draws on her boots, and hooks up her dress behind.

Soon Sofia Alexandrovna is quite ready. She gives a brief, vacant look in the mirror.

Her pale face still seems to be young and handsome. She is slender, like her mother, and small in stature. She has on a closely fitting white dress with short, wide sleeves. Her coiffure is arranged in a Greek knot, held fast with a red ribbon. Her slender, shapely feet are clad in coloured silk stockings and white shoes with silver buckles.



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### XXV

Sofia Alexandrovna goes quickly into the dining-room. She pours herself a glass of fresh milk out of a jug on the table. She drinks it standing, and munches a piece of black bread with it.

She orders the things for dinner at the same time. She chooses dishes loved by Borya. She stops to recollect whether Borya likes this, or does not like that.

Stepanida listens to her sadly, and replies in a tearful voice :

“ Yes, I know ! Why shouldn't I know ? It's not the first time.”

Glasha asks something. The old, tottering nurse rattles on rather volubly. Sofia Alexandrovna answers them mechanically and rapidly. She seems all the while to be listening intently, either for the sound of a distant little bell, or for the rumble of wheels on the road. She makes her way out in haste. And she no longer listens to what is being said to her. She goes out.

She enters Borya's study. Everything there is as in the old days, and in order. When

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Borya comes back he will find everything in its place.

Sofia Alexandrovna, with great concern, takes a rapid look round the room. She wishes to see whether everything is in its place, whether the dust has been swept, whether the rug has been laid before the bed, and whether the inkstand has been filled with ink. She herself changes the water in the vase which holds the cornflowers. If anything is out of place she gives way to tears, then rings for Glasha, and heaps reproaches upon her.

Glasha's face assumes a frightened, compassionate look. In a most humble manner she begs forgiveness.

Sofia Alexandrovna remonstrates with her :

“How can you be so careless, Glasha? You know that we are expecting him every minute. Suppose he should suddenly come in and find this disorder.”

Glasha replies humbly :

“Forgive me, *barinya*. Don't think any more about it. I'll quickly put everything to rights.”

As she goes out she wipes away two or three tears with her white apron.

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### XXVI

With the same undue haste Sofia Alexandrovna goes into the garden. She sees nothing, neither the white Aphrodite nor her roses, on her way to the little arbour from which, overlooking a corner of the garden, the road is visible. Vividly green in the sun, a four-sloped roof covers the arbour, while hangings of coarse cloth, with a red border, serve as a protection against inquisitive eyes.

Sofia Alexandrovna looks down the road with dark, hungry eyes. She waits impatiently, listening to the rapid, uneven beat of her heart; she waits: Borya will surely come in sight.

The wind blows into her face, and partly conceals it with the hangings; her face is pale, and her eyes are dry. The sun warmly kisses her slender arms, which lie motionless on the broad, lavender-grey parapet of the arbour. Everything is bright, green and gay in the fields, but her eyes are fixed on the grey serpent of dust trailing among the freedom of the fields.

If they await him like this surely Borya will come.

But there is no sign of him. In vain her

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hungry glances penetrate the open waste. There is no Borya. More fixed and piercing grows her glance of infinite longing upon the road—but there is no Borya.

Everything is as before, as yesterday, as always. Tranquil, serene and pitiless.

### XXVII

The hour of the early luncheon came. All three sat at the table on the terrace. There was a fourth place laid, and a fourth chair, for who could tell whether Borya might not arrive at luncheon time!

The sun was already high. The day was turning sultry. The fragrance of the red roses at the foot of the goddess's pedestal became ever more passionate. And the smile of the marble-white Aphrodite was even more clear and serene, as she let fall her draperies with a marvellous grace born of eternal movement. In the bright sunshine the sand on the foot-paths seemed yellow-white. The trees cast austere dark shadows. They seemed to exhale an odour of the soil, of sap, and of warmth.

The women sat so that each one of them,



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looking beyond the drawn hangings of the terrace and over the bushes, could see the short narrow path ending at the garden gate, where a part of the road was also visible; they could not fail to observe every passer-by and every vehicle.

But during this hour of the day hardly anyone ever walked or drove by the old house.

Glasha waited on them. She had on a newly-laundered cap with starched ribbons and plaited frills fitting tightly over her hair. The snow-white cap shone pleasantly above Glasha's fresh, sunburnt face.

In the garden, on a form just under the terrace, sat Borya's old nurse, dressed in a dark lavender blouse, black skirt, with a dark blue kerchief over her head. She was warming her old bones in the sun, and listening to the conversation on the terrace; now she grumbled, now she dozed.

Broad-boned and stout, she had a round, amiable face, and even through the compact network of wrinkles there were palpable suggestions of former beauty. Her eyes were clear. The grey hair was flatly combed down. Her figure and her face wore a settled expression of languid good nature.

XXVIII

As always, they eat and drink, and they keep up a cheerful and friendly chatter. Sometimes two of them speak together. A stranger in the garden might conclude that a large company is gathered on the terrace.

Frequently Borya's name is mentioned.

"To be sure, Borya likes . . ."

"Perhaps Borya will bring . . ."

"It is strange Borya is not yet here. . . ."

"Perhaps Borya will come in the evening. . . ."

"We must ask Borya whether he has read . . ."

"It is possible this is not new to Borya. . . ."

While below, under the terrace, the old nurse, each time she hears Borya's name, crosses herself and mumbles :

"O Lord, rest the soul of thy servant, Boris."

At first her voice is low, but it gradually grows louder and louder. Finally the three women at the table can hear her words. They tremble slightly and exchange anxious glances, into which steals an expression of perplexed

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fear. So they begin to speak even louder, and to laugh even more merrily. They permit no intervals of silence, and the hum of their talk and laughter prevents for the time their hearing the nurse's mumbling in the garden.

But their voices inevitably fall after a mention of the beloved name, and now again they hear the tranquil, terrible words :

“ O Lord, rest the soul . . . ”

They sit at luncheon long, but they talk more industriously than they eat. They glance nervously toward the gate. It seems a terrible thing to have to leave the table and to go somewhere while Borya is not yet with them.

### XXIX

Toward the end of luncheon the post arrives. Grisha, a fourteen-year-old youngster, goes for it daily to the station on horseback. Raising clouds of dust he jumps off briskly at the gate. Leaving his horse he enters the garden carrying a black leather bag, and smiles broadly at something or other. Ascending the long steps of the terrace he announces loudly and joyously :

“ I've fetched the post ! ”

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He is cheery, sunburnt, perspiring. He smells of the sun, of the soil, of dust and tar. His hands and feet are as large as a man's. His lips are soft and pouting, like those of a sweet-tempered foal. At the opening of his shirt, cut on the slant, buttons are missing, exposing a strip of his sunburnt chest and a piece of grey string.

Sofia Alexandrovna rises abruptly from her place. She takes the bag from Grisha, and throws it quickly on the table. A pile of stamped wrappers comes pouring upon the white cloth. The three women bend over the table and rummage for letters. But letters come only rarely.

Knitting her brows Natasha looks at the smiling youngster and asks :

“ No letters, Grisha ? ”

Grisha, shuffling his feet, brick-red from the sun, smiles and answers, as always, in the same words :

“ The letters are being written, *barishnya*.”

Sofia Alexandrovna says impatiently :

“ You may go, Grisha.”

Grisha goes. The women open their newspapers.

Sofia Alexandrovna takes up the *Rech* and



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scans it rapidly, occasionally mentioning something that has attracted her notice.

Natasha is looking over *Slovo*. She reads silently, slowly, and attentively.

Elena Kirillovna has the *Russkiya Vedomosti*. She tears the wrapper open slowly and spreads the entire sheet on the table. She reads on, quickly running her eyes over the lines.

### XXX

Groaning, the old nurse slowly ascends the steps. Sofia Alexandrovna pauses from her reading a moment and looks with fear at the old woman. Natasha gives a nervous start and turns away. Elena Kirillovna reads on calmly, without looking at the nurse.

The nurse sighs, sits down on the bench at the entrance, and asks in a monotone the one and the same question that she asks each day :

“ And how many folk are there in this morning’s paper that’s been ordered to die ? And how many are there that’s been hanged ? ”

Sofia Alexandrovna drops the paper, and suddenly rising, very pale, looks upon the old woman. She is quivering from head to foot. Elena Kirillovna, folding the paper, pushes it

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aside and looks straight before her with arrested eyes. Natasha rises; she turns her face, which has suddenly grown pale, toward the old woman, and utters in a kind of wooden voice that does not seem like her own :

“ In Ekaterinoslav—seven ; in Moscow—one.”

Or other towns, and other figures—such as fresh newspaper lists bring each day.

The nurse rises and crosses herself piously. She mutters :

“ O Lord, rest the souls of Thy servants !  
And give them eternal life ! ”

Then Sofia Alexandrovna cries out in despair :

“ Oh Borya, Borya, my Borya ! ”

Her face is as pale as though there were not a single drop of blood left under her dull, elastic skin.

Wringing her hands with a convulsive movement, she looks with terror at Elena Kirillovna and at her daughter. Elena Kirillovna turns aside, and, looking at the old nurse, shakes her head reproachfully, while in her eyes, like drops of early evening dew, appear a few scant tears.

Natasha, looking determinedly at her mother, says with pale, quivering lips :

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“Mamma, calm yourself.”

Suddenly her voice becomes cold and wooden again as though some evil stranger compelled her each day to utter her words slowly and deliberately.

“You yourself know, mamma, that Borya was hanged a full year ago !”

She looks at her mother with the motionless, pathetic gaze of her very dark eyes, and repeats :

“You yourself know this, mamma !”

Sofia Alexandrovna's eyes are widely dilated ; dull, there is terror in them, and the deep pupils burn with an impercipient lustre in their dark depths. She repeats almost soundlessly, looking straight into Natasha's eyes :

“Hanged !”

She resumes her place, looks out of her sad eyes at the white Aphrodite and the red roses at the goddess's feet, and is silent. Her face is white and rigid, her lips are red and tightly set ; there is a suggestion of latent madness in the still lustre of her eyes.

Before the image of eternal beauty, before the fragrance of the short-lived, exultant roses, she is hardening as it were into an image of the eternal grief of a disconsolate mother.

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### XXXI

Elena Kirillovna quietly descends the narrow side staircase into the garden. She sits down on a bench somewhat away from the house, looks upon the green bedecked pond and weeps.

Natasha goes into her room in the mezzanine. She opens a book and tries to read. But she finds it impossible. She puts the book aside and looks out of the window, and her eyes are dimmed.

Higher and higher above the old house rises the pitiless, bright Dragon. His joyous laughter rings in the merry heights, encloses, as in a flaming circle, the depressing silence of the house. The well-directed rays shoot out like sharp-plumed arrows, and the air is tremulous with eternal, inexhaustible anger. No one is being awaited. No one will come. Borya has died. The relentless wheel of time knows no turning back.

So the day is passing—clearly and brightly. The dazzling white light says there is nothing to hope for.



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### XXXII

Natasha sits in her room before an open window. A book is lying on the window-sill. She has no desire to read.

Every line in the book reminds her of him, of unfinished conversations, of heated discussions, of what had been, of what is no more.

The memories become brighter and brighter, and reach at last a clearness and fullness of vision, overwhelming her soul.

The fiery Dragon, obscured by a leaden grey cloud, becomes a little dim. Dimness also creeps into the memory of him. It seems as though the heavens are being traversed by the cold, clear, tranquil moon. Her face is pale, but not from sadness. Her rays have cast a spell upon the sleeping earth and upon the unattainably high heavens.

The moon has bewitched the fields and also the valleys, which are full of mist. There is a dull glimmer in the drops of cool, tranquil dew upon the slumbering grass.

There is in this fantastic glimmer the resurrection of that which has died—of that past

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tenderness and love which inspired deeds requiring superhuman strength. There come again to the lips proud, long-unsung hymns, and vows of action and loyalty.

And what of that evil, vigilant, and instigating eye; and what of the traitor whose words mingled with the passionate words of the young people! Not even the waters of all the cold oceans can quench the fire of daring love, and all the cunning poisons of the earth cannot poison it.

Bewitched with the lunar mystery, the wood stands expectant, nebulous, silent. Incomprehensible and inaccessible to men is its slow, sure experience, and the secret of its forged desires.

Into its lunar silence men have brought the revolt, the speech and laughter of youth; but, overcome by the lunar mystery, they are suddenly grown silent and meditative.

The open glade in the woods, enchanted by the green, cold light of the moon, seems very white. Along the edge of the glade lie the shadows of the trees; they seem unreal and nebulous and mysteriously still.

The moon, very slowly, almost stealthily, is rising higher in the pale blue dome. Round,

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cold, half lost in the milk-white mist as behind a thin veil, she disperses by her dispassionate gaze the nebulous, silent tops of the slumbering trees, and looks down upon the glade with the motionless, inquisitive glance of her white eyes.

The thin particles of dew scattered over the cold grasses vanish—the white nocturnal haze drinks them greedily. The air is oppressively sweet. On the edge of the glade a number of slender, erect, white-limbed birches emerge out of the mist; they are still asleep, and as innocent as their girl companions who rest beneath them in their green-white dresses.

### XXXIII

Reposing under the slender birches in the glade is a party of girls, young men and grown-up people. One sits on the stump of a felled tree, another on the trunk of an old birch struck down in a storm, a third lies upon an overcoat spread on the grass, a fourth rests his back against a young birch. There is a single, slight glow of a cigarette, but this, too, goes out.

In the luminous, haunting mist everything seems white, translucent, fabulously impres-

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ive. And it seems as though the birches in the glade and the moon in the sky are waiting for something.

Here is Natasha. Here is also Natasha's friend, a college girl from Moscow, white-skinned, sharp-featured, looking like a healthy little wild beast. Then there are Borya and his friend, both in linen jackets, both lean, with pale faces and dark, flaming eyes.

And there is yet another—a tall, stout figure in a dark blouse. He has an air of self-confidence and seems to be the most knowing, the most experienced, the most able of those present.

He is surrounded by the grown-up people and the girls, and he is being questioned. Cheery, good-natured, impatient voices appeal to him.

“Do sing for us the *International*.”

Borya, a lad with pale, frowning forehead, and blue-black circles under his eyes, looks into the other's face and implores more heartily than the rest.

The tall, broad-chested Mikhail Lvovich looks askance and stubbornly refuses to sing.

“I can't,” he says gruffly. “My throat is not in condition.”

Borya and Natasha insist.



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Mikhail Lvovich then makes a gesture with his hand and accedes not less gruffly.

“Very well, I’ll sing.”

Every one is overjoyed.

Mikhail Lvovich poses himself on his knees. Above the mist-white glade, above the white-faced lads, above the white mist itself, there rises toward the witching moon, floating tranquilly in the skies, the words of that proud, passionate hymn :

“Arise, ye branded with a curse !”

Mikhail Lvovich sings. His eyes are fixed on the ground, upon the cold grass, white in the glamorous light of the full, clear moon. It is hard to tell whether he does not wish to or cannot look straight into the eyes of these girls and boys—into these trusting, clean eyes.

And they have gathered round him, how closely they have nestled round him, these pure-spirited young girls; and the young lads, their knees in the grass, follow every movement of his lips, and join in quietly. The bold melody grows, gains in volume. Like an exultant prophecy ring the eloquent words :

In the International  
As brothers all men shall meet.

### XXXIV

Mikhail has finished the song. For a time no one speaks. Then the agitated voices all ring out together, stirring the heavy silence of the woods.

Clear, girlish eyes are looking earnestly upon Mikhail Lvovich's morose set face. A clear, girlish voice implores insistently and gently :

"Sing again, please. Be a dear. Sing it once more. I will make a note of the words. I want to know them by heart."

Natasha approaches nearer and says quietly :

"We will all of us learn the words and sing them each day, like a prayer. We shall do it with a full heart."

Mikhail Lvovich at last lifts his eyes. They are small, sparkling, shrewd. This time they have fixed themselves severely and inquisitively on Natasha's face, which suddenly has become confused at this snake-like glance.

Mikhail Lvovich addresses her gruffly.

"It doesn't require much bravery to sing on the quiet, in the woods. Any one can do that."

Natasha's face becomes pale. Dark flames of unchildish determination kindle in her eyes. Excitedly she cries :

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“ We will learn the words, and we will sing them where they are wanted. My God, are we to depend upon words, and upon words alone? We are ready for deeds.”

Borya repeats after her: “ We are ready. We shall do all that is necessary. Yes, even die if need be.”

Mikhail Lvovich says with a calm assurance: “ Yes, I know.”

In his eyes, fixed intently upon the ground, a dim, small flame is visible.

### XXXV

There is a short silence. Then a thin voice is heard. It is the girl, slender as a young birch, with the sharp, cheerful little face, who is speaking.

“ My God! What strength! What eloquence! ”

Mikhail Lvovich slowly turns his face toward her. He smiles severely and says nothing.

The girl has her hands clasped across her knees. It is an extremely pretty pose. Her face has suddenly assumed a very grave air, breathing passionate entreaty and fiery determination. She exclaims fervently:

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“ Let’s all sing the chorus ! Mikhail Lvovich will teach us. You will teach us, Mikhail Lvovich, won’t you ? ”

“ Very well,” Mikhail Lvovich replies with his usual severe dignity.

He casts his dull, heavy gaze round the crowded circle of delighted young faces. He alone sits with his back to the open glade and to the witching moon. His face, now in the shade, has become even more significant. And his whole bearing is one of imposing solemnity.

The faces of the younger people are white in the moonlight. Their garments are luminously bright. Their voices are brilliantly clear. In their simple trust there is the sense of an avowal.

“ Well, let us begin ! ” exclaims the slender girl, somewhat agitated.

Mikhail Lvovich raises his hand with a solemn gesture and begins :

“ Arise, ye branded with a curse ! ”

The children sing with a will, mingling their high, clear voices with Mikhail Lvovich’s deep, low voice. Their young voices are blazing with the passionate flame of freedom and revolt. Higher and still higher, above the white mists, above the black forest, toward the silver



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clouds and the quiet glimmering stars, toward the aspectful moon, rise the sounds of the invocation.

And the white-trunked birches, the milk-white moon, motionless in the sky, the white, silvery grass, pressed down by children's knees—all is still, all is silent, all is harkening with a sensitive ear. Everything around listens with poignant and solemn intentness to the song of these luminous children who, bathed in the translucent silver of the cool, lunar glimmer, their knees on the grass, their eyes burning in their uplifted faces, are repeating faithfully the words sung by the tall, self-contained young man whose dark face with fixed glance gazes morosely on the ground. They repeat after him :

In the International  
As brothers all men shall meet.

The strange foreign word, un-Russian in its ring, suggests to them the lofty, holy designation of a promised land, a new land under new skies, a land in which they have faith.

After the hymn there is silence, a holy silence, solemn and palpable, reaching from the earth to the heavens. They might have been

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in the temple of a new, as yet unknown religion, in a mystic moment of sacrificial rites.

### XXXVI

Mikhail Evovich is the first to break the silence. He speaks slowly, looking at no one and directing his heavy gaze above the children's pale faces, beyond the flaming ring of their glances :

“ My friends, you know the sort of time this is. Each one of us can be of use. If any one of us is sent, I hope that none will tremble for his precious life, and that none will be deterred by the thought of a mother's sorrow.”

The children exclaim :

“ None ! None ! If they would but send us ! ”

“ What is the sorrow of a single mother compared to the suffering of an entire nation ! ” thinks Natasha proudly.

There rises up for an instant a mental image of the ashen-pale face of her mother, her intensely dark, eloquent eyes. A sharp pain, lasting a moment, pierces her heart. What of that ? It is, after all, but a single instant of weakness. A proud will shall conquer this

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slight suffering of a single relative by conferring great love upon the many, the strangers, the grievous sufferers.

What is the woe of one mother ! Let Niobe weep eternally for her children, killed by the burning, poisoned arrows of the high Dragon ; let Rachel remain unconsolated for ever—what is the woe of a poor mother ? Serene is Apollo's face, radiant is Apollo's dream.

Yet how painful, how painful ! A dimness comes over the transcendent idea, as though the dark countenance of the ominous figure who sang the proud hymn has dimmed the moon and has cast an austere shadow upon the heart itself.

And now there is no moon, and no night, and no white glade in the mist in the forest. The bright day stares again at Natasha, she is at the window, the book lies before her, the old house is depressingly silent. The cloud has disappeared, the heavens are clear again, the evil Dragon is once more aiming his flaming arrows, he reiterates his conquest anew.

This cruel melancholy must be faced. Sting, accursed Dragon, burn, torment. Rejoice, conqueror ! But even he must soon go to

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his setting, and, dying, pour out his blood upon half the heavens.

### XXXVII

Natasha, a yellow straw hat upon her head, is now walking in the field. The ground is hot, the sky is blue, the air is sultry and the wind asleep; the corn is yellow, the grass is green. Bathed again in the bright heat, Natasha prods her sweetly fatiguing memories, which cast into oblivion this dismal day.

She goes on—and there stretches before her, even as on a day long ago, the hot golden field, with its tall stalks inclining their heads in the heat. It is the revival of a former stifling, sultry midday.

That was in the days when Natasha still loved the good, human sun, the source of life and joy, the eternal, the untiring herald of labours and deeds, of deeds beyond the powers of man.

Oh, the treacherous speech of the Serpent Tempter! He turns our heads and he entices, and he makes our poor earth seem like some fabulous kingdom.

Again there is a slight wavering stir in the



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sea of the heat-exhausted ears of rye, studded over with little blue flowers which lower timidly their sweetly-dazed heads from sultriness.

Natasha and her brother Boris are walking together, on an inviting narrow path among the golden waves of rye.

How high the rye is! One can barely see the green roof of the old house on the right for the tall stalks, and the semi-circular window in the mezzanine: and on the left the little grey, rough huts of the village.

Natasha and Boris follow one another. All around them the dry ears of rye waver and rustle, and among them are the blue-eyed little cornflowers. The two fragilely slender human silhouettes answered to the same wavering motion.

Natasha goes ahead. She turns to see why Boris has lagged behind. The boy, brown and slender, with large burning eyes, attired in his linen jacket, is gathering the little blue flowers. He has already gathered almost as many as his hands can hold.

XXXVIII

Natasha, laughing, says to her brother :  
“ Enough, my dear, enough. I shan’t be able to carry them all.”

“ You’ll do it easily enough, never fear ! ”  
Boris answers cheerfully.

Natasha stretches out her sunburnt hand to take the flowers. The sheaf of blue corn-flowers, spreading across her breast, almost hides her, she is so slender.

Again Boris addresses her cheerfully : “ Well, is it heavy ? ”

Natasha laughs. Her face lights up with the joy of gratitude, and with a cheerful, child-like determination. “ I will carry these, but no more ! ” she says.

“ I want to gather as many as possible for you.” Boris’s voice is serious ; “ because you know we may not see each other for some time.”

There is a quaver in his voice as he says this.

“ Perhaps, never,” Natasha, growing pensive, replies.

Both faces become sad and careworn.

Boris, frowning, glances sideways, and asks :  
“ Natasha, are you going with him ? ”

Natasha knows that Boris is inquiring about

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Mikhail Lvovich, who is now sending her on a dangerous business, and who has also promised to send Boris on some foolhardy errand. The brave are so often foolhardy.

“No, I am going alone,” Natasha replies, “he will only lead me later to the spot.”

Boris looks at Natasha with gloomy, envious eyes, and asks rather cautiously: “Are you frightened, Natasha?”

Natasha smiles. And what pride there is in her smile! She speaks, and her voice is tranquil: “No, Boris, I feel happy.”

Boris observes that her face is really happy, and that her dark, flaming eyes are cheerful enough. Looking at her thus, her tranquillity communicates itself to him, and inspires him with a calm confidence in himself and in the business in hand.

The children go farther. Boris again gathers the cornflowers. Natasha is musing about something. She has broken off an ear of rye, and is absently nibbling at the grain.

### XXXIX

It is a long, hot, sultry day. The inexorable Dragon looks down indifferently upon the

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children. Unwearying, he aims his bright, vivid shafts at the sunburnt, fiery-eyed lad and at the slender, erect, black-eyed girl. His blazing shafts are evil, and they are well aimed; and his strong clear light is pitiless—but she walks on, and in her eyes there is hope, and in her eyes there is resolution, and in her dark eyes there is a flame which sets the soul afire to achieve deeds beyond the powers of man.

Natasha suddenly pauses at the end of the path by the dusty road. Her eyes look at Boris full of tender admiration. It is evident that she desires to stamp upon her memory all the beloved features of the familiar tanned face—the curve of the dense brows, the rigid set of the red lips, the firm outlines of the chin, the stern profile.

Natasha sighs lightly and addresses Boris gently and cheerfully :

“Enough, dearest. They may not let me into the train with a heap like this. They will say : ‘ This should be put in the luggage van.’ ”

Both laugh carelessly. And still Boris is loath to leave the cornflowers. He says : “ Only a few more. I want you to have a gigantic bouquet.”



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“ You would have everything gigantic ! ”  
Natasha returns good-humouredly.

But her face is serious. She knows how deep this quality is in him, and how significant. Boris looks at her, and in answer repeats his favourite, his most intimate thought :

“ Yes, it is true. I love all bigness, all immoderation. In everything ! In everything ! If we only acted like this always ! And gave ourselves wholly to a thing ! Oh, how different life would be ! ”

Natasha, lost in thought, repeats : “ Yes, big things, things beyond the powers of man. To make life lavish. Only no stinginess, no trembling for one’s skin. Far better to die—to gather all life into one little knot, and to throw it away ! ”

“ Yes, yes, ” says Boris, and his eyes, dark as night, glow with the fury of a yet distant storm. “ We must have no care for lives, but be lavish with them, lavish to the end—only then may we reach our goal ! ”

They cross the road and again walk calmly along a narrow path. Her dress is white among the golden waves. Natasha stretches out her slender hand, the ears of rye rustle dryly and solid seeds of ripe rye fall into

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it. They are struck from above by the vivid shafts of the pitiless Dragon.

The children are walking on, conscious of their vow. They go trustingly, and they do not know that he who sends them is a traitor, and that their sacrifice is vain.

### XL

What is this dry rustling all around? It is the rye. But where are the little cornflowers, where is Boris? The little blue-eyed flowers are in the rye, and Boris has been hanged.

“And I?” Natasha asks herself in a strange, oppressive perplexity. She looks round her like one just awakened.

“Why am I here?”

She answers herself: “I escaped. A lucky chance saved me.”

Natasha is oppressed by the thought. How had she survived it? “Far better if I had perished!”

It all happened very simply. Natasha, being Number Three, was placed at the railway station itself, her duty being contingent on the failure of Number One and Number Two. But the first was successful, though he himself perished in the explosion.

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The second, upon hearing the explosion not far away, lost his presence of mind. He ran to save himself. He caught a cab, and got off near the river. Here he hired a row-boat. When near the middle of the river, he threw the bomb into the water. The man who rowed had guessed that something was wrong. Besides, he had been seen from the Government steamer and from the banks. Number Two was taken, tried and hanged.

Natasha did not betray herself in any way. She walked calmly, without haste, bearing her dangerous burden, observed by no one. She mixed freely with the passing crowd. She delivered the bomb at the appointed place.

A few days later she left for home. She had not been followed. Natasha was awaiting a second commission, and quite suddenly she abandoned the business, because her trust in it had died.

It happened even before Borya was hanged. But her decision came finally in those nightmare days when, quickly and unexpectedly, his life came to an end.

Those were terrible days.

But, no, it is better not to think of them, it is better not to remember them. To remember

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them is to suffer. Far better to remember other things, things cloudless and long past.

### XLI

Oh magic mirror of memory, so much is reflected in thee! Beloved images pass by with a kind of glimmer.

There were the flowers, which they themselves looked after. There was one flower-bed which they cared for with especial tenderness. There was the fresh, intoxicating evening aroma of gilliflower. There was the cluster of jasmine, dewy at dawn, so sweetly and so gently fragrant, that one wished to weep in its presence, as the grass weeps its tears of dew at golden dawn.

Then there was the open space in the garden, and the giant-stride in the centre. What gigantic steps they took! How fast and how high she flew round with Boris!

How glorious were the feast-days to the childish hearts. There was Christmas Eve, with its tree, and candles upon the green branches, with all the many-coloured glitter of golden nuts, red, green and blue trimmings, snow-white foils of cotton-wool, offerings which



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gladdened with their unexpectedness. Then in the daytime there is real snow, glittering like salt, and crunching under one's feet; the frost pinches the cheeks, the sun is shining, their mittens are of the softest down, their hats are white and soft, the sleds are flying down hillocks—oh, what joy!

And now Easter is here. What a solemn night! Then the joyous chanting of matins. The candle flames are everywhere, there seems to be no end to them. There is a smell of Easter cakes. There are Easter eggs painted in all colours. Every one is kissing each other. Every one is happy.

“*Christoss Voskress!*”

“*Voistinu Voskress!*”

But the dear dead do not stir.

No. The beloved memories do not break the continuity of the circle, the resurrection of the others—the fearsome, tragic memories. Inevitably the vision leads on to the last terrible moments.

### XLII

They lived in the capital that winter. Boris was studying his final term in the *gymnasia*.

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For Christmas he went to another city: to relatives, he said.

Natasha was suspicious. But he did not tell her the truth.

“Really, nothing,” he answered to all her questions. “No one is sending me. I am going of my own accord. To see Aunt Liuba.”

And Natasha did not insist.

For several days she did not get any letters from him. But she did not worry. Boris disliked writing letters. They thought he was enjoying himself.

It was an evening in early January. Her mother and grandmother had gone out visiting. Natasha, pleading a headache, remained at home.

“I’ll lie down on the divan. It will pass away.”

The truth was she thought the home of her affected, worldly relatives a dull place, and she had no desire to go there.

The maid had leave to go out. Natasha remained in the house alone. She lay down in her room on the divan with an interesting new book.

After the cheer and ease of the holidays, Natasha felt in good spirits. She was com-

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fortable, tranquil and cheerful. The hangings on the windows were impenetrably opaque. The lamp, burning brightly and evenly, concealed its garish white blaze from her eyes under its trimmed, beaded shade. The whole small room was lost in a luminous twilight.

At last, however, page after page of running lines of print tired Natasha. She dropped into a doze, and was shortly sound asleep. The open book fell softly on the rug.

### XLIII

Suddenly a bell rings. Natasha gives a start.

Ours? No. The bell rang so timidly, so hesitatingly. It was as though she heard it ring in a dream, and not in reality; again, it might have been the ring of some mischievous urchin.

Perhaps she had only imagined it. It is so comfortable to doze. She feels too lazy to get up. Let them ring.

But here is a second ring, more insistent and louder.

Natasha jumps up and runs into the vesti-

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bule, rearranging her hair on the way. Remembering that she is alone in the house she does not open the door, but asks: "Who's there?"

From behind the door she can hear the low, somewhat hoarse voice of the telegraph boy: "A telegram."

Her heart begins to beat with fright. It is always terrible to receive telegrams. For only good news travels slowly. Bad news makes haste.

Natasha puts one end of the door-chain to a little hook in the door. Then she opens the door partly and looks out. There stands the messenger in his uniform, with a metal plate in his cap. He hands her the telegram.

"Sign here, miss."

The grey-white, dry paper trembles in Natasha's hands. Natasha feels a sudden tug at her heart. She speaks incoherently:

"What is it? Oh my God! Sign, did you say?"

She runs to the table. Her hands tremble. She has managed somehow to scrawl her family name "Ozoreva," the pen hesitating and scratching upon the grey paper.

"Here is the signature."



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Across the little door-chain she thrusts the signed paper and a tip into the hand of the messenger. Then she bangs the door to after him. Now she is in front of the lamp. What can it be ?

Tearing the seal open she reads. Terrible words. Such simple, yet such incomprehensible words. Because they are about Boris.

*“Boris has shot ——. Arrested with comrades. Military trial to-morrow. Death sentence threatened.”*

### XLIV

Natasha re-reads the telegram. A sudden terror, strangely akin to shame, for a moment strikes at her heart. She can hear the heavy beat of blood in her temples. She is, as it were, being strangled from all sides ; she can hardly breathe ; the walls seem to have come together, oppressing her on all sides ; and the rapid, pale, pencilled strokes seem also to have run together into one jumble on the grey paper.

Certain thoughts, one after the other, slowly make way into Natasha's dimmed consciousness—oppressive, evil, pitiless thoughts.

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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Stupefied, she wonders how she shall tell her mother. She observes that her hands tremble. She recalls the telephone number of the Lareyevs, where her mother undoubtedly is.

Then anew, terror seizes her; she shivers violently from head to foot as with ague. Her mind is a whirl of confusion.

“No, it is a mistake! It cannot be. It is a cruel, senseless mistake! It is some one’s stupid, cruel joke.”

Boris, our beloved boy, with his fine honest eyes—think of him hanging! There will be a rattle in his throat, as strangling, he will swing in the noose. With sharp, clutching pain, the gentle, childish neck will tighten; the sunburnt face will grow purple; the swollen tongue will creep out all in froth, and the widely dilated eyes will reflect the terror of cruel death.

No, no, it cannot be! It is a mistake! But who can be malicious enough to make such a mistake?

And then where is Boris?

Her cold reasoning says that it is so, that no mistake has been made. The words are clear, the address is correct—yes, yes! It was really to be expected. Here it is, this

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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lavishness of life which he dreamt of, which they both dreamt of. "I love all immoderation. To be lavish—only then we may reach our goal!"

Her legs tremble. She feels herself terribly weak. She sits down on the divan.

Oh God, what's to be done? How is she to tell her mother this terrible thing?

Or should she conceal it? And do everything that could be done by herself? But no, she could do ridiculously little herself!

It is necessary to tell. It must be done quickly. She must not lose an instant. Perhaps it is still possible to save Boris, by going, by petitioning.

Why is she sitting still then? It is necessary to act at once.

Natasha seizes the telephone. What a long time the operator takes to answer.

At last she is connected. She can hear sounds of music and the hum of voices.

A cheerful, familiar voice asks:

"Who's there?"

"It is Natasha Ozoreva."

"Good evening, Natasha," says Marusya Lareyeva loudly. "What a pity you did not come. We are having a fine time."

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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“ Good evening, dear Marusya. Is mamma with you ? ”

“ Yes, she is here. Shall I call her ? ”

“ No, no, for God’s sake. Let some one break it to her. . . . ”

“ Has anything happened ? ”

“ Marusya, a terrible misfortune. Our Boris has been arrested.”

“ My God ! For what ? ”

“ I don’t know. He’ll have a military trial. I feel desperate. It’s so terrible. For God’s sake, don’t frighten mother too much. Tell her to come home at once, please.”

“ Oh, my God, how awful ! ”

“ Oh, Marusya, dearest, for God’s sake, be quick.”

“ I’ll tell my mother at once. Wait at the telephone, Natasha.”

Natasha holds the receiver to her ear and waits. She hears the noise of footsteps. Some one has begun to sing.

Then again the same voice, extremely agitated :

“ Natasha, do you hear ? Your mother wants to speak to you herself.”

Natasha trembles from fright. Good God, what shall she tell her mother ! She inquires :



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## THE OLD HOUSE

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“What? Is she coming herself to the telephone?” she asks.

“Yes, yes. Your mother is here now.”

### XLV

The voice of Sofia Alexandrovna, terribly agitated, is heard:

“Natasha, is that you? For God’s sake, what has happened?”

Natasha replies:

“Yes, mamma, it is I. A telegram has come. Mamma, don’t be frightened, it must be a mistake.”

This time the voice is more controlled.

“Read me the telegram at once.”

“Just a moment. I’ll get it,” says Natasha.

The telegram is read.

“What, a military trial?”

“Yes, military.”

“To-morrow?”

“Yes, yes, to-morrow.”

“Death sentence threatened?”

“Mamma, please be yourself, for God’s sake. Perhaps something can be done.”

“We must go there. Get the things ready,

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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Natasha. Mother and I are returning at once, and we will take the first train out."

The conversation is at an end.

Natasha is alone. She runs about the deserted house, letting things fall in the poignant silence. She is busy with travelling bags and with pillows.

She stops to look at the time-table. There is a train at half-past twelve. Yes, there is still time to catch it.

Then the bell rings, frightening her even more than the earlier ring. The mother and the grandmother have arrived, pale and distraught.

### XLVI

A sleepless, wearisome journey in the train. The wheels roll on with a measured, jarring sound. Stops are made. How slow it all is! How agonizing! If only it would be quicker, quicker!

Or were it better to wish that time should be arrested? That its huge, shaggy wings outspread and flapping above the world should suddenly become motionless? That its owlish glance should be stilled for ever in the instant just before the terrible word is said?

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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They reach their destination in the morning. At the station, a dirty, dejected place, they are met by a cousin of Natasha's, an attorney by profession. From his pale, worried face, they guess that everything is over.

He talks quickly and incoherently. He comforts them with hopes in which he himself does not believe. The trial had been held early that morning. Boris and both his comrades—all of the same green youth—had been sentenced to die by hanging. The court would entertain no appeal. The only hope lay in the district general. He was really not a bad man at heart. Perhaps, by imploring, he might be induced to lighten the sentence to that of hard labour for an indefinite period.

Poor mothers ! What is it they implore ?

### XLVII

Sofia Alexandrovna and Natasha arrived at the general's. They waited long in the quiet, cold-looking reception-room ; the glossy parquet floor shone, portraits in heavy gilt frames hung on the walls, and the careful steps of uniformed officials, coming through a large white door, resounded from time to time.

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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At last they were received. The general listened most amiably, but declined emphatically to do anything. He rose, clinked his spurs, and stretched himself to his full height. He stood there tall, erect, his breast decorated with orders, his head grey, his face ruddy, with black eyebrows and broad nose.

In vain the humiliating entreaties.

Pale, the proud mother knelt before the general and, weeping bitterly, she kissed his hands and at last threw herself at his feet—all in vain. She received the cold answer :

“ I am sorry, madam, it is impossible. I understand your affliction, I sympathize fully with your sorrow, but what can I do ? Whose fault is it ? Upon me lies a great responsibility toward my Emperor and my country. I have my duty—I can't help you. It is against yourself that you ought to bring your reproaches—you've brought him up.”

Of what avail the tears of a poor mother ? Strike thy head upon the parquet floor, bend thy face to the black glitter of his boots ; or else depart, proud and silent. It is all the same, he can do nothing. Thy tears and thy entreaties do not touch him, thy curses do



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not offend him. He is a kind man, he is the loving father of a family, but his upright martial soul does not tremble before the word death. More than once he had risked his life boldly in battle—what is the life of a conspirator to him ?

“ But he is a mere boy ! ”

“ No, madam, this is not a childish prank. I am sorry.”

He walks away. She hears the measured clinking of his spurs. The parquet floor reflects dimly his tall, erect figure.

“ General, have pity ! ”

The cold, white door has swung to after him. She hears the quiet, pleasant voice of a young official. He raises her from the floor and helps her to find her way out.

### XLVIII

They granted a last meeting. A few minutes passed in questions, answers, embraces, and tears.

Boris said very little.

“ Don't cry, mamma. I am not afraid. There is nothing else they can do. They don't feed you at all badly here. Remember me to

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all. And you, Natasha, take care of mother. One sacrifice is enough from our family. Well, good-bye."

He seemed somehow callous and distant. He seemed to be thinking of something else, of something he could tell no one. And his words had an external ring, as though merely to make conversation.

That night, before daybreak, Boris was hanged. The scaffold was set up in the gaol courtyard. The spot where he was buried was kept secret.

The mother implored the next day: "Show me his grave at least!"

What was there to show! He was laid in a coffin, he was put into a hole in the earth and the soil that covered him was smoothed down to its original level—we all know how such culprits are buried.

"Tell me at least how he died."

"Well, he was a brave one. He was calm, a bit serious. And he refused a priest, and would not kiss the cross."

They returned home. A fog of melancholy hung over them, and within them there lit up a spark of mad hope—no, Borya is not dead, Borya will return.

XLIX

The thought that Boris had been hanged could not enter into their habitual, everyday thoughts. Only in the hour when the sun was at its zenith, and in the hour of the midnight moon, it would penetrate their awakened consciousness like a sharp poniard. Again it would pierce the soul with a sharp, tormenting pain, and again it would vanish in the dim mist of dawn with a kind of dull agony. And again, the same unreasonable conviction would awake in their hearts.

No, Borya will return. The bell will suddenly ring, and the door will be opened to him.

“Oh, Borya! Where have you been wandering?”

How we shall kiss him! And how much there will be to tell!

“What does it matter where you have been wandering. You have been wandering, and you have been found, like the prodigal son.”

How happy all will be!

The old nurse will not be consoled. She wails:

“Boryushka, Boryushka, my incomparable

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one! I say to him: 'Boryushka, I'm going to the poor-house!' And he says to me: 'No,' says he, '*nyanechka*,\* I'll not let you go to the poor-house. I,' he says, 'will let you stop with me, *nyanechka*; only wait till I grow up,' says he, 'and you can live with me.' Oh, Boryushka, what's this you've done!"

In the morning the old nurse enters the vestibule. Whose grey overcoat is it that she sees hanging on the rack? It is Borya's, his *gymnasia* uniform. Has he then not gone to the *gymnasia* to-day?

She wanders into the dining-room, making a muffled noise with her soft slippers.

"Natashenka, is Boryushka home to-day? His overcoat's there on the rack. Or is he sick?"

"*Nyanechka!*" exclaims Natasha.

And, frightened, she looks at her mother.

The old nurse has suddenly remembered. She is crying. The grey head shivers in its black wrap. The old woman wails:

"I go there and I look, what's that I see? Borya's overcoat. I say to myself, Borya's gone to the *gymnasia*, why's his overcoat here? It's no holiday. Oh, my Boryushka is gone!"

\* Little nurse.



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She wails louder and louder. Then the old woman falls to the floor and begins to beat the boards with her head.

“Borechka, my own Borechka! If the Lord had only taken me, an old woman, instead of him. What’s the use of life to me? I drag along, of no cheer to myself or to any one else.”

Natasha, helpless, tries to quiet her.

“*Nyanechka*, dearest, rest a little.”

“May Thou rest me, O Lord! My heart told me something was wrong. I’ve been dreaming all sorts of bad dreams. These black dreams have come true! Oh, Borechka, my own!”

The old woman continues to beat her head and to wail. Natasha implores her mother:

“For God’s sake, mamma, have Borya’s overcoat taken from the rack.”

Sofia Alexandrovna looks at her with her dark, smouldering eyes and says morosely:

“Why? It had better hang there. He might suddenly need it.”

Oh, hateful memories! As long as the evil Dragon reigns in the heavens it is impossible to escape them.

Natasha roams restlessly, she can find no

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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place for herself. She is off to the woods; she recalls Boris there, and that he has been hanged. She is off to the river; she recalls Boris there, and that he is no more. She is back at home, and the walls of the old house recall Boris to her, and that he will not return.

Like a pale shadow the mother wanders along the walks of the garden, choosing to pause there where the shade is densest. The old grandmother sits upon a bench and finishes the reading of the newspapers. It is the same every day.

### L

And now the evening is approaching. The sun is low and red. It looks straight into people's eyes as though, while expiring, it were begging for mercy. A breeze blows from the river, and it brings the laughter of white water nymphs.

A number of noisy urchins are running in the road; their shirt-tails flap merrily in the wind, while their sleeves are filled with wind like balloons. The sound of a harmonica comes from the distance, and its song runs

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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on very merrily. The corncrake screeches in the field, and its call resembles a general's loud snore.

The old house once more casts and arranges its long dark shadows disturbed by the intrusive day. Its windows blaze forth with the red fire of the evening sun.

The gilliflower exhales its seductive aroma in some of the distant paths. The roses seem even redder in the sunset, and more sweet. The eternal Aphrodite—the naked marble of her proud body taking on a rose tint—smiles again, and lets fall her draperies as fascinatingly as ever.

And everything is directed as before toward cherished, unreasonable hopes. Enfeebled by the day's heat, and by the sadness of the bright day, the harassed soul has exhausted its measure of suffering, and it falls from the iron embrace of sorrow to the beloved dark earth of the past, once more besprinkled with dreamily refreshing dew.

And again, as at dawn, the three women in the old house await Boris, for a short time happy in their madness.

They await him, and they chat of him, until, from behind the trees of the dark wood, the

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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cold moon shows her ever sad face. The dead moon is under a white shroud of mist.

Then again they remember that Borya has been hanged, and they meet at the green-covered pond to weep for him.

### LI

Natasha is the first to leave the house. She has on a white dress and a black cloak. Her black hair is covered with a thin black kerchief. Her very deep dark eyes shine with flame-like brightness. She stands, her pale face uplifted toward the moon. She awaits the other two.

Elena Kirillovna and Sofia Alexandrovna arrive together.

Elena Kirillovna leaves the house slightly earlier, but Sofia Alexandrovna runs after her and overtakes her almost at the pond. They wear black cloaks, black kerchiefs on their heads, and black shoes.

Natasha begins :

“ On the night before the execution he did not sleep. The moon, just as clear as to-night's, looked into the narrow window of his



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## THE OLD HOUSE

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cell. On the floor the moon sadly outlined a green rhomb, intersected lengthwise and crosswise by narrow dark strokes. Boris walked up and down his cell, and looked now at the moon, now at the green rhomb, and thought—I wish I knew his thoughts that night.”

Her aspiration sounds quite tranquil. It might have been about a stranger.

Sofia Alexandrovna now and again wrings her hands, and as she begins to speak her voice is agitated and heavy with grief :

“What can one think at such moments ! The moon, long dead, looks in. There are five steps from the door to the window, four steps across. The mind springs feverishly from object to object. That the execution is to take place on the morrow is the one thing you try not to think of. Stubbornly you repel the thought. But it remains, it refuses to depart, it throttles the soul with an oppressive, horrible nightmare. The anguish is intense and enfeebling. But I do not wish my gaolers and all these officials who are come to me to see my anguish. I will be calm. And yet what anguish—if only, lifting up my pale face, I could cry aloud to the pale moon !”

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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Elena Kirillovna whispers faintly :

“ Terrible, Sonyushka.”

There are tears in her voice—simple, old-womanish, grandmotherly tears.

### LII

Sofia Alexandrovna, ignoring the interruption, continues :

“ Why should I really go to my death boldly and resolutely ? Is it not all the same ? I shall die in the courtyard, in the dark of night. Whether I die boldly, or weep like a coward, or beg for mercy, or resist the executioner—is it not all the same ? No one will know how I died. I shall face death alone. Why should I really suffer this wild anguish ? I will raise up my voice to wail and to weep, and I will shake the whole gaol with my despairing cries, and I will awake the town, the so-called free town, which is only a larger gaol—so that I shall not suffer alone, but that others shall share in my last agony, in my last dread. But no, I won't do that. It is my fate to die alone.”

Natasha rises, trembles, presses her mother's cold hand in hers, and says :

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## THE OLD HOUSE

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“Mamma, mamma, it is terrible, if alone. No, don't say that he felt alone. We shall be with him.”

Elena Kirillovna whispers :

“Yes, Sonyushka, it would be terrible alone. In such moments !”

“We are with him,” insists Natasha vehemently. “We are with him now.”

A smile is on Sofia Alexandrovna's lips, a smile such as a dying person smiles to greet his last consolation. Sofia Alexandrovna speaks :

“My last consolation is the thought that I am not alone. He is with me. These walls are unrealities, this gaol built by men is a lie. What is real and true is my suffering and I am one with them in my grief. A poor consolation ! And yet I, just think, this extraordinary I, Boris, I am dying.”

“I am dying,” repeats Natasha.

Her voice is clouded, and it is fraught with despair. And all three remain silent for a brief while, overcome by the spell of these tragic words.

LIII

Sofia Alexandrovna speaks again. Her voice sounds tranquil, deliberate, measured :

“ There is no consolation for the dying. His grief is boundless. The cold moon continues to torment him. A moan struggles to break from his throat, a moan like the wild baying of a caged beast.”

Natasha speaks sadly :

“ But he is not alone, not alone. We are with him in his grief.”

Her eyes, darker than a dark night, look up toward the lifeless moon, and the green enchantress, reflected in them, torments her with a dull pain.

Sofia Alexandrovna smiles—and her smile is dead—and with the voice of inconsolable sorrow she speaks again slowly and calmly :

“ We are with him only in his despair, in his pitiful inconsolability, in his dark solitude. But he was alone, alone, when he was strangled by the hand of a hired hangman ; strangled in that dark enclosure which it is not for us to demolish. And the dead moon tormented him, as it torments us. She tempted him with the



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## THE OLD HOUSE

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mad desire to moan wildly, like a wild beast before dying. And now we, in this hour, under this moon—are we not also tormented by the same mad desire to run, to run far from people, and to moan and to wail, and to flee from a grief too great to be borne ! ”

She rises abruptly and walks away, wringing her beautiful white hands. She walks fast, almost runs, driven as it were by some strange, furious will not her own. Natasha follows her with the measured yet rapid, deliberate, mechanical gait of an automaton. And behind them trips along Elena Kirillovna, who lets fall a few scant tears on her black cloak.

The moon follows them callously in their hurried journey across the garden, across the field, into that wood, into that still glade, where once the children sang their proud hymn, and where they let their mad desires be known to one who was to betray them for a price— young blood for gold.

The grass in the fields is wet with dew. The river is white with mist. The high moon is clear and cold. Everywhere it is quiet, as though all the earthly rustlings and noises had lost themselves in the moon's dead light.

LIV

And here is the glade. "Natasha, do you remember? How warmly they all sang *Arise, ye branded with a curse!* Natasha, will you sing it again? Do. Is it a torture?"

"I'll sing," replies Natasha quietly.

She sings in a low voice, almost to herself. The mother listens, and the grandmother listens—but what have the birches and the grass and the clear moon to do with human songs!

In the International  
As brothers all men shall meet!

Her song is at an end. The wood is silent. The moon waits. The mist is pensive. The birches seem to listen. The sky is clear.

Ah, for whom is all this life? Who calls? Who responds? Or is it all the play of the dead?

Loudly wailing, the mother calls: "Borya, Borya!"

Overflowing with tears Elena Kirillovna replies: "Borya won't come. There is no Borya."

Natasha stretches out her arms toward the

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lifeless moon, and cries out : “ Borya has been hanged ! ”

All three now stand side by side, looking at the moon, and weeping. Louder grows their sobbing, fiercer the note of despair. Their moans merge finally into a prolonged, wild wailing, which can be heard for some distance.

The dog at the forester's hut is restless. Trembling with all his lean body, his short hair bristling, he has pricked up his ears. Rising, he stretches his slender limbs. His sharp muzzle, showing its teeth, is uplifted to the tormenting moon. His eyes burn with a yearning flame. The dog bays in answer to the distant wail of the women in the wood.

People are asleep.

## THE UNITER OF SOULS

GARMONOV was extremely young, and had not yet learnt to time his visits; he usually came at the wrong hour and did not know when to leave. He realized at last that he was boring Sonpolyev almost to madness. It dawned upon him that he was taking Sonpolyev from his work. He recalled that Sonpolyev had borne himself with a constrained politeness toward him, and that at times a caustic phrase escaped his lips.

Garmonov grew painfully red, a sudden flame spread itself under the smooth skin of his drawn cheeks. He rose irresolutely. Then he sat down again, for he saw that Sonpolyev was about to say something. Sonpolyev took up the thread of the conversation in a depressed voice :

“ So you’ve put a mask on ! What do you want me to understand by that ? ”

Garmonov muttered in a confused way :

“ It’s necessary to dissemble sometimes.”



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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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Sonpolyev would not listen further, but gave way to his irritation :

“What do you understand about it? What do you know of masks? There is no mask without a responding soul. It is impossible to put on a mask without harmonizing your soul with its soul. Otherwise the mask is uncovered.”

Sonpolyev grew silent, and looked miserably before him. He did not look at Garmonov. He felt again a strange, instinctive hate for him, such as he felt at their first meeting. He had always tried to hide this hate under a mask of great heartiness; he had urged Garmonov most earnestly to visit him, and praised Garmonov's verses to every one. But from time to time he spoke coarse, malicious words to the timid young man, who then flushed violently and shrank back within himself. Sonpolyev was quick to pity him, but soon again he detested his cautious, sluggish ways; he thought him secretive and cunning.

Garmonov rose, said good-bye, and went out. Sonpolyev was left alone. He felt miserable because his work had been interrupted. He no longer felt in the same working mood.

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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A secret malice tormented him. Why should this seemingly insignificant youth, Garmonov, evoke such bitterness in him? He had a large mouth, a long, very smooth face; his movements were slow, his voice had a drawl; there was something ambiguous about him, and enigmatical.

Sonpolyev began sadly to pace the room. He stopped before the wall, and began to speak. There are many people nowadays who have long conversations with the wall—the wall, indeed, makes an interested interlocutor, and a faithful one.

“It is possible,” he said, “to hate so strongly and so poignantly only that which is near to one. But in what does this devilish nearness consist? By what impure magic has some demon bound our souls together? Souls so unlike one another! Mine, that of a man of action with a bent for repose; and his, the soul of a large-mouthed fledgling, who is as cunning as a conspirator, and as cautious as a coward. And what is there in his character that conflicts so strangely with his appearance? Who has stolen the best and most needful part from this moly-coddle’s soul?”

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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He spoke quietly, almost in a murmur. Then he exclaimed as though in a rage :

“ Who has done this ? Man, or the enemy of man ? ”

And he heard the strange answer :

“ I ! ”

Some one spoke this word in a clear, shrill voice. It was like the sharp yet subdued ring of rusty steel. Sonpolyev trembled nervously. He looked round him. There was no one in the room.

He sat down in the arm-chair and looked, scowling, on the table, buried under books and papers ; and he waited. He awaited something. The waiting grew painful. He said loudly :

“ Well, why do you hide ? You’ve begun to speak, you might as well appear. What do you wish to say ? What is it ? ”

He began to listen intently. His nerves were strained. It seemed as though the slightest noise would have sounded like an archangel’s trumpet.

Then there was sudden laughter. It was sharp, and it was like the sound of rusty metal. The spring of some elaborate toy seemed to unwind itself, and trembled and

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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tinkled in the subdued quiet of the evening. Sonpolyev put the palms of his hands over his temples, and rested upon his elbows. He listened intently. The laugh died away with mechanical evenness. It was evident that it came from somewhere quite near, perhaps from the table itself.

Sonpolyev waited. He gazed with intent eyes at the bronze inkstand. He asked derisively: "Ink sprite, was it not you that laughed?"

The sharp voice, quite unlike the muffled voice of phantoms, answered with the same derision: "No, you are mistaken; and you are not very brilliant. I am not an ink sprite. Don't you know the rustling voices of ink sprites? You are a poor observer."

And again there was laughter, again the rusty spring tinkled as it unwound itself.

Sonpolyev said: "I don't know who you are—and how should I know! I cannot see you. Only I think that you are like the rest of your fraternity: you are always near us, you poke your noses into everything, and you bring sadness and evil spells upon us; yet you dare not show yourselves before our eyes."



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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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The metallic voice replied: "The fact is, I came to have a talk with you. I love to talk with such as yourself—with half-folk."

The voice grew silent, and Sonpolyev waited for it to laugh. He thought: "He must punctuate his every phrase with that hideous laughter."

Indeed, he was not mistaken. The strange visitor really talked in this way: first he would speak a few words, then he would burst out into his sharp, rusty laughter. It seemed as though he used his words to wind up the spring, and that later the spring relaxed itself with his laughter.

And while his laughter was still dying away with mechanical evenness the guest showed himself from behind the inkstand.

He was small, and was no taller from head to foot than the fourth finger. He was grey-steel in colour. Owing to his small stature and to his rapid movements it was hard to tell whether the dim glow came from the body, or from a garment that stretched lightly over it. In any case it was something smooth, something expressly simple. The body seemed like a slender keg, broader at the belt, narrower at the shoulders and below. The arms and

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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legs were of equal length and thickness, and of like nimbleness and flexibility ; it seemed as though the arms were very long and thick, and the legs disproportionately short and thin. The neck was short. The face was hardy. The legs were widely astride. At the end of the back something was visible in the nature of a tail or a thick cone ; like growths were upon the sides, under the elbows. The strange figure moved quickly, nimbly, and surely.

The monster sat down on the bronze ridge of the inkstand, pushing aside the wooden penholder with his foot in order to be more comfortable. He grew quiet.

Sonpolyev examined his face. It was lean, grey, and smooth. His eyes were small and glowed brightly. His mouth was large. His ears stuck out and were pointed at the top.

He sat there, grasping the ridge with his hands, like a monkey. Sonpolyev asked : “ Gracious guest, what do you want to say to me ? ”

And in answer a slight voice—mechanically even, unpleasantly sharp and rather rusty in tone—made itself heard : “ Man with a single head and a single soul, recall your past, your

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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primitive experience of those ancient days when you and he lived in the same body.”

And again there was laughter, shrill and sharp, piercing the ear.

While he was still laughing, the guest, with mechanical agility, turned a somersault; he stood on his hands, and Sonpolyev saw for the first time what he had taken for a tail was really a second head. This head did not differ in any way, as far as he could see, from the other head. Whether the heads were too small for him to observe, or whether the heads did not actually differ, it was quite certain that Sonpolyev did not see the slightest distinction between them. The arms reversed themselves as on hinges, and became quite like the legs; the first head, then losing its colour, hid itself between these arm-legs; while the former legs reversed themselves mechanically and became the arms.

Sonpolyev looked at his strange guest with astonishment. The guest made wry faces and danced. And when at last he grew still and his laughter gradually died away, the second head began to speak: “How many souls have you, and how many consciousnesses? Can you tell me that? You pride yourself



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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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on the amazing differentiation of your organs, you have an idea that each member of your body fulfils its own well-defined functions. But tell me, stupid man, have you anything whereby to preserve the memory of your previous existences? The other head contains the rest of you, your early memories and your earlier experience. You argue subtly and craftily across the threshold of your pitiful consciousness, but your misfortune is that you have only one head."

The guest burst out again into rusty, metallic laughter, and he laughed this time rather long. He laughed and he danced at the same time. He turned somersaults, or he rested upon one arm and upon one leg, thereby causing one of his sides to turn upward—until it was impossible to distinguish any of his four extremities. Afterwards his limbs again turned mechanically, and it became obvious that the growths on his sides were also heads. Each head spoke and laughed in its turn. Each head grimaced, mocked at him.

Sonpolyev exclaimed in great fury: "Be silent!"

The guest danced, shouted, and laughed.

Sonpolyev thought: "I must catch him



and crush him. Or I must smash the monster with a blow of the heavy press."

But the guest continued to laugh and to make wry faces.

"I dare not take him with my hands," thought Sonpolyev. "He might burn or scorch me. A knife would be better."

He opened his penknife. Then he quickly directed its sharp point toward the middle of his guest's body. The four-headed monster gathered himself into a ball, flapped his four paws, and burst into piercing laughter. Sonpolyev threw his knife on the table, and exclaimed: "Hateful monster! What do you want of me?"

The guest jumped upon the sharply pointed lid of the inkstand, perched himself upon one foot, stretched his arms upward, and exclaimed in an ugly, shrill voice: "Man with one head, recall your remote past when you and he were in the same body. The time you shared together in a dangerous adventure. Recall the dance of that terrible hour."

Suddenly it grew dark. The laughter resounded, hoarse and hideous. The head was going round. . . .

Light columns moved forward out of the

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darkness. The ceiling was low. The torches glowed dimly. The red tongues of flame wavered in the scented air. The flute poured out its notes. Handsome young limbs moved in measure to its music.

And it seemed to Sonpolyev that he was young and powerful, and that he was dancing round a banqueting table. A shrivelled, insolent, drunken face was looking at him; the banqueter was laughing uproariously, he was happy, and the dance of the half-naked youths pleased him. Sonpolyev felt that a furious rage was strangling him, and was hindering him from carrying out his project. He danced past the carousing man and his hands trembled. A reddish mist of hate dimmed his sight.

His second soul wakened at the same time; it was the cunning, the sidling, the feline soul. This time the youth smiled at the happy man; he floated gracefully past him, a sweet, gentle boy. The banqueter laughed loudly. The youth's naked limbs and bared torso cheered the lord of the feast.

And again there was hate, which dimmed his eyes with a red haze, and caused his hands to tremble with fury.

Some one whispered angrily: "Are we

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going to twirl so long fruitlessly? It is time. It is time. Put an end to it!"

The friendly spirits prevailed. The two souls flowed together. Hate and cunning became one. There was a light, floating movement, then a powerful stroke; nimble feet swept the youth into the swift, beautiful dance. There was a hoarse outcry. Then an uproar. Everything became confused. . . .

And again there was darkness.

Sonpolyev awoke: the same small monster was dancing on the table, grimacing and laughing uproariously.

Sonpolyev asked: "What's the meaning of this?"

His guest replied: "Two souls once dwelt in this youth, and one of them is now yours; it is a soul of exultant emotions and of passionate desires, it is an ever insatiable, trembling soul."

Then there was laughter, jarring on the ear. The monster danced on.

Sonpolyev shouted: "Stop, you dance devil! It seems to me you wish to say that the second soul of this primitive youth lives in the feeble body of this despicable, smooth-faced youngster?"

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The guest stopped laughing and exclaimed :  
“ Man, you have at last understood what I wished to tell you. Now perhaps you will guess who I am, and why I have come.”

Sonpolyev waited until the trembling, shrill laughter ceased, and he answered his guest :  
“ You are the uniter of souls. But why did you not join us at our birth ? ”

The monster hissed, curled up, then stopped and threw upward one of his side heads and exclaimed :

“ We can repair this if you like. Do you wish it ? ”

“ I wish it,” Sonpolyev replied quickly.

“ Call him to you on New Year’s Eve, and call me. This hair will enable you to summon me.”

The monster ran quickly to the lamp, and placing upon its stand a short, thin black hair continued speaking : “ When you light it I’ll come. But you ought to know that neither you nor he will preserve afterward a separate existence. And the man who will depart from here shall contain both souls, but it will be neither you nor he.”

Then he disappeared. His shrill, rusty laughter still resounded and tormented the



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ear, but Sonpolyev no longer saw any one before him. Only a black hair on the flat stand of the lamp reminded him of his guest.

Sonpolyev took the hair and put it into his purse.

The last day of the year was approaching midnight.

Garmonov was sitting once more at Sonpolyev's. They spoke quietly, in subdued voices. It was painful. Sonpolyev asked: "You do not regret coming to my lonely party?"

The smooth-faced young man smiled, and this made his teeth seem very white. He drawled out his words very slowly, and what he said was so tedious and so empty that Sonpolyev had no desire to listen to him. Sonpolyev, without continuing the conversation, asked quite bluntly: "You remember your earlier existence?"

"Not very well," answered Garmonov.

It was clear that he did not understand the question, and that he thought Sonpolyev had asked him about his childhood.

Sonpolyev frowned in his vexation. He began to explain what he wished to say. He

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felt that his speech was involved and long. And this vexed him still more.

But Garmonev had understood. He grew cheerful. He flushed slightly. His words had a more animated sound than usual: "Yes, yes, I sometimes feel that I have lived before. It is such a strange feeling. It's as though that life was fuller, bolder and freer; and that I dared to do things that I dare not do now."

"And isn't it true," asked Sonpolyev in some agitation, "that you feel as though you had lost something, as though you now lack the most significant part of your being?"

"Yes," answered Garmonov with emphasis. "That's precisely my feeling."

"Would you like to restore this missing part?" Sonpolyev continued to question. "To be once more as before, whole and bold; to contain in one body—which shall feel itself light and young and free—the fullness of life and the union of the antagonistic identities of our human breed. To be, indeed, more than whole; to feel as it were, in one's breast, the beating of a doubled heart; to be this and that; to join two clashing souls within oneself, and to wrest the necessary manhood

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and hardihood for great deeds from the fiery struggle of intense contradictions."

"Yes, yes," said Garmonov, "I, too, sometimes dream about this."

Sonpolyev was afraid to look at the irresolute, confused, smooth face of his young visitor. He vaguely feared that Garmonov's face would disconcert him. He made haste.

Besides, midnight was approaching. Sonpolyev said quietly: "I have the means in my hands to realize this dream. Do you wish to have it realized?"

"I should like to," said Garmonov irresolutely.

Sonpolyev raised his eyes. He looked at Garmonov with firmness and decision, as though he demanded something urgent and indispensable from him. He looked with a fixed intentness into the dark youthful eyes, which should have flamed fire, but instead they were the cold, crafty eyes of a little man with half a soul.

But it seemed to Sonpolyev that under his fixed fiery gaze Garmonov's eyes were becoming inflamed with enthusiasm and burning wrath. The young man's smooth face had suddenly become significant and stern.

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“Do you wish it?” Sonpolyev asked him once more.

Garmonov replied quickly, with decision: “I wish it.”

And then a strange, sharp, shrill voice pronounced: “Oh, small and cunning man; you who once during your ancient existence did a deed of great hardihood—that was when you joined your crafty soul to the flaming soul of an indignant man—tell us in this great, rare hour, have you firmly decided to merge your soul with the other, the different soul?”

And Garmonov answered even more quickly and more decisively: “I wish to!”

Sonpolyev listened to the shrill voice of the questioner. He recognized him. He was not mistaken: the “I wish to!” of Garmonov had already lost itself in the rusty, metallic laughter of that extraordinary visitor.

Sonpolyev waited until the laughter ceased; then he said: “But you should know that you will have to reject all dissembling. And all the joys of separate existence. Once I achieve my magic we shall both perish, and we shall set free our souls, or rather we shall fuse them together, and there shall be neither I nor you—there will be one in our place, and



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he shall be fiery in his conception, and cold in his execution. Both of us will have to go, in order to give a place to him, in whom both of us will be united. My friend, have you resolved upon this terrible thing? It is a great and terrible thing.”

Garmonov smiled a strange, faltering smile. But the fiery glance of Sonpolyev extinguished the smile; and the young man, as if submitting to some inevitable and fated command, pronounced in a dim, lifeless voice: “I have decided. I wish it. I am not afraid.”

Sonpolyev took the hair out of his wallet with trembling fingers. He lit a candle. Behind it hid the four-headed visitor. His grey body seemed to quake; and it vacillated in the wavering flame that fondled in its flickering embraces the white body of the submissive candle.

Garmonov opened his eyes wide, and they steadfastly followed Sonpolyev's movements. Sonpolyev put one end of the hair to the flame. The hair curled slightly, grew red, gave a flare. It burned very slowly, with a quiet rhythmic crackle, which resembled the laugh of the nocturnal guest.

The words of the strange guest were simple

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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but terrible. At first Sonpolyev was barely conscious of them; he was so agitated and so absorbed by the burning of the magic hair that he could see no connexion with the simple, familiar words of the monster. Suddenly terror came upon him. He had understood. There was derision in those simple, terribly simple words.

“Little soul, failing little soul, timid little soul.”

Sonpolyev, frightened, looked at Garmov. The smooth-faced young man sat there strangely shrunken. His face was pale. Beads of perspiration showed on his forehead. A pitiful, forced smile twisted his lips. When he saw that Sonpolyev was looking at him he shrank even more, and whispered in a broken, hollow voice, as though against his will: “It is terrible. It is painful. It is unnecessary.”

Suddenly he hunched like a cat—a cunning, timid, evil cat—and sprang forward; thus deformed, he pushed out his over-red lips and blew upon the almost consumed hair. The flame flickered upward, trembled and died. A tiny cloud of blue smoke spread itself in the still air. The shrill laughter of the nocturnal guest pierced the ears.

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## THE UNITER OF SOULS

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The hideous words resounded : “ Miscarried ! Miscarried ! ”

Garmonov sat down. He smiled guiltily and cunningly. Sonpolyev looked at him with unseeing eyes.

The clock began to strike in the next room. And to each stroke the uniter of souls responded with the hoarse outcry : “ Miscarried ! ”

And he laughed again his metallic laughter like a wound-up spring. He whirled round and grimaced ; he seemed to lose himself in the lifeless yellow electric light.

At the twelfth stroke, the last voice of the passing year, the hideous voice grew silent.

“ Miscarried ! ”

And the horrible laughter of the vanishing monster died away. Garmonov, truly rejoicing over his deliverance from an unhappy fate, rose, and said : “ A happy New Year ! ”

## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

### I

IT was quiet and tranquil, and neither joyous nor sad. There was an electric light in the room. The walls seemed impregnable. The window was overhung by heavy, dark-green draperies, even denser in tone than the green of the wall-paper. Both doors—the large one at the side, and the small one in the depth of the alcove that faced the window—were securely bolted. And there, behind them, reigned darkness and desolation in the broad corridor as well as in the spacious and cold reception-room, where melancholy plants yearned for their native soil.

Gurov was lying on the divan. A book was in his hands. He often paused in his reading. He meditated and mused during these pauses, and it was always about the same thing. Always about *them*.

They hovered near him. This he had noticed



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long ago. They were hiding. Their manner was importunate. They rustled very quietly. For a long time they remained invisible to the eye. But one day, when Gurov awoke rather tired, sad and pale, and languidly turned on the electric light to dissipate the greyish gloom of an early winter morning—he espied one of them suddenly.

Small, grey, shifty and nimble, *he* flashed by, and in the twinkling of an eye disappeared.

And thereafter, in the morning, or in the evening, Gurov grew used to seeing these small, shifty, house sprites run past him. This time he did not doubt that they would appear.

To begin with he felt a slight headache, afterwards a sudden flash of heat, then of cold. Then, out of the corner, there emerged the long, slender Fever with her ugly, yellow face and her bony dry hands; she lay down at his side, and embraced him, and fell to kissing him and to laughing. And these rapid kisses of the affectionate and cunning Fever, and these slow approaches of the slight headache were agreeable.

Feebleness spread itself over the whole body, and lassitude also. This too was agreeable. It made him feel as though all the turmoil of

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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life had receded into the distance. And people also became far away, unimportant, even unnecessary. He preferred to be with these quiet ones, these house sprites.

Gurov had not been out for some days. He had locked himself in at home. He did not permit any one to come to him. He was alone. He thought about them. He awaited them.

### II

This tedious waiting was cut short in a strange and unexpected manner. He heard the slamming of a distant door, and presently he became aware of the sound of unhurried footfalls which came from the direction of the reception-room, just behind the door of his room. Some one was approaching with a sure and nimble step.

Gurov turned his head toward the door. A gust of cold entered the room. Before him stood a boy, most strange and wild in aspect. He was dressed in linen draperies, half-nude, barefoot, smooth-skinned, sun-tanned, with black tangled hair and dark, burning eyes. An amazingly perfect, handsome face; handsome to a degree which made it terrible to gaze upon

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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its beauty. And it portrayed neither good nor evil.

Gurov was not astonished. A masterful mood took hold of him. He could hear the house sprites scampering away to conceal themselves.

The boy began to speak.

“Aristomarchon! Perhaps you have forgotten your promise? Is this the way of valiant men? You left me when I was in mortal danger, you had made me a promise, which it is evident you did not intend to keep. I have sought for you such a long time! And here I have found you, living at your ease, and in luxury.”

Gurov fixed a perplexed gaze upon the half-nude, handsome lad; and turgid memories awoke in his soul. Something long since submerged arose in dim outlines and tormented his memory, which struggled to find a solution to the strange apparition; a solution, moreover, which seemed so near and so intimate.

And what of the invincibility of his walls? Something had happened round him, some mysterious transformation had taken place. But Gurov, engulfed in his vain exertions to recall something very near to him and yet

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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slipping away in the tenacious embrace of ancient memory, had not yet succeeded in grasping the nature of the change that he felt had taken place. He turned to the wonderful boy.

“Tell me, gracious boy, simply and clearly, without unnecessary reproaches, what had I promised you, and when had I left you in a time of mortal danger? I swear to you, by all the holies, that my conscience could never have permitted me such a mean action as you reproach me with.”

The boy shook his head. In a sonorous voice, suggestive of the melodious outpouring of a stringed instrument, he said: “Aristomarchon, you always have been a man skilful with words, and not less skilful in matters requiring daring and prudence. If I have said that you left me in a moment of mortal danger I did not intend it as a reproach, and I do not understand why you speak of your conscience. Our projected affair was difficult and dangerous, but who can hear us now; before whom, with your craftily arranged words and your dissembling ignorance of what happened this morning at sunrise, can you deny that you had given me a promise?”



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The electric light grew dim. The ceiling seemed to darken and to recede into height. There was a smell of grass ; its forgotten name, once, long ago, suggested something gentle and joyous. A breeze blew. Gurov raised himself, and asked : " What sort of an affair had we two contrived ? Gracious boy, I deny nothing. Only I don't know what you are speaking of. I don't remember."

Gurov felt as though the boy were looking at him, yet not directly. He felt also vaguely, conscious of another presence no less unfamiliar and alien than that of this curious stranger, and it seemed to him that the unfamiliar form of this other presence coincided with his own form. An ancient soul, as it were, had taken possession of Gurov and enveloped him in the long-lost freshness of its vernal attributes.

It was growing darker, and there was increasing purity and coolness in the air. There rose up in his soul the joy and ease of pristine existence. The stars glowed brilliantly in the dark sky. The boy spoke.

" We had undertaken to kill the Beast. I tell you this under the multitudinous gaze of the all-seeing sky. Perhaps you were frightened. That's quite likely too ! We had

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planned a great, terrible affair, that our names might be honoured by future generations.”

Soft, tranquil, and monotonous was the sound of a stream which purred its way in the nocturnal silence. The stream was invisible, but its nearness was soothing and refreshing. They stood under the broad shelter of a tree and continued the conversation begun at some other time.

Gurov asked : “ Why do you say that I had left you in a moment of mortal danger ? Who am I that I should be frightened and run away ? ”

The boy burst into a laugh. His mirth had the sound of music, and as it passed into speech his voice still quavered with sweet, melodious laughter.

“ Aristomarchon, how cleverly you feign to have forgotten all ! I don't understand what makes you do this, and with such a mastery that you bring reproaches against yourself which I have not even dreamt of. You had left me in a moment of mortal danger because it had to be, and you could not have helped me otherwise than by forsaking me at the moment. You will surely not remain

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stubborn in your denial when I remind you of the words of the Oracle ? ”

Gurov suddenly remembered. A brilliant light, as it were, unexpectedly illumined the dark domain of things forgotten. And in wild ecstasy, in a loud and joyous voice, he exclaimed : “ *One* shall kill the Beast ! ”

The boy laughed. And Aristomarchon asked : “ Did you kill the Beast, Timarides ? ”

“ With what ? ” exclaimed Timarides. “ However strong my hands are, I was not one who could kill the Beast with a blow of the fist. We, Aristomarchon, had not been prudent and we were unarmed. We were playing in the sand by the stream. The Beast came upon us suddenly and he laid his paw upon me. It was for me to offer up my life as a sweet sacrifice to glory and to a noble cause ; it was for you to execute our plan. And while he was tormenting my defenceless and unresisting body, you, fleet-footed Aristomarchon, could have run for your lance, and killed the now blood-intoxicated Beast. But the Beast did not accept my sacrifice. I lay under him, quiescent and still, gazing into his bloodshot eyes. He held his heavy paw on my shoulder,

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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his breath came in hot, uneven gasps, and he sent out low snarls. Afterwards, he put out his huge, hot tongue and licked my face ; then he left me."

"Where is he now ?" asked Aristomarchon.

In a voice strangely tranquil and strangely sonorous in the quiet arrested stillness of the humid air, Timarides replied : "He followed me. I do not know how long I have been wandering until I found you. He followed me. I led him on by the smell of my blood. I do not know why he has not touched me until now. But here I have enticed him to you. You had better get the weapon which you had hidden so carefully and kill the Beast, while I in my turn will leave you in the moment of mortal danger, eye to eye with the enraged creature. Here's luck to you, Aristomarchon !"

As soon as he uttered these words Timarides started to run. For a short time his cloak was visible in the darkness, a glimmering patch of white. And then he disappeared. In the same instant the air resounded with the savage bellowing of the Beast, and his ponderous tread became audible. Pushing aside the growth of shrubs there emerged from the darkness the huge, monstrous head of the



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Beast, flashing a livid fire out of its two enormous, flaming eyes. And in the dark silence of nocturnal trees the towering ferocious shape of the Beast loomed ominously as it approached Aristomarchon.

Terror filled Aristomarchon's heart.

"Where is the lance?" was the thought that quickly flashed across his brain.

And in that instant, feeling the fresh night breeze on his face, Aristomarchon realized that he was running from the Beast. His ponderous springs and his spasmodic roars resounded closer and closer behind him. And as the Beast came up with him a loud cry rent the silence of the night. The cry came from Aristomarchon, who, recalling then some ancient and terrible words, pronounced loudly the incantation of the walls.

And thus enchanted the walls erected themselves around him. . . .

### III

Enchanted, the walls stood firm and were lit up. A dreary light was cast upon them by the dismal electric lamp. Gurov was in his usual surroundings.

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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Again came the nimble Fever and kissed him with her yellow, dry lips, and caressed him with her dry, bony hands, which exhaled heat and cold. The same thin volume, with its white pages, lay on the little table beside the divan where, as before, Gurov rested in the caressing embrace of the affectionate Fever, who showered upon him her rapid kisses. And again there stood beside him, laughing and rustling, the tiny house sprites.

Gurov said loudly and indifferently: "The incantation of the walls!"

Then he paused. But in what consisted this incantation? He had forgotten the words. Or had they never existed at all?

The little, shifty, grey demons danced round the slender volume with its ghostly white pages, and kept on repeating with their rustling voices: "Our walls are strong. We are in the walls. We have nothing to fear from the outside."

In their midst stood one of them, a tiny object like themselves, yet different from the rest. He was all black. His mantle fell from his shoulders in folds of smoke and flame. His eyes flashed like lightning. Terror and joy alternated quickly.

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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Gurov spoke : “ Who are you ? ”

The black demon answered : “ I am the Invoker of the Beast. In one of your long-past existences you left the lacerated body of Timarides on the banks of a forest stream. The Beast had satiated himself on the beautiful body of your friend ; he had gorged himself on the flesh that might have partaken of the fullness of earthly happiness ; a creature of superhuman perfection had perished in order to gratify for a moment the appetite of the ravenous and ever insatiable Beast. And the blood, the wonderful blood, the sacred wine of happiness and joy, the wine of superhuman bliss—what had been the fate of this wonderful blood ? Alas ! The thirsty, ceaselessly thirsty Beast drank of it to gratify his momentary desire, and is thirsty anew. You had left the body of Timarides, mutilated by the Beast, on the banks of the forest stream ; you forgot the promise you had given your valorous friend, and even the words of the ancient Oracle had not banished fear from your heart. And do you think that you are safe, that the Beast will not find you ? ”

There was austerity in the sound of his voice. While he was speaking the house

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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sprites gradually ceased their dance ; the little, grey house sprites stopped to listen to the Invoker of the Beast.

Gurov then said in reply : “ I am not worried about the Beast ! I have pronounced eternal enchantment upon my walls and the Beast shall never penetrate hither, into my enclosure.”

The little grey ones were overjoyed, their voices tinkled with merriment and laughter ; having gathered round, hand in hand, in a circle, they were on the point of bursting forth once more into dance, when the voice of the Invoker of the Beast rang out again, sharp and austere.

“ But I am here. I am here because I have found you. I am here because the incantation of the walls is dead. I am here because Timarides is waiting and importuning me. Do you hear the gentle laugh of the brave, trusting lad ? Do you hear the terrible bellowing of the Beast ? ”

From behind the wall, approaching nearer, could be heard the fearsome bellowing of the Beast.

“ The Beast is bellowing behind the wall, the invincible wall ! ” exclaimed Gurov in



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terror. "My walls are enchanted for ever, and impregnable against foes."

Then spoke the black demon, and there was an imperious ring in his voice: "I tell you, man, the incantation of the walls is dead. And if you think you can save yourself by pronouncing the incantation of the walls, why then don't you utter the words?"

A cold shiver passed down Gurov's spine. The incantation! He had forgotten the words of the ancient spell. And what mattered it? Was not the ancient incantation dead—dead?

Everything about him confirmed with irrefutable evidence the death of the ancient incantation of the walls—because the walls, and the light and the shade which fell upon them, seemed dead and wavering. The Invoker of the Beast spoke terrible words. And Gurov's mind was now in a whirl, now in pain, and the affectionate Fever did not cease to torment him with her passionate kisses. Terrible words resounded, almost deadening his senses—while the Invoker of the Beast grew larger and larger, and hot fumes breathed from him, and grim terror. His eyes ejected fire, and when at last he grew so tall

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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as to screen off the electric light, his black cloak suddenly fell from his shoulders. And Gurov recognized him—it was the boy Timarides.

“ Will you kill the Beast ? ” asked Timarides in a sonorous voice. “ I have enticed him, I have led him to you, I have destroyed the incantation of the walls. The cowardly gift of inimical gods, the incantation of the walls, had turned into naught my sacrifice, and had saved you from your action. But the ancient incantation of the walls is dead—be quick, then, to take hold of your sword and kill the Beast. I have been a boy—I have become the Invoker of the Beast. He had drunk of my blood, and now he thirsts anew ; he had partaken also of my flesh, and he is hungry again, the insatiable, pitiless Beast. I have called him to you, and you, in fulfilment of your promise, may kill the Beast. Or die yourself.”

He vanished. A terrible bellowing shook the walls. A gust of icy moisture blew across to Gurov.

The wall facing the spot where Gurov lay opened, and the huge, ferocious and monstrous Beast entered. Bellowing savagely, he approached Gurov and laid his ponderous

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## INVOKER OF THE BEAST

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paw upon his breast. Straight into his heart plunged the pitiless claws. A terrible pain shot through his whole body. Shifting his blood-red eyes the Beast inclined his head toward Gurov and, crumbling the bones of his victim with his teeth, began to devour his yet-palpitating heart.

## THE WHITE DOG

EVERYTHING grew irksome for Alexandra Ivanovna in the workshop of this out-of-the-way town—the pattens, the clatter of machines, the complaints of the managers; it was the shop in which she had served as apprentice and now for several years as seamstress. Everything irritated Alexandra Ivanovna; she quarrelled with every one and abused the innocent apprentices. Among others to suffer from her outbursts of temper was Tanechka, the youngest of the seamstresses, who had only recently become an apprentice. In the beginning Tanechka submitted to her abuse in silence. In the end she revolted, and, addressing herself to her assailant, said, quite calmly and affably, so that every one laughed :

“ You, Alexandra Ivanovna, are a downright dog ! ”

Alexandra Ivanovna felt humiliated.

“ You are a dog yourself ! ” she exclaimed. Tanechka was sitting sewing. She paused



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## THE WHITE DOG

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now and then from her work and said in a calm, deliberate manner :

“ You always whine. . . . Certainly, you are a dog. . . . You have a dog’s snout. . . . And a dog’s ears. . . . And a wagging tail. . . . The mistress will soon drive you out of doors, because you are the most detestable of dogs, a poodle.”

Tanechka was a young, plump, rosy-cheeked girl with an innocent, good-natured face, which revealed, however, a trace of cunning. She sat there so demurely, barefooted, still dressed in her apprentice clothes ; her eyes were clear, and her brows were highly arched on her fine curved white forehead, framed by straight, dark chestnut hair, which in the distance looked black. Tanechka’s voice was clear, even, sweet, insinuating, and if one could have heard its sound only, and not given heed to the words, it would have given the impression that she was paying Alexandra Ivanovna compliments.

The other seamstresses laughed, the apprentices chuckled, they covered their faces with their black aprons and cast side glances at Alexandra Ivanovna. As for Alexandra Ivanovna, she was livid with rage.

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## THE WHITE DOG

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“Wretch!” she exclaimed. “I will pull your ears for you! I won’t leave a hair on your head.”

Tanechka replied in a gentle voice :

“The paws are a trifle short. . . . The poodle bites as well as barks. . . . It may be necessary to buy a muzzle.”

Alexandra Ivanovna made a movement toward Tanechka. But before Tanechka had time to lay aside her work and get up, the mistress of the establishment, a large, serious-looking woman, entered, rustling her dress.

She said sternly : “Alexandra Ivanovna, what do you mean by making such a fuss?”

Alexandra Ivanovna, much agitated, replied : “Irina Petrovna, I wish you would forbid her to call me a dog!”

Tanechka in her turn complained : “She is always snarling at something or other. Always quibbling at the smallest trifles.”

But the mistress looked at her sternly and said : “Tanechka, I can see through you. Are you sure you didn’t begin? You needn’t think that because you are a seamstress now you are an important person. If it weren’t for your mother’s sake——”

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Tanechka grew red, but preserved her innocent and affable manner. She addressed her mistress in a subdued voice: "Forgive me, Irina Petrovna, I will not do it again. But it wasn't altogether my fault. . . ."

Alexandra Ivanovna returned home almost ill with rage. Tanechka had guessed her weakness.

"A dog! Well, then I am a dog," thought Alexandra Ivanovna, "but it is none of her affair! Have I looked to see whether she is a serpent or a fox? It is easy to find one out, but why make a fuss about it? Is a dog worse than any other animal?"

The clear summer night languished and sighed, a soft breeze from the adjacent fields occasionally blew down the peaceful streets. The moon rose clear and full, that very same moon which rose long ago at another place, over the broad desolate steppe, the home of the wild, of those who ran free, and whined in their ancient earthly travail. The very same, as then and in that region.

And now, as then, glowed eyes sick with longing; and her heart, still wild, not forgetting

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## THE WHITE DOG

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in town the great spaciousness of the steppe, felt oppressed ; her throat was troubled with a tormenting desire to howl like a wild thing.

She was about to undress, but what was the use ? She could not sleep, anyway.

She went into the passage. The warm planks of the floor bent and creaked under her, and small shavings and sand which covered them tickled her feet not unpleasantly.

She went out on the doorstep. There sat the *babushka* Stepanida, a black figure in her black shawl, gaunt and shrivelled. She sat with her head bent, and it seemed as though she were warming herself in the rays of the cold moon.

Alexandra Ivanovna sat down beside her. She kept looking at the old woman sideways. The large curved nose of her companion seemed to her like the beak of an old bird.

“ A crow ? ” Alexandra Ivanovna asked herself.

She smiled, forgetting for the moment her longing and her fears. Shrewd as the eyes of a dog her own lighted up with the joy of her discovery. In the pale green light of the moon the wrinkles of her faded face became



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altogether invisible, and she seemed once more young and merry and light-hearted, just as she was ten years ago, when the moon had not yet called upon her to bark and bay of nights before the windows of the dark bathhouse.

She moved closer to the old woman, and said affably: “*Babushka* Stepanida, there is something I have been wanting to ask you.”

The old woman turned to her, her dark face furrowed with wrinkles, and asked in a sharp, oldish voice that sounded like a caw: “Well, my dear? Go ahead and ask.”

Alexandra Ivanovna gave a repressed laugh; her thin shoulders suddenly trembled from a chill that ran down her spine.

She spoke very quietly: “*Babushka* Stepanida, it seems to me—tell me is it true?—I don’t know exactly how to put it—but you, *babushka*, please don’t take offence—it is not from malice that I——”

“Go on, my dear, never fear, say it,” said the old woman.

She looked at Alexandra Ivanovna with glowing, penetrating eyes.

“It seems to me, *babushka*—please, now,

don't take offence—as though you, *babushka*, were a crow.”

The old woman turned away. She was silent and merely nodded her head. She had the appearance of one who had recalled something. Her head, with its sharply outlined nose, bowed and nodded, and at last it seemed to Alexandra Ivanovna that the old woman was dozing. Dozing, and mumbling something under her nose. Nodding her head and mumbling some old forgotten words—old magic words.

An intense quiet reigned out of doors. It was neither light nor dark, and everything seemed bewitched with the inarticulate mumbling of old forgotten words. Everything languished and seemed lost in apathy. Again a longing oppressed her heart. And it was neither a dream nor an illusion. A thousand perfumes, imperceptible by day, became subtly distinguishable, and they recalled something ancient and primitive, something forgotten in the long ages.

In a barely audible voice the old woman mumbled: “Yes, I am a crow. Only I have no wings. But there are times when I caw, and I caw, and tell of woe. And I am given

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## THE WHITE DOG

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to forebodings, my dear; each time I have one I simply must caw. People are not particularly anxious to hear me. And when I see a doomed person I have such a strong desire to caw."

The old woman suddenly made a sweeping movement with her arms, and in a shrill voice cried out twice: "Kar-r, Kar-r!"

Alexandra Ivanovna shuddered, and asked: "*Babushka*, at whom are you cawing?"

The old woman answered: "At you, my dear—at you."

It had become too painful to sit with the old woman any longer. Alexandra Ivanovna went to her own room. She sat down before the open window and listened to two voices at the gate.

"It simply won't stop whining!" said a low and harsh voice.

"And uncle, did you see——?" asked an agreeable young tenor.

Alexandra Ivanovna recognized in this last the voice of the curly-headed, somewhat red, freckled-faced lad who lived in the same court.

A brief and depressing silence followed. Then she heard a hoarse and harsh voice say

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suddenly: "Yes, I saw. It's very large—and white. Lies near the bathhouse, and bays at the moon."

The voice gave her an image of the man, of his shovel-shaped beard, his low, furrowed forehead, his small, piggish eyes, and his spread-out fat legs.

"And why does it bay, uncle?" asked the agreeable voice.

And again the hoarse voice did not reply at once.

"Certainly to no good purpose—and where it came from is more than I can say."

"Do you think, uncle, it may be a werewolf?" asked the agreeable voice.

"I should not advise you to investigate," replied the hoarse voice.

She could not quite understand what these words implied, nor did she wish to think of them. She did not feel inclined to listen further. What was the sound and significance of human words to *her*?

The moon looked straight into her face, and persistently called her and tormented her. Her heart was restless with a dark longing, and she could not sit still.

Alexandra Ivanovna quickly undressed her-



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self. Naked, all white, she silently stole through the passage; she then opened the outer door—there was no one on the step or outside—and ran quickly across the court and the vegetable garden, and reached the bathhouse. The sharp contact of her body with the cold air and her feet with the cold ground gave her pleasure. But soon her body was warm.

She lay down in the grass, on her stomach. Then, raising herself on her elbows, she lifted her face toward the pale, brooding moon, and gave a long-drawn-out whine.

“Listen, uncle, it is whining,” said the curly-haired lad at the gate.

The agreeable tenor voice trembled perceptibly.

“Whining again, the accursed one,” said the hoarse, harsh voice slowly.

They rose from the bench. The gate latch clicked.

They went silently across the courtyard and the vegetable garden, the two of them. The older man, black-bearded and powerful, walked in front, a gun in his hand. The curly-headed lad followed tremblingly, and looked constantly behind,

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Near the bathhouse, in the grass, lay a huge white dog, whining piteously. Its head, black on the crown, was raised to the moon, which pursued its way in the cold sky; its hind legs were strangely thrown backward, while the front ones, firm and straight, pressed hard against the ground.

In the pale green and unreal light of the moon it seemed enormous, so huge a dog was surely never seen on earth. It was thick and fat. The black spot, which began at the head and stretched in uneven strands down the entire spine, seemed like a woman's loosened hair. No tail was visible, presumably it was turned under. The fur on the body was so short that in the distance the dog seemed wholly naked, and its hide shone dimly in the moonlight, so that altogether it resembled the body of a nude woman, who lay in the grass and bayed at the moon.

The man with the black beard took aim. The curly-haired lad crossed himself and mumbled something.

The discharge of a rifle sounded in the night air. The dog gave a groan, jumped up on its hind legs, became a naked woman, who, her body covered with blood, started to run, all

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the while groaning, weeping and raising cries of distress.

The black-bearded one and the curly-haired one threw themselves in the grass, and began to moan in wild terror.

## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

### I

VOLODYA LOVLEV, a pale meagre lad of twelve, had returned home from school and was waiting for his dinner. He was standing in the drawing-room at the piano, and was turning over the pages of the latest number of the *Niva* which had come only that morning.

A leaflet of thin grey paper fell out ; it was an announcement issued by an illustrated journal. It enumerated the future contributors—the list contained about fifty well-known literary names ; it praised at some length the journal as a whole and in detail its many-sidedness, and it presented several specimen illustrations.

Volodya began to turn the pages of the leaflet in an absent way and to look at the miniature pictures. His large eyes looked wearily out of his pale face.

One page suddenly caught his attention, and



his wide eyes opened slightly wider. Running from top to bottom were six drawings of hands throwing shadows in dark silhouette upon a white wall—the shadows representing the head of a girl with an amusing three-cornered hat, the head of a donkey, of a bull, the sitting figure of a squirrel, and other similar things.

Volodya smiled and looked very intently at them. He was quite familiar with this amusement. He could hold the fingers of one hand so as to cast a silhouette of a hare's head on the wall. But this was quite another matter, something that Volodya had not seen before; its interest for him was that here were quite complex figures cast by using both hands.

Volodya suddenly wished to reproduce these shadows. Of course there was no use trying now, in the uncertain light of a late autumn afternoon.

He had better try it later in his own room. In any case, it was of no use to any one.

Just then he heard the approaching footsteps and voice of his mother. He flushed for some reason or other and quickly put the leaflet into his pocket, and left the piano to meet her. She looked at him with a caressing smile as she came toward him; her pale,

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## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

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handsome face greatly resembled his, and she had the same large eyes.

She asked him, as she always did : “ Well, what’s the news to-day ? ”

“ There’s nothing new,” said Volodya dejectedly.

But it occurred to him at once that he was being ungracious, and he felt ashamed. He smiled genially and began to recall what had happened at school ; but this only made him feel sadder.

“ Pruzhinin has again distinguished himself,” and he began to tell about the teacher who was disliked by his pupils for his rudeness. “ Lentyev was reciting his lesson and made a mess of it, and so Pruzhinin said to him : ‘ Well, that’s enough ; sit down, blockhead ! ’ ”

“ Nothing escapes you,” said his mother, smiling.

“ He’s always rude.”

After a brief silence Volodya sighed, then complained : “ They are always in a hurry.”

“ Who ? ” asked his mother.

“ I mean the masters. Every one is anxious to finish his course quickly and to make a good show at the examination. And if you ask a question you are immediately suspected of

trying to take up the time until the bell rings, and to avoid having questions put to you.”

“Do you talk much after the lessons?”

“Well, yes—but there’s the same hurry after the lessons to get home, or to study the lessons in the girls’ class-rooms. And everything is done in a hurry—you are no sooner done with the geometry than you must study your Greek.”

“That’s to keep you from yawning.”

“Yawning! I’m more like a squirrel going round on its cage-wheel. It’s exasperating.”

His mother smiled lightly.

## II

After dinner Volodya went to his room to prepare his lessons. His mother saw that the room was comfortable, that nothing was lacking in it. No one ever disturbed Volodya here; even his mother refrained from coming in at this time. She would come in later, to help Volodya if he needed help.

Volodya was an industrious and even a clever pupil. But he found it difficult to-day to apply himself. No matter what lesson he tried he could not help remembering something

unpleasant ; he would recall the teacher of each particular subject, his sarcastic or rude remark, which dropped in passing had entered into the impressionable boy's mind.

Several of his recent lessons happened to turn out poorly ; the teachers appeared dissatisfied, and they grumbled incessantly. Their mood communicated itself to Volodya, and his books and copy-books inspired him at this moment with a deep confusion and unrest.

He passed hastily from the first lesson to the second and to the third ; this bother with trifles for the sake of not appearing " a block-head " the next day seemed to him both silly and unnecessary. The thought perturbed him. He began to yawn from tedium and from sadness, and to dangle his feet impatiently ; he simply could not sit still.

But he knew too well that the lessons must be learnt, that this was very important, that his future depended upon it ; and so he went on conscientiously with the tedious business.

Volodya made a blot on the copy-book, and he put his pen aside. He looked at the blot, and decided that it could be erased with a penknife. He was glad of the distraction.

Not finding the penknife on the table he



put his hand into his pocket and rummaged there. Among all such rubbish as is to be found in a boy's pocket he felt his penknife and pulled it out, together with some sort of leaflet.

He did not see at first what the paper was he held in his hands, but on looking at it he suddenly remembered that this was the little book with the shadows, and quite as suddenly he grew cheerful and animated.

And there it was—that same little leaflet which he had forgotten when he began his lessons.

He jumped briskly off his chair, moved the lamp nearer the wall, looked cautiously at the closed door—as though afraid of some one entering—and, turning the leaflet to the familiar page, began to study the first drawing with great intentness, and to arrange his fingers according to directions. The first shadow came out as a confused shape, not at all what it should have been. Volodya moved the lamp, now here, now there; he bent and he stretched his fingers; and he was at last rewarded by seeing a woman's head with a three-cornered hat.

Volodya grew cheerful. He inclined his hand

somewhat and moved his fingers very slightly—the head bowed, smiled, and grimaced amusingly.

Volodya proceeded with the second figure, then with the others. All were hard at the beginning, but he managed them somehow in the end.

He spent a half-hour in this occupation, and forgot all about his lessons, the school, and the whole world.

Suddenly he heard familiar footsteps behind the door. Volodya flushed; he stuffed the leaflet into his pocket and quickly moved the lamp to its place, almost overturning it; then he sat down and bent over his copy-book. His mother entered.

“Let’s go and have tea, Volodenka,” she said to him.

Volodya pretended that he was looking at the blot and that he was about to open his penknife. His mother gently put her hands on his head. Volodya threw the knife aside and pressed his flushing face against his mother. Evidently she noticed nothing, and this made Volodya glad. Still, he felt ashamed, as though he had actually been caught at some stupid prank.

III

The samovar stood upon the round table in the dining-room and quietly hummed its garrulous song. The hanging-lamp diffused its light upon the white tablecloth and upon the dark walls, filling the room with dream and mystery.

Volodya's mother seemed wistful as she leant her handsome, pale face forward over the table. Volodya was leaning on his arm, and was stirring the small spoon in his glass. It was good to watch the tea's sweet eddies and to see the little bubbles rise to the surface. The little silver spoon quietly tinkled.

The boiling water, sputtering, ran from the tap into his mother's cup.

A light shadow was cast by the little spoon upon the saucer and the tablecloth, and it lost itself in the glass of tea. Volodya watched it intently : the shadows thrown by the tiny little eddies and bubbles recalled something to him—precisely what, Volodya could not say. He held up and he turned the little spoon, and he ran his fingers over it—but nothing came of it.

“All the same,” he stubbornly insisted to

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## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

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himself, "it's not with fingers alone that shadows can be made. They are possible with anything. But the thing is to adjust oneself to one's material."

And Volodya began to examine the shadows of the samovar, of the chairs, of his mother's head, as well as the shadows cast on the table by the dishes; and he tried to catch a resemblance in all these shadows to something. His mother was speaking—Volodya was not listening properly.

"How is Lesha Sitnikov getting on at school?" asked his mother.

Volodya was studying then the shadow of the milk-jug. He gave a start, and answered hastily: "It's a tom-cat."

"Volodya, you must be asleep," said his astonished mother. "What tom-cat?"

Volodya grew red.

"I don't know what's got into my head," he said. "I'm sorry, mother, I wasn't listening."

### IV

The next evening, before tea, Volodya again thought of his shadows, and gave himself up to them. One shadow insisted on turning out



badly, no matter how hard he stretched and bent his fingers.

Volodya was so absorbed in this that he did not hear his mother coming. At the creaking of the door he quickly put the leaflet into his pocket and turned away, confused, from the wall. But his mother was already looking at his hands, and a tremor of fear lit up her eyes.

“What are you doing, Volodya? What have you hidden?”

“Nothing, really,” muttered Volodya, flushing and changing colour rapidly.

It flashed upon her that Volodya wished to smoke, and that he had hidden a cigarette.

“Volodya, show me at once what you are hiding,” she said in a frightened voice.

“Really, mamma . . .”

She caught Volodya by the elbow.

“Must I feel in your pocket myself?”

Volodya grew even redder, and pulled the little book out of his pocket.

“Here it is,” he said, giving it to his mother.

“Well, what is it?”

“Well, here,” he explained, “on this side are the drawings, and here, as you see, are the shadows. I was trying to throw them on the wall, and I haven’t succeeded very well.”

“What is there to hide here!” said his mother, becoming more tranquil. “Now show me what they look like.”

Volodya, taken aback, began obediently to show his mother the shadows.

“Now this is the profile of a bald-headed man. And this is the head of a hare.”

“And so this is how you are studying your lessons!”

“Only for a little, mother.”

“For a little! Why are you blushing then, my dear? Well, I shan’t say anything more. I think I can depend on you to do what is right.”

His mother moved her hand over his short, bristling hair, whereupon Volodya laughed and hid his flushing face under his mother’s elbow.

Then his mother left him, and for a long time Volodya felt awkward and ashamed. His mother had caught him doing something that he himself would have ridiculed had he caught any of his companions doing it.

Volodya knew that he was a clever lad, and he deemed himself serious; and this was, after all, a game fit only for little girls when they got together.

He pushed the little book with the shadows

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## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

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deeper into the table-drawer, and did not take it out again for more than a week ; indeed, he thought little about the shadows that week. Only in the evening sometimes, in changing from one lesson to another, he would smile at the recollection of the girl in the hat—there were, indeed, moments when he put his hand in the drawer to get the little book, but he always quickly remembered the shame he experienced when his mother first found him out, and this made him resume his work at once.

### V

Volodya and his mother lived in their own house on the outskirts of the district town. Eugenia Stepanovna had been a widow for nine years. She was now thirty-five years old ; she seemed young and handsome, and Volodya loved her tenderly. She lived entirely for her son, studied ancient languages for his sake, and shared all his school cares. A quiet and gentle woman, she looked somewhat apprehensively upon the world out of her large, benign eyes.

They had one domestic. Praskovya was a widow ; she was gruff, sturdy, and strong ;

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## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

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she was forty-five years old, but in her stern taciturnity she was more like a woman a hundred years old.

Whenever Volodya looked at her morose, stony face he wondered what she was thinking of in her kitchen during the long winter evenings, as the cold knitting-needles, clinking, shifted in her bony fingers with a regular movement, and her dry lips stirred yet uttered no sound. Was she recalling her drunken husband, or her children who had died earlier? or was she musing upon her lonely and homeless old age?

Her stony face seemed hoplessly gloomy and austere.

### VI

It was a long autumn evening. On the other side of the wall were the wind and the rain.

How wearily, how indifferently the lamp flared! Volodya, propping himself up on his elbow, leant his whole body over to the left and looked at the white wall and at the white window-blinds.

The pale flowers were almost invisible on the wall-paper . . . the wall was a melancholy white. . . .



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## LIGHT AND SHADOWS

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The shaded lamp subdued the bright glare of light. The entire upper portion of the room was twilit.

Volodya lifted his right arm. A long, faintly outlined, confused shadow crept across the shaded wall.

It was the shadow of an angel, flying heavenward from a depraved and afflicted world; it was a translucent shadow, spreading its broad wings and reposing its bowed head sadly upon its breast.

Would not the angel, with his gentle hands, carry away with him something significant yet despised of this world?

Volodya sighed. He let his arm fall languidly. He let his depressed eyes rest on his books.

It was a long autumn evening. . . . The wall was a melancholy white. . . . On the other side of the wall something wept and rustled.

## VII

Volodya's mother found him a second time with the shadows.

This time the bull's head was a success, and

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he was delighted. He made the bull stretch out his neck, and the bull lowed.

His mother was less pleased.

“So this is how you are taking up your time,” she said reproachfully.

“For a little, mamma,” whispered Volodya, embarrassed.

“You might at least save this for a more suitable time,” his mother went on. “And you are no longer a little boy. Aren’t you ashamed to waste your time on such nonsense!”

“Mamma, dear, I shan’t do it again.”

But Volodya found it difficult to keep his promise. He enjoyed making shadows, and the desire to make them came to him often, especially during an uninteresting lesson.

This amusement occupied much of his time on some evenings and interfered with his lessons. He had to make up for it afterwards and to lose some sleep. How could he give up his amusement?

Volodya succeeded in evolving several new figures, and not by means of the fingers alone. These figures lived on the wall, and it even seemed to Volodya at times that they talked to him and entertained him.

But Volodya was a dreamer even before then.

VIII

It was night. Volodya's room was dark. He had gone to bed but he could not sleep. He was lying on his back and was looking at the ceiling.

Some one was walking in the street with a lantern. His shadow traversed the ceiling, among the red spots of light thrown by the lantern. It was evident that the lantern swung in the hands of the passer-by--the shadow wavered and seemed agitated.

Volodya felt a sadness and a fear. He quickly pulled the bed-cover over his head, and, trembling in his haste, he turned on his right side and began to encourage himself.

He then felt soothed and warm. His mind began to weave sweet, naïve fancies, the fancies which visited him usually before sleep.

Often when he went to bed he felt suddenly afraid; he felt as though he were becoming smaller and weaker. He would then hide among the pillows, and gradually became soothed and loving, and wished his mother were there that he might put his arms round her neck and kiss her.

IX

The grey twilight was growing denser. The shadows merged. Volodya felt depressed. But here was the lamp. The light poured itself on the green tablecloth, the vague, beloved shadows appeared on the wall.

Volodya suddenly felt glad and animated, and made haste to get the little grey book. The bull began to low . . . the young lady to laugh uproariously. . . . What evil, round eyes the bald-headed gentleman was making!

Then he tried his own. It was the steppe. Here was a wayfarer with his knapsack. Volodya seemed to hear the endless, monotonous song of the road. . . .

Volodya felt both joy and sadness.

X

“ Volodya, it’s the third time I’ve seen you with the little book. Do you spend whole evenings admiring your fingers ? ”

Volodya stood uneasily at the table, like a truant caught, and he turned the pages of the leaflet with hot fingers.



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“ Give it to me,” said his mother.

Volodya, confused, put out his hand with the leaflet. His mother took it, said nothing, and went out ; while Volodya sat down over his copy-books.

He felt ashamed that, by his stubbornness, he had offended his mother, and he felt vexed that she had taken the booklet from him ; he was even more vexed at himself for letting the matter go so far. He felt his awkward position, and his vexation with his mother troubled him : he had scruples in being angry with her, yet he couldn't help it. And because he had scruples he felt even more angry.

“ Well, let her take it,” he said to himself at last, “ I can get along without it.”

And, in truth, Volodya had the figures in his memory, and used the little book merely for verification.

## XI

In the meantime his mother opened the little book with the shadows—and became lost in thought.

“ I wonder what's fascinating about them ? ”

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she mused. "It is strange that such a good, clever boy should suddenly become wrapped up in such nonsense! No, that means it's not mere nonsense. What, then, is it?" she pursued her questioning of herself.

A strange fear took possession of her; she felt malignant toward these black pictures, yet quailed before them.

She rose and lighted a candle. She approached the wall, the little grey book still in her hand, and paused in her wavering agitation.

"Yes, it is important to get to the bottom of this," she resolved, and began to reproduce the shadows from the first to the last.

She persisted most patiently with her hands and her fingers, until she succeeded in reproducing the figure she desired. A confused, apprehensive feeling stirred within her. She tried to conquer it. But her fear fascinated her as it grew stronger. Her hands trembled, while her thought, cowed by life's twilight, ran on to meet the approaching sorrows.

She suddenly heard her son's footsteps. She trembled, hid the little book, and blew out the candle.

Volodya entered and stopped in the doorway, confused by the stern look of his mother as

she stood by the wall in a strange, uneasy attitude.

“What do you want?” asked his mother in a harsh, uneven voice.

A vague conjecture ran across Volodya’s mind, but he quickly repelled it and began to talk to his mother.

### XII

Then Volodya left her.

She paced up and down the room a number of times. She noticed that her shadow followed her on the floor, and, strange to say, it was the first time in her life that her own shadow had made her uneasy. The thought that there was a shadow assailed her mind unceasingly—and Eugenia Stepanovna, for some reason, was afraid of this thought, and even tried not to look at her shadow.

But the shadow crept after her and taunted her. Eugenia Stepanovna tried to think of something else—but in vain.

She suddenly paused, pale and agitated.

“Well, it’s a shadow, a shadow!” she exclaimed aloud, stamping her foot with a strange irritation, “what of it?”

Then all at once she reflected that it was stupid to make a fuss and to stamp her feet, and she became quiet.

She approached the mirror. Her face was paler than usual, and her lips quivered with a kind of strange hate.

“It’s nerves,” she thought; “I must take myself in hand.”

### XIII

Twilight was falling. Volodya grew pensive.

“Let’s go for a stroll, Volodya,” said his mother.

But in the street there were also shadows everywhere, mysterious, elusive evening shadows; and they whispered in Volodya’s ear something that was familiar and infinitely sad.

In the clouded sky two or three stars looked out, and they seemed equally distant and equally strange to Volodya and to the shadows that surrounded him.

“Mamma,” he said, oblivious of the fact that he had interrupted her as she was telling him something, “what a pity that it is impossible to reach those stars.”



His mother looked up at the sky and answered: "I don't see that it's necessary. Our place is on earth. It is better for us here. It's quite another thing there."

"How faintly they glimmer! They ought to be glad of it."

"Why?"

"If they shone more strongly they would cast shadows."

"Oh, Volodya, why do you think only of shadows?"

"I didn't mean to, mamma," said Volodya in a penitent voice.

#### XIV

Volodya worked harder than ever at his lessons; he was afraid to hurt his mother by being lazy. But he employed all his invention in grouping the objects on his table in a way that would produce new and ever more fantastic shadows. He put this here and that there—anything that came to his hands—and he rejoiced when outlines appeared on the white wall that his mind could grasp. There was an intimacy between him and these shadowy outlines, and they were very dear to

him. They were not dumb, they spoke to him, and Volodya understood their inarticulate speech.

He understood why the dejected wayfarer murmured as he wandered upon the long road, the autumn wetness under his feet, a stick in his trembling hand, a knapsack on his bowed back.

He understood why the snow-covered forest, its boughs crackling with frost, complained, as it stood sadly dreaming in the winter stillness; and he understood why the lonely crow cawed on the old oak, and why the bustling squirrel looked sadly out of its tree-hollow.

He understood why the decrepit and homeless old beggar-women sobbed in the dismal autumn wind, as they shivered in their rags in the crowded graveyard, among the crumbling crosses and the hopelessly black tombs.

There was self-forgetfulness in this, and also tormenting woe!

## XV

Volodya's mother observed that he continued to play.

She said to him after dinner: "At least,

you might get interested in something else."

"In what?"

"You might read."

"No sooner do I begin to read than I want to cast shadows."

"If you'd only try something else—say soap-bubbles."

Volodya smiled sadly.

"No sooner do the bubbles fly up than the shadows follow them on the wall."

"Volodya, unless you take care your nerves will be shattered. Already you have grown thinner because of this."

"Mamma, you exaggerate."

"No, Volodya. . . . Don't I know that you've begun to sleep badly and to talk nonsense in your sleep. Now just think, suppose you die!"

"What are you saying!"

"God forbid, but if you go mad, or die, I shall suffer horribly."

Volodya laughed and threw himself on his mother's neck.

"Mamma dear, I shan't die. I won't do it again."

She saw that he was crying now.

“That will do,” she said. “God is merciful. Now you see how nervous you are. You’re laughing and crying at the same time.”

XVI

Volodya’s mother began to look at him with careful and anxious eyes. Every trifle now agitated her.

She noticed that Volodya’s head was somewhat asymmetrical: his one ear was higher than the other, his chin slightly turned to one side. She looked in the mirror, and further remarked that Volodya had inherited this too from her.

“It may be,” she thought, “one of the characteristics of unfortunate heredity—degeneration; in which case where is the root of the evil? Is it my fault or his father’s?”

Eugenia Stepanovna recalled her dead husband. He was a most kind-hearted and most lovable man, somewhat weak-willed, with rash impulses. He was by nature a zealot and a mystic, and he dreamt of a social Utopia, and went among the people. He had been rather given to tipping the last years of his life.



He died young ; he was but thirty-five years old.

Volodya's mother even took her boy to the doctor and described his symptoms. The doctor, a cheerful young man, listened to her, then laughed and gave counsel concerning diet and way of life, throwing in a few witty remarks ; he wrote out a prescription in a happy, off-hand way, and he added playfully, with a slap on Volodya's shoulder : " But the very best medicine would be—a birch."

Volodya's mother felt the affront deeply, but she followed all the rest of the instructions faithfully.

### XVII

Volodya was sitting in his class. He felt depressed. He listened inattentively.

He raised his eyes. A shadow was moving along the ceiling near the front wall. Volodya observed that it came in through the first window. To begin with it fell from the window toward the centre of the classroom, but later it started forward rather quickly away from Volodya—evidently some one was walking in the street, just by the window.

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While this shadow was still moving another shadow came through the second window, falling, as did the first one, toward the back wall, but later it began to turn quickly toward the front wall. The same thing happened at the third and the fourth windows ; the shadows fell in the class-room on the ceiling, and in the degree that the passer-by moved forward they retreated backward.

“ This,” thought Volodya, “ is not at all the same as in an open place, where the shadow follows the man ; when the man goes forward, the shadow glides behind, and other shadows again meet him in the front.”

Volodya turned his eyes on the gaunt figure of the tutor. His callous, yellow face annoyed Volodya. He looked for his shadow and found it on the wall, just behind the tutor’s chair. The monstrous shape bent over and rocked from side to side, but it had neither a yellow face nor a malignant smile, and Volodya looked at it with joy. His thoughts scampered off somewhere far away, and he heard not a single thing of what was being said.

“ Lovlev ! ” His tutor called his name.

Volodya rose, as was the custom, and stood looking stupidly at the tutor. He had such

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an absent look that his companions tittered, while the tutor's face assumed a critical expression.

Volodya heard the tutor attack him with sarcasm and abuse. He trembled from shame and from weakness. The tutor announced that he would give Volodya "one" for his ignorance and his inattention, and he asked him to sit down.

Volodya smiled in a dull way, and tried to think what had happened to him.

### XVIII

The "one" was the first in Volodya's life! It made him feel rather strange.

"Lovlev!" his comrades taunted him, laughing and nudging him, "you caught it that time! Congratulations!"

Volodya felt awkward. He did not yet know how to behave in these circumstances.

"What if I have," he answered peevishly, "what business is it of yours?"

"Lovlev!" the lazy Snegirev shouted, "our regiment has been reinforced!"

His first "one"! And he had yet to tell his mother.

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He felt ashamed and humiliated. He felt as though he bore in the knapsack on his back a strangely heavy and awkward burden—the “one” stuck clumsily in his consciousness and seemed to fit in with nothing else in his mind.

“One”!

He could not get used to the thought about the “one,” and yet could not think of anything else. When the policeman, who stood near the school, looked at him with his habitual severity Volodya could not help thinking: “What if you knew that I’ve received ‘one’!”

It was all so awkward and so unusual. Volodya did not know how to hold his head and where to put his hands; there was uneasiness in his whole bearing.

Besides, he had to assume a care-free look before his comrades and to talk of something else!

His comrades! Volodya was convinced that they were all very glad because of his “one.”

### XIX

Volodya’s mother looked at the “one” and turned her uncomprehending eyes on her son.



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Then again she glanced at the report and exclaimed quietly :

“ Volodya ! ”

Volodya stood before her, and he felt intensely small. He looked at the folds of his mother's dress and at his mother's pale hands ; his trembling eyelids were conscious of her frightened glances fixed upon them.

“ What's this ? ” she asked.

“ Don't you worry, mamma, ” burst out Volodya suddenly ; “ after all, it's my first ! ”

“ Your first ! ”

“ It may happen to any one. And really it was all an accident. ”

“ Oh, Volodya, Volodya ! ”

Volodya began to cry and to rub his tears, child-like, over his face with the palm of his hand.

“ Mamma darling, don't be angry, ” he whispered.

“ That's what comes of your shadows, ” said his mother.

Volodya felt the tears in her voice. His heart was touched. He glanced at his mother. She was crying. He turned quickly toward her.

“ Mamma, mamma, ” he kept on repeating,

while kissing her hands, " I'll drop the shadows, really I will."

### XX

Volodya made a strong effort of the will and refrained from the shadows, despite strong temptation. He tried to make amends for his neglected lessons.

But the shadows beckoned to him persistently. In vain he ceased to invite them with his fingers, in vain he ceased to arrange objects that would cast a new shadow on the wall; the shadows themselves surrounded him—they were unavoidable, importunate shadows.

Objects themselves no longer interested Volodya, he almost ceased to see them; all his attention was centred on their shadows.

When he was walking home and the sun happened to peep through the autumn clouds, as through smoky vestments, he was overjoyed because there was everywhere an awakening of the shadows.

The shadows from the lamplight hovered near him in the evening at home.

The shadows were everywhere. There were the sharp shadows from the flames, there were

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the fainter shadows from diffused daylight. All of them crowded toward Volodya, recrossed each other, and enveloped him in an unbreakable network.

Some of the shadows were incomprehensible, mysterious; others reminded him of something, suggested something. But there were also the beloved, the intimate, the familiar shadows; these Volodya himself, however casually, sought out and caught everywhere from among the confused wavering of the others, the more remote shadows. But they were sad, these beloved, familiar shadows.

Whenever Volodya found himself seeking these shadows his conscience tormented him, and he went to his mother to make a clean breast of it.

Once it happened that Volodya could not conquer his temptation. He stood up close to the wall and made a shadow of the bull. His mother found him.

“Again!” she exclaimed angrily. “I really shall have to ask the director to put you into the small room.”

Volodya flushed violently and answered morosely: “There is a wall there also. The walls are everywhere.”

“Volodya,” exclaimed his mother sorrowfully, “what are you saying !”

But Volodya already repented of his rudeness, and he was crying.

“Mamma, I don’t know myself what’s happening to me !”

### XXI

Volodya’s mother had not yet conquered her superstitious dread of shadows. She began very often to think that she, like Volodya, was losing herself in the contemplation of shadows. Then she tried to comfort herself.

“What stupid thoughts !” she said. “Thank God, all will pass happily ; he will be like this a little while, then he will stop.”

But her heart trembled with a secret fear, and her thought, frightened of life, persistently ran to meet approaching sorrows.

She began in the melancholy moments of waking to examine her soul, and all her life would pass before her ; she saw its emptiness, its futility, and its aimlessness. It seemed but a senseless glimmer of shadows, which merged in the denser twilight.

“Why have I lived ?” she asked herself.



“Was it for my son? But why? That he too shall become a prey to shadows, a maniac with a narrow horizon, chained to his illusions, to restless appearances upon a lifeless wall? And he too will enter upon life, and he will make of life a chain of impressions, phantasmic and futile, like a dream.”

She sat down in the armchair by the window, and she thought and thought. Her thoughts were bitter, oppressive. She began, in her despair, to wring her beautiful white hands.

Then her thoughts wandered. She looked at her outstretched hands, and began to imagine what sort of shapes they would cast on the wall in their present attitude. She suddenly paused and jumped up from her chair in fright.

“My God!” she exclaimed. “This is madness.”

## XXII

She watched Volodya at dinner.

“How pale and thin he has grown,” she said to herself, “since the unfortunate little book fell into his hands. He’s changed entirely—in character and in everything else. It is

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said that character changes before death. What if he dies ? But no, no. God forbid !”

The spoon trembled in her hand. She looked up at the ikon with timid eyes.

“ Volodya, why don't you finish your soup ? ” she asked, looking frightened.

“ I don't feel like it, mamma.”

“ Volodya, darling, do as I tell you ; it is bad for you not to eat your soup.”

Volodya gave a tired smile and slowly finished his soup. His mother had filled his plate fuller than usual. He leant back in his chair and was on the point of saying that the soup was not good. But his mother's worried look restrained him, and he merely smiled weakly.

“ And now I've had enough,” he said.

“ Oh no, Volodya, I have all your favourite dishes to-day.”

Volodya sighed sadly. He knew that when his mother spoke of his favourite dishes it meant that she would coax him to eat. He guessed that even after tea his mother would prevail upon him, as she did the day before, to eat meat.

XXIII

In the evening Volodya's mother said to him: "Volodya dear, you'll waste your time again; perhaps you'd better keep the door open!"

Volodya began his lessons. But he felt vexed because the door had been left open at his back, and because his mother went past it now and then.

"I cannot go on like this," he shouted, moving his chair noisily. "I cannot do anything when the door is wide open."

"Volodya, is there any need to shout so?" his mother reproached him softly.

Volodya already felt repentant, and he began to cry.

"Don't you see, Volodenka, that I'm worried about you, and that I want to save you from your thoughts."

"Mamma, sit here with me," said Volodya.

His mother took a book and sat down at Volodya's table. For a few minutes Volodya worked calmly. But gradually the presence of his mother began to annoy him.

"I'm being watched just like a sick man," he thought spitefully.

His thoughts were constantly interrupted, and he was biting his lips. His mother remarked this at last, and she left the room.

But Volodya felt no relief. He was tormented with regret at showing his impatience. He tried to go on with his work but he could not. Then he went to his mother.

“Mamma, why did you leave me?” he asked timidly.

### XXIV

It was the eve of a holiday. The little image-lamps burned before the ikons.

It was late and it was quiet. Volodya's mother was not asleep. In the mysterious dark of her bedroom she fell on her knees, she prayed and she wept, sobbing out now and then like a child.

Her braids of hair trailed upon her white dress; her shoulders trembled. She raised her hands to her breast in a praying posture, and she looked with tearful eyes at the ikon. The image-lamp moved almost imperceptibly on its chains with her passionate breathing. The shadows rocked, they crowded in the corners, they stirred behind the reliquary,



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and they murmured mysteriously. There was a hopeless yearning in their murmurings and an incomprehensible sadness in their wavering movements.

At last she rose, looking pale, with strange, widely dilated eyes, and she reeled slightly on her benumbed legs.

She went quietly to Volodya. The shadows surrounded her, they rustled softly behind her back, they crept at her feet, and some of them, as fine as the threads of a spider's web, fell upon her shoulders and, looking into her large eyes, murmured incomprehensibly.

She approached her son's bed cautiously. His face was pale in the light of the image-lamp. Strange, sharp shadows lay upon him. His breathing was inaudible; he slept so tranquilly that his mother was frightened.

She stood there in the midst of the vague shadows, and she felt upon her the breath of vague fears.

### XXV

The high vaults of the church were dark and mysterious. The evening chants rose toward these vaults and resounded there with

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an exultant sadness. The dark images, lit up by the yellow flickers of wax candles, looked stern and mysterious. The warm breathing of the wax and of the incense filled the air with lofty sorrow.

Eugenia Stepanovna placed a candle before the ikon of the Mother of God. Then she knelt down. But her prayer was distraught.

She looked at her candle. Its flame wavered. The shadows from the candles fell on Eugenia Stepanovna's black dress and on the floor, and rocked unsteadily. The shadows hovered on the walls of the church and lost themselves in the heights between the dark vaults, where the exultant, sad songs resounded.

### XXVI

It was another night.

Volodya awoke suddenly. The darkness enveloped him, and it stirred without sound. He freed his hands, then raised them, and followed their movements with his eyes. He did not see his hands in the darkness, but he imagined that he saw them wanly stirring before him. They were dark and mysterious,

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and they held in them the affliction and the murmur of lonely yearning.

His mother also did not sleep; her grief tormented her. She lit a candle and went quietly toward her son's room to see how he slept. She opened the door noiselessly and looked timidly at Volodya's bed.

A streak of yellow light trembled on the wall and intersected Volodya's red bed-cover. The lad stretched his arms toward the light and, with a beating heart, followed the shadows. He did not even ask himself where the light came from. He was wholly obsessed by the shadows. His eyes were fixed on the wall, and there was a gleam of madness in them.

The streak of light broadened, the shadows moved in a startled way; they were morose and hunch-backed, like homeless, roaming women who were hurrying to reach somewhere with old burdens that dragged them down.

Volodya's mother, trembling with fright, approached the bed and quietly aroused her son.

“ Volodya ! ”

Volodya came to himself. For some seconds he glanced at his mother with large eyes, then he shivered from head to foot and, springing

out of bed, fell at his mother's feet, embraced her knees, and wept.

“What dreams you do dream, Volodya!” exclaimed his mother sorrowfully.

## XXVII

“Volodya,” said his mother to him at breakfast, “you must stop it, darling; you will become a wreck if you spend your nights also with the shadows.”

The pale lad lowered his head in dejection. His lips quivered nervously.

“I'll tell you what we'll do,” continued his mother. “Perhaps we had better play a little while together with the shadows each evening, and then we will study your lessons. What do you say?”

Volodya grew somewhat animated.

“Mamma, you're a darling!” he said shyly.

## XXVIII

In the street Volodya felt drowsy and timid. The fog was spreading; it was cold and dismal. The outlines of the houses looked strange in the mist. The morose, human silhouettes



moved through the filmy atmosphere like ominous, unkindly shadows. Everything seemed so intensely unreal. The cab-horse, which stood drowsily at the street-crossing, appeared like a huge fabulous beast.

The policeman gave Volodya a hostile look. The crow on the low roof foreboded sorrow in Volodya's ear. But sorrow was already in his heart; it made him sad to note how everything was hostile to him.

A small dog with an unhealthy coat barked at him from behind a gate and Volodya felt a strange depression. And the urchins of the street seemed ready to laugh at him and to humiliate him.

In the past he would have settled scores with them as they deserved, but now fear lived in his breast; it robbed his arms of their strength and caused them to hang by his sides.

When Volodya returned home Praskovya opened the door to him, and she looked at him with moroseness and hostility. Volodya felt uneasy. He quickly went into the house, and refrained from looking at Praskovya's depressing face again.

XXIX

His mother was sitting alone. It was twilight, and she felt sad.

A light suddenly glimmered somewhere.

Volodya ran in, animated, cheerful, and with large, somewhat wild eyes.

“Mamma, the lamp has been lit ; let’s play a little.”

She smiled and followed Volodya.

“Mamma, I’ve thought of a new figure,” said Volodya excitedly, as he placed the lamp in the desired position. “Look. . . . Do you see ? This is the steppe, covered with snow, and the snow falls—a regular storm.”

Volodya raised his hands and arranged them.

“Now look, here is an old man, a wayfarer. He is up to his knees in snow. It is difficult to walk. He is alone. It is an open field. The village is far away. He is tired, he is cold ; it is terrible. He is all bent—he’s such an old man.”

Volodya’s mother helped him with his fingers.

“Oh !” exclaimed Volodya in great joy.

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“The wind is tearing his cap off, it is blowing his hair loose, it has thrown him in the snow. The drifts are getting higher. Mamma, mamma, do you hear?”

“It’s a blinding storm.”

“And he?”

“The old man?”

“Do you hear, he is moaning?”

“Help!”

Both of them, pale, were looking at the wall. Volodya’s hands shook, the old man fell.

His mother was the first to arouse herself.

“And now it’s time to work,” she said.

### XXX

It was morning. Volodya’s mother was alone. Rapt in her confused, dismal thoughts, she was walking from one room to another. Her shadow outlined itself vaguely on the white door in the light of the mist-dimmed sun. She stopped at the door and lifted her arm with a large, curious movement. The shadow on the door wavered and began to murmur something familiar and sad. A strange feeling of comfort came over Eugenia Stepanovna as she stood, a wild smile on her face, before the door and

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moved both her hands, watching the trembling shadows.

Then she heard Praskovya coming, and she realized that she was doing an absurd thing. Once more she felt afraid and sad.

“We ought to make a change,” she thought, “and go elsewhere, somewhere farther away, to a new atmosphere. We must run away from here, simply run away!”

And suddenly she remembered Volodya’s words: “There is a wall there also. The walls are everywhere.”

“There is nowhere to run!”

In her despair she wrung her pale, beautiful hands.

### XXXI

It was evening.

A lighted lamp stood on the floor in Volodya’s room. Just behind it, near the wall, sat Volodya and his mother. They were looking at the wall and were making strange movements with their hands.

Shadows stirred and trembled upon the wall.

Volodya and his mother understood them. Both were smiling sadly and were saying weird and impossible things to each other. Their



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faces were peaceful and their eyes looked clear ;  
their joyousness was hopelessly sorrowful and  
their sorrow was wildly joyous.

In their eyes was a glimmer of madness,  
blessed madness.

The night was descending upon them.

## THE GLIMMER OF HUNGER

SERGEI MATVEYEVICH MOSHKIN had dined very well that day—that is comparatively well—when you stop to consider that he was only a village schoolmaster who had lost his place, and had been knocking about already a year or so on strange stairways, in search of work. Nevertheless, the glimmer of hunger persisted in his dark, sad eyes, and it gave his lean, smooth face a kind of unlooked-for significance.

Moshkin spent his last three-rouble note on this dinner, and now a few coppers jingled in his pocket, while his purse contained a smooth fifteen-copeck piece. He banqueted out of sheer joy. He knew quite well that it was stupid to rejoice prematurely and without sufficient cause. But he had been seeking work so long, and had been having such a time of it, that even the shadow of a hope gave him joy.

Moshkin had put an advertisement in the

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*Novo Vremya*. He announced himself a pedagogue who had command of the pen; he based his claim on the fact that he corresponded for a provincial newspaper. This, indeed, was why he had lost his place; it was discovered that he had written articles reflecting unfavourably on the authorities; the chief official of the district called the attention of the inspector of public schools to this, and the inspector, of course, would not brook such doings by any of his staff.

“We don’t want that kind,” the inspector said to him in a personal interview.

Moshkin asked: “What kind do you want?”

The inspector, without replying to this irrelevant question, remarked dryly: “Good-bye. I hope to meet you in the next world.”

Moshkin stated further in his advertisement that he wished to be a secretary, a permanent collaborator on a newspaper, a private tutor; also that he was willing to accompany his employer to the Caucasus or the Crimea, and to make himself useful in the house, etc. He gave an assurance of his reasonableness, and that he had no objections to travelling.

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He waited. One postcard came. It inspired him with hope; he hardly knew why.

It came in the morning while Moshkin was drinking his tea. The landlady brought it in herself. There was a glitter in her dark, snake-like eyes as she remarked tauntingly: "Here's some correspondence for Mr. Sergei Matveyevich Moshkin."

And while he was reading she smoothed her black hair down her triangular yellow forehead, and hissed: "What's the good of getting letters? Much better if you paid for your board and lodging. A letter won't feed your hunger; you ought to go among people, look for a job and not expect things to come to you."

He read:

*"Be so good as to come in for a talk, between 6 and 7 in the evening, at Row 6, House 78, Apartment 57."*

There was no signature.

Moshkin glanced angrily at his landlady. She was broad and erect, and as she stood there at the door quite calm, with lowered arms, she was like a doll; she seemed delibe-



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rately malicious, and she looked at him with her motionless, anger-provoking eyes.

Moshkin exclaimed: "Basta!"

He hit the table with his fist. Then he rose, and paced up and down the room. He kept on repeating: "Basta!"

The landlady asked quietly and spitefully: "Are you going to pay or not, you Kazan and Astrakhan correspondent, you impudent face?"

Moshkin stopped in front of her, put out his empty palm, and said: "That's all I have."

He said nothing about his last three-rouble note. The landlady hissed: "I'm not hard on you, but I need money. Wood's seven roubles a load now, how am I to pay it? You can't live on nothing. Can't you find some one to look after you? You're a young man of ability, and you have quite a charming appearance. You can always get hold of some goose or other. But how am I to pay? Whichever way you turn you've got to put down money."

Moshkin replied: "Don't worry, Prascovia Petrovna, I am getting a job to-night, and I'll pay what I owe you."

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He began to pace the room again, making a flapping noise with his slippers.

The landlady paused at the door, and kept on with her grumbling. When she went at last, she cried out: "Another in my place would have shown you the door long ago."

For some time after she had left there still remained in his memory her strange, erect figure, with relaxed arms; her broad, yellow forehead, shaped like a triangle under her smoothly-oiled hair; her worn yellow dress, cut away like a narrow triangle, and her red, sniffing nose shaped like a small triangle. Three triangles in all.

All day long Moshkin was hungry, cheerful, and indignant. He walked aimlessly in the streets. He looked at the girls, and they all seemed to him to be lovable, happy, and accessible—to the rich. He stopped before the shop windows, where expensive goods were displayed. The glimmer of hunger in his eyes grew keener and keener.

He bought a newspaper. He read as he sat on a form in the square, where the children laughed and ran, where the nurses tried to look fashionable, where there was a smell of dust and of consumptive trees—and where

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the smells of the street and of the garden mingled unpleasantly, reminding him of the smell of gutta-percha. Moshkin was very much struck by an account in the newspaper of a hungry fanatic who had slashed a picture by a celebrated artist in the museum.

“ Now that’s something I can understand ! ”

Moshkin walked briskly along the path. He repeated : “ Now that’s something I can understand ! ”

And afterwards, as he walked in the streets and looked at the huge and stately houses, at the exposed wealth of the shops, at the elegant dress of the people of fashion, at the swiftly moving carriages, at all these beauties and comforts of life, accessible to all who have money, and inaccessible to him—as he looked and observed and envied, he felt more and more keenly the mood of destructive rage.

“ Now that’s something I can understand ! ”

He walked up to a stout and pompous house-porter, and shouted : “ Now that’s something I can understand ! ”

The porter looked at him with silent scorn. Moshkin laughed joyously, and said : “ Clever chaps those anarchists ! ”

“ Be off with you ! ” exclaimed the porter

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angrily. "And see that you don't over-eat yourself."

Moshkin was about to leave him but stopped short in fright. There was a policeman quite near, and his white gloves stood out with startling sharpness. Moshkin thought in his sadness :

"A bomb might come in handy here."

The porter spat angrily after him, and turned away.

Moshkin walked on. At six o'clock he entered a restaurant of the middle rank. He chose a table by the window. He had some vodka, and followed it with anchovies. He ordered a seventy-five copeck dinner. He had a bottle of chablis on ice; after dinner a liqueur. He got slightly intoxicated. His head went round at the sound of music. He did not take his change. He left, reeling slightly, accompanied respectfully by a porter, into whose hand he stuck a twenty-copeck piece.

He looked at his nickelled watch. It was just past seven. It was time to go. He had to make haste. They might hire another. He strode impetuously toward his destination.

He was hindered by : dug up pavements ;



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superannuated, eternally somnolent cabbies, at street crossings ; passers-by, especially *muzhiks* and women ; those who came toward him, without stepping aside at all, or who stepped aside more often to the left than to the right—while those whom he had to overtake joggled along indifferently on the narrow way, and it was hard to tell at once on which side to pass them ; beggars—these clung to him ; and the mechanical process of walking itself.

How difficult to conquer space and time when one is in a hurry ! Truly the earth drew him to itself and he purchased every step with violence and exhaustion. He felt pains in his legs. This increased his spite, and intensified the glimmer of hunger in his eyes.

Moshkin thought :

“ I'd like to chuck it all to the devil ! To all the devils ! ”

At last he got there.

Here was the Row, and here was House No. 78. It was a four-storey house, in a state of neglect ; the two approaches had a gloomy look, the gates in the middle stood wide agape. He looked at the plates at the approaches ; the first numbers were here, and

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there was no No. 57. No one was in sight. There was a white button at the gates; and on the brass plate below, buried under dirt, was the word "porter."

He pressed the button and entered the gate to look for the directory of the tenants. Before he had got that far he was met by the porter, a man of insinuating appearance, with a black beard.

"Where is apartment No. 57?"

Moshkin asked the question in a careless manner, borrowed from the district official who had caused him to lose his place. He also knew from experience that one must address porters just like this, and not like that. Wandering in strange gates and on strange staircases gives one a certain polish.

The porter asked somewhat suspiciously: "Who do you want?"

Moshkin drawled out his words with artless carelessness: "I don't exactly know. I've come in answer to an announcement. I've received a letter, but the name is not signed. Only the address is given. Who lives at No. 57?"

"Madame Engelhardova," said the porter.

"Engelhardt?" asked Moshkin.

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## GLIMMER OF HUNGER

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The porter repeated : " Engelhardova."

Moshkin smiled. " And what's her Russian name ? "

" Elena Petrovna," the porter answered.

" Is she a bad-tempered hag ? " asked Moshkin for some reason or other.

" No-o, she's a young lady. Quite stylish. Turn to the right of the gate."

" Only the first numbers are given there," said Moshkin.

The porter said : " No, you'll also find 57 there. At the very bottom."

Moshkin asked : " What does she do ? Does she run a business of some sort ? A school ? Or a journal ? "

No. Madame Engelhardova had neither a school, nor a journal.

" She lives on her capital," explained the porter.

Madame Engelhardova's maid, who looked like a village girl, led him into the drawing-room, to the right of the dark ante-room, and asked him to wait.

He waited. It was tedious and annoying. He began to examine the contents of the elaborately furnished room. There were arm-chairs, tables, stools, folding screens, fire-

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screens, book-shelves, and small columns upon which rested busts, lamps, and artistic gew-gaws; there were mirrors, lithographs, and clocks on the walls; while the windows were decorated with hangings and flowers. All these made the room crowded, oppressive and dark. Moshkin paced through this depression over the rugs. He looked at the pictures and the statues with hate.

“I'd like to chuck all this to the devil! To all the devils!”

But when the mistress of the house walked in suddenly he lowered his eyes, and hid his glimmer of hunger.

She was young, pink, and tall and quite good-looking. She walked quickly and with decision, like the mistress of a village house, and swung, not altogether gracefully, her strong, handsome white arms bared from above the elbows.

She came to him and held out her hand, a little high—to be pressed, or to be kissed, as he chose. He kissed it. There was spite in his kiss. He did it with a quick, resounding smack, and one of his teeth scratched her skin slightly, so that she winced. But she said nothing. She walked toward the divan, got



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behind the table and sat down. She showed him an armchair.

When he had seated himself, she asked him :  
“ Was that your announcement in yesterday’s paper ? ”

He said : “ Mine.”

He reconsidered, and said more politely :  
“ Yes, mine.”

He felt vexed, and he thought to himself :  
“ I’d like to send her to the devil ! ”

She went on talking. She asked him what he could do, where he had studied, where he had worked. She approached the subject very cautiously, as though afraid to say too much before the proper time.

He gathered that she wished to publish a journal—she had not yet decided what sort. Some sort. A small one. She was negotiating for the purchase of a property. Of the nature of the journal she said nothing.

She needed some one for the office. As he had said in his announcement that he was a pedagogue she thought that he had taught in one of the higher schools.

In any case, she wanted some one to keep the books in the office, to receive subscriptions, to carry on the editorial and the office corre-

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spondence, to receive money by post, to put the journals in wrappers, to send them to the post, to read proofs, and something else . . . and still something else. . . .

The young woman spoke for half an hour. She recounted the various duties in an unintelligent way.

“You need several people for all these tasks,” said Moshkin sharply.

The young woman grew red with vexation. She made a wry face as she remarked eagerly : “The journal will be a small one, of a special nature. If I hired several people for such a small undertaking they would have nothing to do.”

He smiled, and observed : “Well, anyhow there’ll be no chance for boredom. How many hours a day will you want me to work ? ”

“Well, let us say from nine in the morning until seven in the evening. Sometimes, when the work is in a hurry you might remain a little longer, or you might come in on a holiday—I believe you are free ? ”

“How much do you think of paying ? ”

“Would eighteen roubles a month be enough for you ? ”

He reflected a while, then he laughed.

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“ Too little.”

“ I can't afford more than twenty-two.”

“ Very well.”

He rose suddenly in his rage, thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out the latchkey to his house, and said quietly but resolutely : “ Hands up ! ”

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the young woman, and she quickly raised her arms.

She was sitting on the divan. She was pale and trembling.

They formed a contrast—she large and strong ; and he small and meagre.

The sleeves of her dress fell to her shoulders, and the two bare white arms, stretching upward, seemed like the plump legs of a woman acrobat practising at home. She was evidently strong enough to hold up her arms for a long time. But her frightened face betrayed the deep terror of her ordeal.

Moshkin, enjoying her plight, uttered slowly and sternly : “ Move, if you dare ! Or give a single whisper ! ”

He approached a picture.

“ How much does this cost ? ”

“ Two hundred and twenty, without the frame,” said the young woman in a trembling voice.

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He searched in his pocket and found a penknife. He cut the picture from top to bottom, and from right to left.

“ Oh ! ” the young woman cried out.

He approached a small marble head.

“ What does this cost ? ”

“ Three hundred.”

He used his latchkey, and struck off the ear and the nose, and he mutilated the cheeks. The young woman sighed quietly ; and it was pleasant to hear her quiet sighing.

He cut up a few more pictures, and the arm-chair coverings, and broke a few of the gew-gaws.

He then approached the young woman, and exclaimed : “ Get under the divan ! ”

She obeyed.

“ Lie there quietly, until some one comes. Or else I'll throw a bomb.”

He left. He met no one, either in the ante-room, or on the stairs.

The same house-porter stood at the gates. Moshkin went up to him and said : “ What a strange young lady you have in your house.”

“ Why ? ”

“ She doesn't know how to behave. She loves a brawl. You had better go to her.”



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“No use my going as long as I’m not called.”

“Just as you please.”

He left. The glimmer of hunger grew fainter in his eyes.

Moshkin continued to walk the streets. His mind realized in a slow, dull way the drawing-room scene, the mutilated pictures, and the young woman under the divan.

The dull waters of the canal lured him. The receding light of the setting sun made their surface beautiful and sad, like the music of a mad composer. How rough the stone slabs were on the canal’s banks, and how dusty the stones of the pavements, and what stupid and dirty children ran to meet him! Everything seemed shut against him and everything seemed hostile to him.

The green, golden waters of the canal lured him, and the glimmer of hunger in his eyes went out for ever.

What a noise the swift splash of water made, as ring after ring, dead black rings, spread out and out, and cut the green golden waters of the canal.

# HIDE AND SEEK

## I

EVERYTHING in Lelechka's nursery was bright, pretty, and cheerful. Lelechka's sweet voice charmed her mother. Lelechka was a delightful child. There was no other such child, there never had been, and there never would be. Lelechka's mother, Serafima Alexandrovna, was sure of that. Lelechka's eyes were dark and large, her cheeks were rosy, her lips were made for kisses and for laughter. But it was not these charms in Lelechka that gave her mother the keenest joy. Lelechka was her mother's only child. That was why every movement of Lelechka's bewitched her mother. It was great bliss to hold Lelechka on her knees and to fondle her; to feel the little girl in her arms—a thing as lively and as bright as a little bird.

To tell the truth, Serafima Alexandrovna felt happy only in the nursery. She felt cold with her husband.

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Perhaps it was because he himself loved the cold—he loved to drink cold water, and to breathe cold air. He was always fresh and cool, with a frigid smile, and wherever he passed cold currents seemed to move in the air.

The Nesletyevs, Sergei Modestovich and Serafima Alexandrovna, had married without love or calculation, because it was the accepted thing. He was a young man of thirty-five, she a young woman of twenty-five; both were of the same circle and well brought up; he was expected to take a wife, and the time had come for her to take a husband.

It even seemed to Serafima Alexandrovna that she was in love with her future husband, and this made her happy. He looked handsome and well-bred; his intelligent grey eyes always preserved a dignified expression; and he fulfilled his obligations of a fiancé with irreproachable gentleness.

The bride was also good-looking; she was a tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, somewhat timid but very tactful. He was not after her dowry, though it pleased him to know that she had something. He had connexions, and his wife came of good, influential people. This might, at the proper opportunity, prove useful.

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Always irreproachable and tactful, Nesletyev got on in his position not so fast that any one should envy him, nor yet so slow that he should envy any one else—everything came in the proper measure and at the proper time.

After their marriage there was nothing in the manner of Sergei Modestovich to suggest anything wrong to his wife. Later, however, when his wife was about to have a child, Sergei Modestovich established connexions elsewhere of a light and temporary nature. Serafima Alexandrovna found this out, and, to her own astonishment, was not particularly hurt; she awaited her infant with a restless anticipation that swallowed every other feeling.

A little girl was born; Serafima Alexandrovna gave herself up to her. At the beginning she used to tell her husband, with rapture, of all the joyous details of Lelechka's existence. But she soon found that he listened to her without the slightest interest, and only from the habit of politeness. Serafima Alexandrovna drifted farther and farther away from him. She loved her little girl with the ungratified passion that other women, deceived in their husbands, show their chance young lovers.



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“*Mamochka*, let’s play *priatki*,” (hide and seek), cried Lelechka, pronouncing the *r* like the *l*, so that the word sounded “*pliatki*.”

This charming inability to speak always made Serafima Alexandrovna smile with tender rapture. Lelechka then ran away, stamping with her plump little legs over the carpets, and hid herself behind the curtains near her bed.

“*Tiu-tiu, mamochka!*” she cried out in her sweet, laughing voice, as she looked out with a single roguish eye.

“Where is my baby girl?” the mother asked, as she looked for Lelechka and made believe that she did not see her.

And Lelechka poured out her rippling laughter in her hiding place. Then she came out a little farther, and her mother, as though she had only just caught sight of her, seized her by her little shoulders and exclaimed joyously: “Here she is, my Lelechka!”

Lelechka laughed long and merrily, her head close to her mother’s knees, and all of her cuddled up between her mother’s white hands. Her mother’s eyes glowed with passionate emotion.

“Now, *mamochka*, you hide,” said Lelechka, as she ceased laughing.

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Her mother went to hide. Lelechka turned away as though not to see, but watched her *mamochka* stealthily all the time. Mamma hid behind the cupboard, and exclaimed: “*Tiu-tiu*, baby girl!”

Lelechka ran round the room and looked into all the corners, making believe, as her mother had done before, that she was seeking—though she really knew all the time where her *mamochka* was standing.

“Where’s my *mamochka*?” asked Lelechka. “She’s not here, and she’s not here,” she kept on repeating, as she ran from corner to corner.

Her mother stood, with suppressed breathing, her head pressed against the wall, her hair somewhat disarranged. A smile of absolute bliss played on her red lips.

The nurse, Fedosya, a good-natured and fine-looking, if somewhat stupid woman, smiled as she looked at her mistress with her characteristic expression, which seemed to say that it was not for her to object to gentlewomen’s caprices. She thought to herself: “The mother is like a little child herself—look how excited she is.”

Lelechka was getting nearer her mother’s corner. Her mother was growing more ab-

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sorbed every moment by her interest in the game ; her heart beat with short quick strokes, and she pressed even closer to the wall, disarranging her hair still more. Lelechka suddenly glanced toward her mother's corner and screamed with joy.

"I've found 'oo," she cried out loudly and joyously, mispronouncing her words in a way that again made her mother happy.

She pulled her mother by her hands to the middle of the room, they were merry and they laughed ; and Lelechka again hid her head against her mother's knees, and went on lisping and lisping, without end, her sweet little words, so fascinating yet so awkward.

Sergei Modestovich was coming at this moment toward the nursery. Through the half-closed doors he heard the laughter, the joyous outcries, the sound of romping. He entered the nursery, smiling his genial cold smile ; he was irreproachably dressed, and he looked fresh and erect, and he spread round him an atmosphere of cleanliness, freshness and coldness. He entered in the midst of the lively game, and he confused them all by his radiant coldness. Even Fedosya felt abashed, now for her mistress, now for herself. Sera-



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fima Alexandrovna at once became calm and apparently cold—and this mood communicated itself to the little girl, who ceased to laugh, but looked instead, silently and intently, at her father.

Sergei Modestovich gave a swift glance round the room. He liked coming here, where everything was beautifully arranged; this was done by Serafima Alexandrovna, who wished to surround her little girl, from her very infancy, only with the loveliest things. Serafima Alexandrovna dressed herself tastefully; this, too, she did for Lelechka, with the same end in view. One thing Sergei Modestovich had not become reconciled to, and this was his wife's almost continuous presence in the nursery.

“It's just as I thought. . . . I knew that I'd find you here,” he said with a derisive and condescending smile.

They left the nursery together. As he followed his wife through the door Sergei Modestovich said rather indifferently, in an incidental way, laying no stress on his words: “Don't you think that it would be well for the little girl if she were sometimes without your company? Merely, you see, that the



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child should feel its own individuality," he explained in answer to Serafima Alexandrovna's puzzled glance.

"She's still so little," said Serafima Alexandrovna.

"In any case, this is but my humble opinion. I don't insist. It's your kingdom there."

"I'll think it over," his wife answered, smiling, as he did, coldly but genially.

Then they began to talk of something else.

## II

Nurse Fedosya, sitting in the kitchen that evening, was telling the silent housemaid Darya and the talkative old cook Agathya about the young lady of the house, and how the child loved to play *priatki* with her mother—"She hides her little face, and cries 'tiu-tiu'!"

"And the *barinya* \* herself is like a little one," added Fedosya, smiling.

Agathya listened and shook her head ominously; while her face became grave and reproachful.

\* Gentlewoman.

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“That the *barinya* does it, well, that’s one thing; but that the young lady does it, that’s bad.”

“Why?” asked Fedosya with curiosity.

This expression of curiosity gave her face the look of a wooden, roughly-painted doll.

“Yes, that’s bad,” repeated Agathya with conviction. “Terribly bad!”

“Well?” said Fedosya, the ludicrous expression of curiosity on her face becoming more emphatic.

“She’ll hide, and hide, and hide away,” said Agathya, in a mysterious whisper, as she looked cautiously toward the door.

“What are you saying?” exclaimed Fedosya, frightened.

“It’s the truth I’m saying, remember my words,” Agathya went on with the same assurance and secrecy. “It’s the surest sign.”

The old woman had invented this sign, quite suddenly, herself; and she was evidently very proud of it.

### III

Lelechka was asleep, and Serafima Alexandrovna was sitting in her own room, thinking

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with joy and tenderness of Lelechka. Lelechka was in her thoughts, first a sweet, tiny girl, then a sweet, big girl, then again a delightful little girl; and so until the end she remained mamma's little Lelechka.

Serafima Alexandrovna did not even notice that Fedosya came up to her and paused before her. Fedosya had a worried, frightened look.

"*Barinya, barinya,*" she said quietly, in a trembling voice.

Serafima Alexandrovna gave a start. Fedosya's face made her anxious.

"What is it, Fedosya?" she asked with great concern. "Is there anything wrong with Lelechka?"

"No, *barinya,*" said Fedosya, as she gesticulated with her hands to reassure her mistress and to make her sit down. "Lelechka is asleep, may God be with her! Only I'd like to say something—you see—Lelechka is always hiding herself—that's not good."

Fedosya looked at her mistress with fixed eyes, which had grown round from fright.

"Why not good?" asked Serafima Alexandrovna, with vexation, succumbing involuntarily to vague fears.

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“ I can’t tell you how bad it is,” said Fedosya, and her face expressed the most decided confidence.

“ Please speak in a sensible way,” observed Serafima Alexandrovna dryly. “ I understand nothing of what you are saying.”

“ You see, *barinya*, it’s a kind of omen,” explained Fedosya abruptly, in a shamefaced way.

“ Nonsense ! ” said Serafima Alexandrovna.

She did not wish to hear any further as to the sort of omen it was, and what it foreboded. But, somehow, a sense of fear and of sadness crept into her mood, and it was humiliating to feel that an absurd tale should disturb her beloved fancies, and should agitate her so deeply.

“ Of course I know that gentlefolk don’t believe in omens, but it’s a bad omen, *barinya*,” Fedosya went on in a doleful voice, “ the young lady will hide, and hide . . . ”

Suddenly she burst into tears, sobbing out loudly : “ She’ll hide, and hide, and hide away, angelic little soul, in a damp grave,” she continued, as she wiped her tears with her apron and blew her nose.

“ Who told you all this ? ” asked Serafima Alexandrovna in an austere low voice.



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“Agathya says so, *barinya*,” answered Fedosya; “it’s she that knows.”

“Knows!” exclaimed Serafima Alexandrovna in irritation, as though she wished to protect herself somehow from this sudden anxiety. “What nonsense! Please don’t come to me with any such notions in the future. Now you may go.”

Fedosya, dejected, her feelings hurt, left her mistress.

“What nonsense! As though Lelechka could die!” thought Serafima Alexandrovna to herself, trying to conquer the feeling of coldness and fear which took possession of her at the thought of the possible death of Lelechka. Serafima Alexandrovna, upon reflection, attributed these women’s beliefs in omens to ignorance. She saw clearly that there could be no possible connexion between a child’s quite ordinary diversion and the continuation of the child’s life. She made a special effort that evening to occupy her mind with other matters, but her thoughts returned involuntarily to the fact that Lelechka loved to hide herself.

When Lelechka was still quite small, and had learned to distinguish between her mother

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and her nurse, she sometimes, sitting in her nurse's arms, made a sudden roguish grimace, and hid her laughing face in the nurse's shoulder. Then she would look out with a sly glance.

Of late, in those rare moments of the *barinya's* absence from the nursery, Fedosya had again taught Lelechka to hide ; and when Lelechka's mother, on coming in, saw how lovely the child looked when she was hiding, she herself began to play hide and seek with her tiny daughter.

### IV

The next day Serafima Alexandrovna, absorbed in her joyous cares for Lelechka, had forgotten Fedosya's words of the day before.

But when she returned to the nursery, after having ordered the dinner, and she heard Lelechka suddenly cry "*Tiu-tiu!*" from under the table, a feeling of fear suddenly took hold of her. Though she reproached herself at once for this unfounded, superstitious dread, nevertheless she could not enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of Lelechka's favourite game,

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and she tried to divert Lelechka's attention to something else.

Lelechka was a lovely and obedient child. She eagerly complied with her mother's new wishes. But as she had got into the habit of hiding from her mother in some corner, and of crying out "*Tiu-tiu!*" so even that day she returned more than once to the game.

Serafima Alexandrovna tried desperately to amuse Lelechka. This was not so easy because restless, threatening thoughts obtruded themselves constantly.

"Why does Lelechka keep on recalling the *tiu-tiu*? Why does she not get tired of the same thing—of eternally closing her eyes, and of hiding her face? Perhaps," thought Serafima Alexandrovna, "she is not as strongly drawn to the world as other children, who are attracted by many things. If this is so, is it not a sign of organic weakness? Is it not a germ of the unconscious non-desire to live?"

Serafima Alexandrovna was tormented by presentiments. She felt ashamed of herself for ceasing to play hide and seek with Lelechka before Fedosya. But this game had become agonizing to her, all the more agonizing because she had a real desire to play it, and because

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something drew her very strongly to hide herself from Lelechka and to seek out the hiding child. Serafima Alexandrovna herself began the game once or twice, though she played it with a heavy heart. She suffered as though committing an evil deed with full consciousness.

It was a sad day for Serafima Alexandrovna.

### V

Lelechka was about to fall asleep. No sooner had she climbed into her little bed, protected by a network on all sides, than her eyes began to close from fatigue. Her mother covered her with a blue blanket. Lelechka drew her sweet little hands from under the blanket and stretched them out to embrace her mother. Her mother bent down. Lelechka, with a tender expression on her sleepy face, kissed her mother and let her head fall on the pillow. As her hands hid themselves under the blanket Lelechka whispered: "The hands *tiu-tiu!*"

The mother's heart seemed to stop—Lelechka lay there so small, so frail, so quiet. Lelechka



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smiled gently, closed her eyes and said quietly: "The eyes *tiu-tiu!*"

Then even more quietly: "Lelechka *tiu-tiu!*"

With these words she fell asleep, her face pressing the pillow. She seemed so small and so frail under the blanket that covered her. Her mother looked at her with sad eyes.

Serafima Alexandrovna remained standing over Lelechka's bed a long while, and she kept looking at Lelechka with tenderness and fear.

"I'm a mother: is it possible that I shouldn't be able to protect her?" she thought, as she imagined the various ills that might befall Lelechka.

She prayed long that night, but the prayer did not relieve her sadness.

## VI

Several days passed. Lelechka caught cold. The fever came upon her at night. When Serafima Alexandrovna, awakened by Fedosya, came to Lelechka and saw her looking so hot,

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so restless, and so tormented, she instantly recalled the evil omen, and a hopeless despair took possession of her from the first moments.

A doctor was called, and everything was done that is usual on such occasions—but the inevitable happened. Serafima Alexandrovna tried to console herself with the hope that Lelechka would get well, and would again laugh and play—yet this seemed to her an unthinkable happiness! And Lelechka grew feebler from hour to hour.

All simulated tranquillity, so as not to frighten Serafima Alexandrovna, but their masked faces only made her sad.

Nothing made her so unhappy as the reiterations of Fedosya, uttered between sobs: “She hid herself and hid herself, our Lelechka!”

But the thoughts of Serafima Alexandrovna were confused, and she could not quite grasp what was happening.

Fever was consuming Lelechka, and there were times when she lost consciousness and spoke in delirium. But when she returned to herself she bore her pain and her fatigue with gentle good nature; she smiled feebly at her *mamochka*, so that her *mamochka* should

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not see how much she suffered. Three days passed, torturing like a nightmare. Lelechka grew quite feeble. She did not know that she was dying.

She glanced at her mother with her dimmed eyes, and lisped in a scarcely audible, hoarse voice: “*Tiu-tiu, mamochka! Make tiu-tiu, mamochka!*”

Serafima Alexandrovna hid her face behind the curtains near Lelechka’s bed. How tragic!

“*Mamochka!*” called Lelechka in an almost inaudible voice.

Lelechka’s mother bent over her, and Lelechka, her vision grown still more dim, saw her mother’s pale, despairing face for the last time.

“A white *mamochka!*” whispered Lelechka.

*Mamochka’s* white face became blurred, and everything grew dark before Lelechka. She caught the edge of the bed-cover feebly with her hands and whispered: “*Tiu-tiu!*”

Something rattled in her throat; Lelechka opened and again closed her rapidly paling lips, and died.

Serafima Alexandrovna was in dumb despair as she left Lelechka, and went out of the room. She met her husband.

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“Lelechka is dead,” she said in a quiet, dull voice.

Sergei Modestovich looked anxiously at her pale face. He was struck by the strange stupor in her formerly animated handsome features.

### VII

Lelechka was dressed, placed in a little coffin, and carried into the parlour. Serafima Alexandrovna was standing by the coffin and looking dully at her dead child. Sergei Modestovich went to his wife and, consoling her with cold, empty words, tried to draw her away from the coffin. Serafima Alexandrovna smiled.

“Go away,” she said quietly. “Lelechka is playing. She’ll be up in a minute.”

“Sima, my dear, don’t agitate yourself,” said Sergei Modestovich in a whisper. “You must resign yourself to your fate.”

“She’ll be up in a minute,” persisted Serafima Alexandrovna, her eyes fixed on the dead little girl.

Sergei Modestovich looked round him cautiously: he was afraid of the unseemly and of the ridiculous.



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“Sima, don’t agitate yourself,” he repeated. “This would be a miracle, and miracles do not happen in the nineteenth century.”

No sooner had he said these words than Sergei Modestovich felt their irrelevance to what had happened. He was confused and annoyed.

He took his wife by the arm, and cautiously led her away from the coffin. She did not oppose him.

Her face seemed tranquil and her eyes were dry. She went into the nursery and began to walk round the room, looking into those places where Lelechka used to hide herself. She walked all about the room, and bent now and then to look under the table or under the bed, and kept on repeating cheerfully : “Where is my little one ? Where is my Lelechka ? ”

After she had walked round the room once she began to make her quest anew. Fedosya, motionless, with dejected face, sat in a corner, and looked frightened at her mistress ; then she suddenly burst out sobbing, and she wailed loudly :

“She hid herself, and hid herself, our Lelechka, our angelic little soul ! ”

Serafima Alexandrovna trembled, paused,

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cast a perplexed look at Fedosya, began to weep, and left the nursery quietly.

### VIII

Sergei Modestovich hurried the funeral. He saw that Serafima Alexandrovna was terribly shocked by her sudden misfortune, and as he feared for her reason he thought she would more readily be diverted and consoled when Lelechka was buried.

Next morning Serafima Alexandrovna dressed with particular care—for Lelechka. When she entered the parlour there were several people between her and Lelechka. The priest and deacon paced up and down the room; clouds of blue smoke drifted in the air, and there was a smell of incense. There was an oppressive feeling of heaviness in Serafima Alexandrovna's head as she approached Lelechka. Lelechka lay there still and pale, and smiled pathetically. Serafima Alexandrovna laid her cheek upon the edge of Lelechka's coffin, and whispered: "*Tiu-tiu*, little one!"

The little one did not reply. Then there was some kind of stir and confusion around

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Serafima Alexandrovna ; strange, unnecessary faces bent over her, some one held her—and Lelechka was carried away somewhere.

Serafima Alexandrovna stood up erect, sighed in a lost way, smiled, and called loudly :  
“ Lelechka ! ”

Lelechka was being carried out. The mother threw herself after the coffin with despairing sobs, but she was held back. She sprang behind the door, through which Lelechka had passed, sat down there on the floor, and as she looked through the crevice, she cried out :  
“ Lelechka, *tiu-tiu* ! ”

Then she put her head out from behind the door, and began to laugh.

Lelechka was quickly carried away from her mother, and those who carried her seemed to run rather than to walk.

## THE SMILE

### I

SOME fifteen boys and girls and several young men and women had gathered in the garden belonging to the Semiboyarinov cottage to celebrate the birthday of one of the sons of the house, Lesha by name, a student of the second class. Lesha's birthday was made indeed an occasion for bringing eligible young men to the house for his grown sisters' sake.

All were merry and smiling—the older members of the party as well as the young boys and girls, who ran up and down the yellow sand of the well-kept footpaths; a pale, unimpressive boy, who was sitting alone on a bench under a lilac bush and looking silently at the other boys, was also smiling. His loneliness, his silence, and his well-worn though clean clothes, all pointed to his poverty and to his embarrassment in the company of these lively, well-dressed children. His face was



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## THE SMILE

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timid and thin, his chest sunken, and his lean hands lay so meekly that it aroused one's pity to look at him. Still, he smiled; but even his smile seemed pitiful; it was as though it depressed him to watch the games and the happiness of other children, or as though he were [afraid to annoy others by his sad looks and his poor dress.

He was called Grisha Igumnov. His father had died not long ago; Grisha's mother occasionally sent her son to her rich relatives with whom he always felt depressed and uneasy.

"Why do you sit alone? Get up and run about!" said the blue-eyed Lydochka Semi-boyarinov as she passed him.

Grisha did not dare to disobey; his heart beat violently, his face became covered with small beads of perspiration. He approached the happy, red-cheeked boys timidly. They looked at him unfriendlily as at a stranger, and Grisha himself felt at once that he was not like them: he could not speak so boldly and so loudly; and he had neither such yellow boots, nor such a round little cap with a woolly red visor turned jauntily upwards as the boy nearest to him had.

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## THE SMILE

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The boys continued to talk among themselves as though there were no Grisha. Grisha stood near them in an uneasy pose; his thin shoulders stooped somewhat, his slender fingers held fast to his narrow girdle, and he smiled timidly. He did not know what to do, and in his confusion did not hear what the lively boys were saying. They finished their conversation and scattered suddenly. Grisha, his timid, guilty smile still on his face, walked back uneasily on the sandy path and sat down once more on the bench. He was ashamed because he had walked up to the boys, yet had not spoken to any one, and because nothing had come of it. As he sat down he looked timidly round him—no one paid him the slightest attention, and no one laughed at him. Grisha grew calm.

Just then two little girls, their arms round each other, passed him. Under their fixed stare Grisha shrank, grew red, and smiled guiltily.

When the little girls had passed by the youngest of them, with fair hair, asked loudly: "Who's this ugly duckling?"

The elder girl, who was red-cheeked and black-browed, laughed and answered: "I

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## THE SMILE

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don't know. We had better ask Lydochka. It's most likely a poor relation."

"What an absurd boy," said the little blonde. "He spreads his ears out, and sits there and smiles."

They disappeared behind the bushes at the turn of the path, and Grisha no longer heard their voices. He felt hurt, and when he thought that he might have to sit there a long time, until his mother should come for him, he was sick at heart.

A big-eyed, slender student with a stubborn crest of hair sticking up from his high forehead noticed that Grisha was sitting alone there like an orphan, and he wished to be kind to him, and to make him feel more at his ease; so he sat down near him.

"What's your name?" he asked.

Grisha told him quietly.

"And my name is Mitya," said the student. "Are you here alone, or with any one?"

"With mother," whispered Grisha.

"Why do you sit here all by yourself?" asked Mitya.

Grisha stirred nervously, and did not know what to say.

"Why don't you play?"

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## THE SMILE

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“ I don't want to.”

Mitya did not hear him so he asked :  
“ What did you say ? ”

“ I don't feel like it,” said Grisha somewhat more loudly.

The student, astonished, continued : “ Why don't you feel like it ? ”

Grisha again did not know what to say ; he smiled in a lost way. Mitya was looking at him attentively. Glances of strangers always embarrassed Grisha ; it was as though he feared that they might find something absurd in his appearance.

Mitya was silent for a while, as he thought of something else that he might ask.

“ What do you collect ? ” he asked.  
“ You've got a collection of something, haven't you ? We all collect : I—stamps, Katya Pokrivalova—shells, Lesha—butterflies. What do you collect ? ”

“ Nothing,” said Grisha, flushing.

“ Well, well,” said Mitya with artless astonishment. “ So you collect nothing ! That's very curious.”

Grisha felt ashamed that he was not collecting anything, and that he had disclosed the fact.



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## THE SMILE

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“I, too, must collect something!” he thought to himself, but he could not decide to say this aloud.

Mitya sat a little longer, then left him. Grisha felt a relief. But a new ordeal was in store for him.

The nurse engaged by the Semiboyarinovs for their youngest son was strolling along the garden paths with the one-year-old child in her arms. She wished to rest, and chose the same bench upon which Grisha was sitting. He again felt uneasy. He looked straight before him, and could not even decide to move away from the nurse to the other end of the bench.

The infant's attention soon became drawn to Grisha's protruding ears, and he leant forward towards one of them. The nurse, a robust, red-cheeked woman, concluded that Grisha would not mind. She brought her charge nearer to Grisha, and the pink infant caught Grisha's ear with his fat little hand. Grisha was paralysed with confusion, but could not decide to protest. The child, laughing loudly and merrily, now let go Grisha's ear, now caught hold of it again. The red-cheeked nurse, who enjoyed the game not less than the

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## THE SMILE

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infant, kept on repeating: "Let's go for him! Let's give it to him!"

One of the boys saw the scene, and told the other boys that little Georgik was obstreperous with the quiet boy who was sitting so long on the bench. The children gathered round Georgik and Grisha, and laughed noisily. Grisha tried to show that he didn't mind, that he felt no pain, and that he also enjoyed the fun. But it grew harder and harder for him to smile, and he had a very strong desire to cry. He knew that he ought not to cry, that it was a disgrace, and he restrained himself with an effort.

Happily he was soon delivered. The blue-eyed Lydochka, upon hearing the children's boisterous laughter, went to see what had happened. She reproached the nurse: "Aren't you ashamed to go on like this?"

She herself had difficulty to keep from laughing at Grisha's pitiful, confused face. But she restrained herself, and upheld her dignity as a grown young woman before the nurse and the children.

The nurse rose and said, laughing: "Georginka did it quite gently. The boy himself didn't say that it hurt him."

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## THE SMILE

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“You mustn’t do such things,” said Lydochka sternly.

Georgik, unhappy because they had taken him away from Grisha, raised a cry. Lydochka took him in her arms and carried him away to quiet him. The nurse followed her. But the boys and the girls remained. They thronged round Grisha and eyed him unceremoniously.

“Perhaps he’s got stuck-on ears,” suggested one of the boys, “that’s why he doesn’t feel any pain.”

“I rather think you like to be held by your ears,” said another.

“Tell us,” said the little girl with the large blue eyes, “which ear does your mother catch hold of most?”

“His ears have been stretched out to order in a workshop,” cried a merry youngster, and laughed loudly at his own joke.

“No,” another corrected him, “he was born like that. When he was very small he was led not by his hand but by his ear.”

Grisha looked at his tormentors like a small beast at bay, with a fixed smile on his face, when, suddenly, wholly unexpectedly to the cheerful company, he burst into tears. Many

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## THE SMILE

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small drops fell on his jacket. The children grew quiet at once. They became uneasy. They exchanged embarrassed glances, and looked silently at Grisha as he wiped the tears from his face with his thin hands; he appeared to be ashamed of his tears.

“Why should he be offended?” said the beautiful, flaxen-haired Katya angrily. “Who’s done him any harm? The ugly duckling!”

“He’s not an ugly duckling. You’re an ugly duckling yourself,” intervened Mitya.

“I can’t stand rude people,” said Katya, growing red with vexation.

A little, brown-faced girl in a red dress looked long at Grisha, and knitted her brows as in reflection. Then she scanned the other children with her perplexed eyes, and asked quietly:

“Why then did he smile?”

## II

It was not often that Grisha’s wardrobe received important additions. His mother could not afford it; hence, every item gave Grisha great joy. The autumn cold came, and Grisha’s mother bought an overcoat, a



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## THE SMILE

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hat and mittens. The mittens pleased Grisha more than anything else.

On the holiday, after Mass, he put on his new things and went out to play. He loved to walk about in the streets, and he used to go out alone; his mother had no time to go out with him. She looked proudly out of the window as Grisha walked gravely by. She recalled at that moment her well-to-do relatives who had promised her so much, and had done so little, and she thought: "Well, I've managed it without them, thank God!"

It was a cold, clear day; the sun did not shine with its full brightness; the waters of the canals in the city were covered with their first thin ice. Grisha walked the streets, rejoicing in this brisk cold, in his new clothes, and with his naïve fancies; he always loved to dream when he was alone, and he dreamt always of great deeds, of fame, of a bright, happy life in a rich house, indeed of everything that was unlike the sad reality.

As Grisha stood on the bank of the canal and looked through the iron railings at the thin ice that floated on the surface, he was approached by a street urchin in threadbare

## THE SMILE

attire, and with hands red from the cold. He entered into conversation with Grisha. Grisha was not afraid of him, and even pitied him because of his benumbed hands. His new acquaintance informed him that he was called Mishka, but that his family name was Babushkin, because he and his mother lived with his *babushka*.\*

“But then what is your mother’s family name?”

“My mother’s name?” repeated Mishka, smiling. “She’s called Matushkin, because my *babushka* is no *babushka* to her, but is her *matushka*.” †

“That’s strange,” said Grisha with astonishment. “My mother and I have one family name; we are called the Igumnovs.”

“That’s because,” explained Mishka with animation, “your grandfather was an *igumen*.” ‡

“No,” said Grisha, “my grandfather was a colonel.”

“All the same it’s likely that his father, or some one else was an *igumen*, and so you have all become the Igumnovs.”

Grisha did not know who his great-grand-

\* Grandfather.

† Mother.

‡ An abbot,

*Grandmother*

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## THE SMILE

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father was, so he said nothing. Mishka kept on eyeing his mittens.

“You have handsome mittens,” he said.

“New ones,” Grisha explained, with a joyous smile. “It’s the first time I’ve put them on; d’you see, here is a little string drawn through!”

“Well, you’re a lucky one! And are they quite warm?”

“Rather!”

“I have also mittens at home, but I haven’t put them on because I don’t like them. They are yellow, and I don’t like yellow ones. Let me put yours on, and I’ll run along and show them to my *babushka*, and ask her to get me a pair like them.”

Mishka looked at Grisha pleadingly, and his eyes sparkled enviously.

“You won’t keep me waiting long?” asked Grisha.

“No, I live quite near here, just round the corner. Don’t be afraid! Upon my word, in a minute!”

Grisha trustfully took off his mittens and gave them to Mishka.

“I’ll be back in a minute, wait here, don’t go away,” exclaimed Mishka, as he ran off

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## THE SMILE

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with Grisha's mittens. He disappeared round the corner, and Grisha was left waiting. He did not imagine that Mishka would fool him; he thought that he would simply run home, show his mittens, and return with them. He stood there long and waited, and Mishka did not even dream of returning.

The short autumn day was already darkening; Grisha's mother, restless because of her boy's long absence, went out to look for him. Grisha at last understood that Mishka would not return. The poor boy turned sadly toward home and he met his mother.

"Grisha, what have you done with yourself?" she asked, angry and glad at finding her son.

Grisha did not reply. He seemed embarrassed as he rubbed his hands, red with cold. His mother then noticed that he did not wear his mittens.

"Where are your mittens?" she asked angrily, as she searched his overcoat pockets.

Grisha smiled and said: "I lent them to a boy for a short time, and he didn't bring them back."



## III

Years passed after years. The lively and brave children who once had gathered on Lesha Semiboyarinov's birthday became lively and brave men and women, and the urchin who had fooled Grisha, it goes without saying, found his way in life—while Grisha, of course, became a failure. As in his childhood, he went on dreaming, and in his dreams he conquered his kingdom; but in real life he could not protect himself from any enterprising person who pushed him unceremoniously out of his way. His relations with women were equally unsuccessful, and his faint-hearted attentions were not once rewarded by a responsive feeling. He had no friends. His mother alone loved him.

Igumnov rejoiced when he found a position at a small salary, because his mother could live calmly now without worrying about a crust of bread. But his happiness was of short duration; soon his mother died. Grisha fell into depression, lost his spirits. Life seemed to him to be aimless. Apathy took hold of him; he had no interest in his work. He lost his place, and was soon in great need.

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## THE SMILE

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Igumnov finally pawned his last possession, his mother's ring; as he walked out of the place he smiled—and his smile kept him from bursting into tears of self-pity.

He had to see various people and to ask them for work. But Igumnov was not good at this. He was backward and quiet, and he experienced a helpless confusion that prevented him from persisting in his dealings with men. While yet on the stairway of a man's house a fear would seize him, his heart would beat painfully, his legs would grow heavy, and his hand would stretch toward the bell irresolutely.

During one of his most depressing and hungry days Igumnov sat in the sumptuous private office of Aleksei Stepanovich Semiboyarinov, the father of the same Lesha whose birthday party remained memorable to him. Igumnov had already sent a letter to Aleksei Stepanovich: after all it was much easier to ask on paper than by word of mouth. And now he came for his answer.

From the restless, solicitous manner of Semiboyarinov, a small, dry, old man, with closely-cut, silver-grey hair, he guessed that he would have a refusal. This made him feel

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## THE SMILE

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wretched, but he could not help smiling an artless pleasant smile, as though he wished to show that it did not matter in the least, that he really did not count on anything. The smile evidently irritated Semiboyarinov.

“I’ve got your letter, my dear fellow,” said he at last in his dry, deliberate voice. “But there’s nothing that I can see just now.”

“Nothing?” mumbled Igumnov, growing red.

“Absolutely nothing, my dear fellow. Every place is taken. And I don’t see anything in prospect for the near future. Perhaps something might be done for you at New Year.”

“I’ll be glad of a chance even then,” said Igumnov, smiling in such a way as to suggest that a mere eight months was of no account to him.

“Yes, I’ll be very glad to do something then. If it depended upon me you’d get your place to-day. I’d like very much to be of use to you, my good man.”

“Thank you,” said Igumnov.

“But tell me,” asked Semiboyarinov sympathetically, “why did you leave your old place?”

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## THE SMILE

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“They found no use for me,” answered Igumnov, confused.

“No use for you? Well, I hope we’ll find some use for you. Let me have your address, my good fellow.”

Semiboyarinov began to rummage on his table for a piece of paper. Igumnov just then caught sight of his own letter under a marble paper-weight.

“My address is in the letter,” he said.

“So it is!” said his host briskly. “I’ll make a note of it.”

“I have the habit,” observed Igumnov, rising from his place, “always to write my address at the beginning of a letter.”

“A European habit,” commended his host.

Igumnov took his leave and went out smiling, proud of his European habits, which, however, did not prevent him from feeling hungry. He was almost glad that the unpleasant conversation was at an end. He recalled all the polite words, and especially those that contained the promise; foolish hopes awakened in him. But a few minutes later, as he was walking in the street, he realized that the promise would come to nothing. Besides, it was made for the future, and he had need of food now,



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## THE SMILE

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and he must go to his lodgings with a heavy heart—what would his landlady say? What could he say to her?

Igumnov began to walk more slowly, then he turned in the opposite direction. Lost in gloom, he walked on, pale and hungry, through the noisy streets of the capital, past busy satiated people. His smile vanished. The look of dark despair gave a certain significance to his usually little expressive features.

He was now close to the Niva. The huge dome of the Isakiyevski Cathedral glowed golden in the wide expanse of blue sky. The large open squares and streets were enveloped in the gentle, scarcely perceptible, dust-like haze of the rays of the setting sun. The din of carriages was softened in these magnificent open spaces. Everything seemed strange and hostile to the hungry, helpless man. The beautiful, rich-coloured fruits behind the shop windows could not have been more inaccessible if they were under the watch of a strong guard.

Children were playing merrily in the green square. Igumnov looked at them and smiled. Unpleasant memories of his own childhood tormented him with an intense pity for himself. He reflected that it was only left

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## THE SMILE

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to him to die. The thought frightened him. And again he reflected: "Why shouldn't I die? Wasn't there a time when I did not exist? I shall have rest, eternal oblivion."

Fragments of wise strange thoughts came to him and soothed him.

Igumnov was now on the embankment. He leant against the granite parapet and watched the restless waters of the river. A single move, he thought, and everything would be ended. But it was terrible to think of drowning, of struggling with one's mouth full of water, of being strangled by these heavy, cold sweeps of water, of battling helplessly, and of at last sinking from sheer exhaustion to the bottom, there to be carried by the undercurrents, and at last to be cast out, a shapeless corpse, upon some coast of the sea.

Igumnov shivered and moved away from the river. He suddenly espied not far away his former colleague Kurkov. Smartly dressed, cheerful and self-satisfied, Kurkov was walking slowly and swinging a thin cane with a fancy handle.

"Ah, Grigory Petrovich!" he exclaimed, as though he were glad of the meeting. "Are you strolling, or are you on business?"

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## THE SMILE

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“ Yes, I’m strolling, that is on business,” said Igumnov.

“ I think we are going the same way ? ”

They walked on together. Kurkov’s cheerful chatter only intensified Igumnov’s mood. Moving his shoulders nervously he addressed Kurkov with sudden resolution : “ Nikolai Sergeevich, do you happen to have a rouble on you ? ”

“ A rouble ? ” said Kurkov in astonishment. “ Why do you want it ? ”

Igumnov flushed, and began to explain in stammers. “ You see, I . . . just one rouble is lacking. . . . I have to get something . . . something; you see . . . ”

He breathed heavily in his agitation. He grew silent, and smiled a pitiful, fixed smile.

“ That means I shan’t get it back,” thought Kurkov.

And now he spoke no longer in the same careless tone as before.

“ I’d like to, but I haven’t any spare cash, not a copeck. I had to borrow some yesterday myself.”

“ Well, if you haven’t it, you can’t help it,” mumbled Igumnov, and continued to

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## THE SMILE

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smile. "I'll simply have to get along without it."

His smile irritated Kurkov, perhaps because it was such a pitiful, helpless affair.

"Why does he smile?" thought Kurkov in vexation. "Doesn't he believe me? Well, I don't care if he doesn't—I don't own the Government exchequer."

"Why don't you come in sometimes and see us?" he asked Igumnov in a careless, dry manner, as he looked elsewhere.

"I am always meaning to. Of course I'll come in," answered Igumnov in a trembling voice. "What about to-day?"

There rose before him a picture of the cosy dining-room of the Kurkovs, the hospitable hostess, the samovar on the table and the various tasty tit-bits.

"To-day?" asked Kurkov in the same careless, dry voice. "No, we shan't be home to-day. But do step in some day before long. Well, I must turn up this lane. Good-bye!"

And he made haste to cross the wooden walk of the embankment. Igumnov looked after him, and smiled. Slow, incoherent thoughts crept through his brain.



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## THE SMILE

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As Kurkov disappeared up the lane Igum-  
nov again approached the granite parapet,  
and, trembling in cold terror, began slowly  
and awkwardly to climb over it.

There was no one near.

## THE HOOP

### I

A WOMAN was taking her morning stroll in a lonely suburban street ; a boy of four was with her. She was young and smart and she was smiling brightly ; she was casting affectionate glances at her son, whose red cheeks beamed with happiness. The boy was bowling a hoop ; a large, new, bright yellow hoop. He ran after his hoop awkwardly, laughed uproariously with joy, thrust forward his plump little legs, bare at the knee, and flourished his stick. He needn't have raised his stick so high above his head—but what of that ?

What happiness ! He had never had a hoop before ; how briskly it made him run !

And nothing of this had existed for him before ; everything was new to him—the streets in early morning, the merry sun, and the distant din of the city. Everything was new to the boy—and joyous and pure.

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## THE HOOP

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### II

A shabbily dressed old man, with coarse hands stood at the street crossing. He pressed close to the wall to let the woman and the boy pass. The old man looked at the boy with dull eyes and smiled stupidly. Confused, sluggish thoughts struggled within his almost bald head.

“A little gentleman!” said he to himself. “Quite a small fellow. And simply bursting with joy. Just look at him cutting his paces!”

He could not quite understand it. Somehow it seemed strange to him.

Here was a child—a thing to be pulled about by the hair! Play is mischief. Children, as every one knows, are mischief-makers.

And there was the mother—she uttered no reproach, she made no fuss, she did not scold. She was smart and bright. It was quite easy to see that they were used to warmth and comfort.

On the other hand, when he, the old man, was a boy he lived a dog's life! There was nothing particularly rosy in his life even now; though, to be sure, he was no longer thrashed

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## THE HOOP

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and he had plenty to eat. He recalled his younger days—their hunger, their cold, their drubbings. He had never had fun with a hoop, or other playthings of well-to-do folks. Thus passed all his life—in poverty, in care, in misery. And he could recall nothing—not a single joy.

He smiled with his toothless mouth at the boy, and he envied him. He reflected :

“ What a silly sport ! ”

But envy tormented him.

He went to work—to the factory where he had worked from childhood, where he had grown old. And all day he thought of the boy.

It was a fixed, deep-rooted thought. He simply could not get the boy out of his mind. He saw him running, laughing, stamping his feet, bowling the hoop. What plump little legs he had, bared at the knee ! . . .

All day long, amid the din of the factory wheels, the boy with the hoop appeared to him. And at night he saw the boy in a dream.

### III

Next morning his reveries again pursued the old man.

The machines were clattering, the labour was



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## THE HOOP

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monotonous, automatic. The hands were busy at their accustomed tasks ; the toothless mouth was smiling at a diverting fancy. The air was thick with dust, and under the high ceiling strap after strap, with hissing sound, glided quickly from wheel to wheel, endless in number. The far corners were invisible for the dense escaping vapours. Men emerged here and there like phantoms, and the human voice was not heard for the incessant din of the machines.

The old man's fancy was at work—he had become a little boy for the moment, his mother was a gentlewoman, and he had his hoop and his little stick ; he was playing, driving the hoop with the little stick. He wore a white costume, his little legs were plump, bare at the knee. . . .

The days passed ; the work went on, the fancy persisted.

### IV

The old man was returning from work one evening when he saw the hoop of an old barrel lying in the street. It was a rough, dirty object. The old man trembled with happiness,

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## THE HOOP

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and tears appeared in his dull eyes. A sudden, almost irresistible desire took possession of him.

He glanced cautiously around him ; then he bent down, picked up the hoop with trembling hands, and smiling shamefacedly, carried it home with him.

No one noticed him, no one questioned him. Whose concern was it ? A ragged old man was carrying an old, battered, useless hoop—who cared ?

He carried it stealthily, afraid of ridicule. Why he picked it up and why he carried it, he himself could not tell. Still, it was like the boy's hoop, and this was enough. There was no harm in it lying about.

He could look at it ; he could touch it. It would stimulate his reveries ; the whistle and turmoil of the factory would grow fainter, the escaping vapours less dense. . . .

For several days the hoop lay under the bed in the old man's poor, cramped quarters. Sometimes he would take it from its place and look at it ; the dirty, grey hoop soothed the old man, and the sight of it quickened his persistent thoughts about the happy little boy.

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## THE HOOP

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### V

It was a clear, warm morning, and the birds were chirping away in the consumptive urban trees somewhat more cheerfully than usual. The old man rose early, took his hoop, and walked a little distance out of town.

He coughed as he made his way among the old trees and the thorny bushes in the woods. The trees, covered with their dry, blackish, bursting bark, seemed to him incomprehensibly and sternly silent. The odours were strange, the insects astonishing, the ferns of gigantic growth. There was neither dust nor din here, and the gentle, exquisite morning mist lay behind the trees. The old feet glided over the dry leaves and stumbled across the old gnarled roots.

The old man broke off a dry limb and hung his hoop upon it.

He came upon an opening, full of daylight and of calm. The dewdrops, countless and opalescent, gleamed upon the green blades of newly mown grass.

Suddenly the old man let the hoop slide off the stick. He struck with the stick, and sent

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## THE HOOP

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the hoop rolling across the green lawn. The old man laughed, brightened at once, and pursued the hoop like that little boy. He kicked up his feet and drove the hoop with his stick, which he flourished high over his head, just as that little boy did.

It seemed to him that he was small, beloved, and happy. It seemed to him that he was being looked after by his mother, who was following close behind and smiling. Like a child on his first outing, he felt refreshed on the bright grass, and on the still mosses.

His goat-like, dust-grey beard, that harmonized with his sallow face, trembled, while his cough mingled with his laughter, and raucous sounds came from his toothless mouth.

### VI

And the old man grew to love his morning hour in the woods with the hoop.

He sometimes thought he might be discovered, and ridiculed—and this aroused him to a keen sense of shame. This shame resembled fear; he would grow numb, and his knees would give way under him. He would look round him with fright and timidity.



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## THE HOOP

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But no—there was no one to be seen, or to be heard. . . .

And having diverted himself to his heart's content he would return to the city, smiling gently and joyously.

### VII

No one had ever found him out. And nothing unusual ever happened. The old man played peacefully for several days, and one very dewy morning he caught cold. He went to bed, and soon died. Dying in the factory hospital, among strangers, indifferent people, he smiled serenely.

His memories soothed him. He, too, had been a child; he, too, had laughed and scampered across the green grass, among the dark trees—his beloved mother had followed him with her eyes.

# THE SEARCH

## I

THE pleasant in life has a way of mixing with the unpleasant. It is pleasant to be a student of the first class, for it gives one a certain standing in the world. But even the life of a student of the first class is not free from unpleasantness.

The first thing of which Shura was conscious when he awoke one morning was that something was tearing on his person. He felt uncomfortable. As he turned on his side he was even more clearly aware of the damage that his shirt had suffered. There was a large gap under the armpits, and presently he realized that it extended down to the very bottom.

Shura was sad. He remembered having told his mother only the day before about the condition of his shirt.

"Wear it another day, Shurochka," she answered him.

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## THE SEARCH

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Shura frowned and said rather sadly :  
“ Mother, it won't stand another day's wear.  
To-morrow I shall be a ragamuffin.”

Without looking up from her work she grumbled.

“ Let me have some peace. I have already promised you a change to-morrow evening. If you'd only be less mischievous your clothes would last longer. You'd wear out iron.”

Shura, who was a quiet lad, growled back in reply :

“ No one simply couldn't be less mischievous than I. Only sometimes you can't help it, and then in a reasonable sort of way.”

His request went unheeded. And here was the consequence. His shirt was torn to its very hem. It was now good for nothing, all for want of a little foresight.

He jumped out of bed, and ran semi-nude into the next room, where his mother was making ready to go out to bring back some paying homework. The thought of going to school in discomfort and of waiting till evening vexed him.

“ What did I tell you ? ” he exclaimed.  
“ You wouldn't give me a shirt when I asked you yesterday. Now look what's happened ! ”

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Deeply annoyed, she looked at Shura and complained.

“Aren't you ashamed to run about like that? I fear I'll never drum any sense into you. You always come bothering me when I'm in a hurry.”

Still, it was quite evident that it would not do to let the lad go in tatters. She found a brand new shirt and gave it to Shura somewhat reluctantly, as she had intended giving him one of the old ones, which were not due to arrive from the laundry until the evening.

Shura was overjoyed. The new linen gave him a pleasant sensation, its harsh cold surface tickled the skin most pleasantly. He laughed, and he pranced about the room as he dressed; and his mother was not there to scold him.

## II

The school, as always, seemed such a strange place. It was both gay and depressing, and hummed with a kind of unnatural industry. It was gay in the intervals between the lessons, and extremely tedious during the lessons.

The subjects of study were most singular and useless. They concerned: folk, who had



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died long ago and did no good while they lived, and whom, for some unknown reason, it was necessary to recall after all these centuries, although some of the personages had never even existed; verbs, which were conjugated with something; nouns, which were declined for some purpose or other, though no use could be found for them in living speech; figures, which call for proofs of something which need not be proven at all; and much else, equally inconsequential and absurd. And there was nothing in all this that one could not do without; there was no correlation of facts, there was no straightforward answer to the eternal question: Why and Wherefore?

### III

That morning early, in the assembly room, Mitya Krinin asked Shura: "Well, have you brought it?"

Shura recalled that he had promised to bring Krinin a book of popular songs. He replied: "Just a moment. I've left it in my overcoat."

He ran into the dressing-room. The bells suddenly rang out in all parts of the building,

calling the students to prayer, without which the lessons could hardly be expected to begin.

Shura made haste. He put his hand in the overcoat pocket, found nothing; then, on discovering that it was some one else's overcoat, he exclaimed in vexation:

“There now, that's something new—my hand in another boy's overcoat!”

And he began to search in his own.

There was an outburst of derisive laughter. He looked around, startled, to find there the mischievous Dutikov, who called out in his unpleasant voice: “So, my boy, you're going through other people's pockets!”

Shura growled back angrily: “It's not your affair. Anyway, I'm not going through yours.”

He found his book and ran back to the assembly room, where the students were already ranging themselves for the service, forming into long rows, according to height. The smaller students stood in front, near to the ikons, the taller behind; and in each row, in gradation, the lads on the right were taller than those on the left. The school faculty considered it necessary for them to pray in rows, and according to height; otherwise the prayer might come to nothing. Apart from them, there was

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a group of boys more proficient in chanting, and the leader of these, at the beginning of each chant, changed his voice several times—this was called “setting the tone.” The singing was loud, rapid, expressionless; they might have all been beating drums. The head student was reading in the prayer book the prayers which it was customary to read and not to sing—and his reading was just as loud, just as expressionless. In a word, it was the same as ever.

But after prayers something happened.

### IV

Student Epiphanov, of the second class, brought with him to school that morning a pearl-handled penknife and a silver rouble, and now these were nowhere to be found. He raised a cry and went to complain.

An investigation was started.

Dutikov reported that he had seen Shura Dolinin going through the pockets of some one's overcoat. Shura was called into the cabinet of the director.

Sergey Ivanovich, the director, fixed his suspicious eyes on the lad. The old tutor,

who saw an excellent chance of catching a thief, and incidentally of balancing accounts somewhat for tricks that had been played upon him by the mischievous lads, experienced malicious pleasure and pounced upon the confused, flushing lad with questions.

“ Why were you in the dressing-room during prayer ? ”

“ Before prayer, Sergey Ivanovich,” whimpered Shura in a voice squeaky from fright.

“ Very well, before prayer,” said the director with irony in his voice. “ What I want to know is why were you there ? ”

Shura explained.

The director continued : “ Very well, after a book. But why in some one else’s pocket ? ”

“ It was a mistake,” said Shura, distressed.

“ A nice mistake,” remarked the director dryly. “ Now confess, haven’t you taken by mistake a penknife and a rouble. By mistake, mind you ? Look through your pockets, my lad.”

Shura began to cry, and said through his tears : “ I haven’t stolen anything.”

The director smiled. It was pleasant to provoke tears. Such beautiful and such large childish tears trickled down the pink cheeks in three separate streams : two streams of



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tears came from one eye, and only one from the other.

“If you haven’t stolen anything why do you cry?” said the director in a bantering tone. “I don’t even say that you have stolen. I assume that you merely made a mistake: caught hold of something that came into your hand, and then forgot all about it. Suppose you look through your pockets.”

Shura quickly drew from his pockets all the absurd trifles usually found on boys, and then turned both his pockets inside out.

“Nothing,” he said sadly.

The director gave him a searching look.

“You are sure it hasn’t dropped down in your clothes somewhere—the knife might have slipped into your boots, eh?”

He rang. The watchman came.

Shura was crying. And everything round him seemed to float in a rose mist, in the incomprehensible mental void of his degradation. They turned Shura about, felt him all over, searched him. Little by little they undressed him. First they took off his boots and shook them out; they did the same with his stockings. His belt, blouse and breeches followed. Everything was shaken out and searched.

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And through all this torment of shame, through all this indignity of a degrading and needless ceremony there penetrated one resplendent ray of joy; the torn shirt was at home, and the new, clean one rustled in the coarse hands of the zealous pedagogue.

Shura stood in his shirt, crying. Behind the door he could hear tumultuous voices and cries of joy.

The door burst open, and a little, red-cheeked, smiling chap entered hurriedly. And through his shame, through his tears, and through his joy about the new shirt, Shura heard a confused and panting voice say :

“It’s been found, Sergey Ivanovich. On Epiphanov himself. There was a hole in his pocket—the penknife and rouble slipped down into his boot.”

Then, suddenly, they became gentle with Shura. They stroked his head, comforted him, and helped him to dress.

### V

Now he cried, now he laughed. At home he again cried and laughed. He complained :

“I was entirely undressed. It would have

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been nice, wouldn't it, if I had been wearing that torn shirt ! ”

Later—yes, what happened later ? His mother would go to the director. She wished to make a scene. Afterwards she would lodge a complaint against him. But she recalled, in the street, that her boy was a non-paying student. There was no scene. Besides, the director received her pleasantly. He was so apologetic.

The impression of his degradation remained with the boy. All its incidents had impressed themselves upon him : he had been suspected of theft, and searched, and he had stood, almost naked, undergoing the scrutiny of an officious person. Shameful ? Let us, by all means, console ourselves that it is an experience useful to life.

Weeping, the mother said : “ Who knows—perhaps when you grow up, something of the sort will really happen. We've heard of such things in our time.”

# THE WHITE MOTHER

## I

EASTER was near. Esper Constantinovich Saksaooolov was in a painful and undecided state of mind. It seemed to have begun when he was asked at the Gorodischevs : “ Where are you greeting the holiday ? ”

Saksaooolov, for some reason, did not reply at once. The housewife, who was stout, short-sighted and fussy, went on : “ Come to us.”

Saksaooolov felt vexed—most likely at the young girl, who at the words of her mother gave him a quick glance, then averted it, and continued her conversation with a professor’s young assistant.

Mothers of grown daughters saw a possible husband in Saksaooolov, which annoyed him. He considered himself an old bachelor at thirty-seven.

He answered sharply : “ Thank you. But I always pass that night at home.”

The girl glanced at him with a smile and asked : “ With whom ? ”



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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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“Alone,” answered Saksaoolov with a shade of astonishment in his voice.

“You’re a misanthrope,” said Madame Gorodischeva, with a sour smile.

Saksaoolov valued his freedom. It seemed strange to him, whenever he thought of it, that he had been so near marriage once. He had lived long in his small but tastefully furnished apartment, had got used to his man attendant, the elderly and steady Fedota, and to Fedota’s not less reliable spouse, who cooked his dinner; and he persuaded himself that he ought to remain single out of memory to his first love. In truth, his heart was growing cold from indifference born of a lonely, incomplete life.

He had his own fortune, his father and mother had died long ago, and he had no near relatives. He lived methodically and quietly; had something to do with a government department; was intimately acquainted with contemporary literature and art; and was something of an epicurean—but life itself seemed to him to be empty and aimless. Were it not that one pure, radiant fancy visited him at times he would have become entirely cold, like many others.

II

His first and only love, which ended before it had time to blossom, wrapt him closely in sad and sweet reveries, usually in the evenings. Five years earlier he had met a young girl who left an indelible impression upon him. She was pale, gentle, slender, with blue eyes, and fair wavy hair. She almost seemed to him not to belong to this earth, but was like a creature of air and mist, blown for a brief moment by fate into the city turmoil. Her movements were slow; her gentle, clear voice was soft, like the murmur of a brook purling over stones.

Saksaoov, whether by chance or not, saw her always in a white dress. The impression of white had become inseparable from his thought of her. Her very name, Tamar, suggested to him something as white as the snow on the mountain tops.

He began to visit her at the house of her parents. More than once he had resolved to say to her those words which bind human fates together. But she never let him go on; she would always grow frightened and shy, and

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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she would rise and leave him. What frightened her? Saksaoov read signs of virgin love in her face; her eyes grew brighter when he entered, and a light flush suffused her cheeks.

But one never-to-be-forgotten day she listened to him. It was in the early spring. The ice on the river was gone, and the trees were covered with a soft green veil. Tamar and Saksaoov were sitting before the window in the city house, and looking out on the Niva. He spoke, scarcely knowing what he said, but his words were both gentle and terrible to her. She grew pale, smiled vaguely, and rose. Her slender hand trembled on the carved top of the chair.

“To-morrow,” Tamar said quietly, and went out.

Saksaoov gazed with intense feeling toward the door behind which Tamar had disappeared. His head was in a whirl. His eye fell upon a sprig of white lilac; he picked it up almost absently, and left without bidding his hosts good-bye.

He could not sleep that night. He stood at the window and looked out into the far-stretching streets, at first dark, then lighter at dawn; he smiled and pressed the sprig of

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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lilac between his fingers. When it grew light he noticed that the floor of the room was strewn with white petals of lilac. This seemed both curious and of happy omen to Saksaoorlov. He felt the cool of the breeze on his heated face. He took a bath and he felt refreshed. Then he went to Tamar.

They told him that she was ill, that she had caught a cold somewhere. And Saksaoorlov never saw her again; she died within two weeks. He did not go to her funeral. Her death left him quite calm, and he no longer knew whether he had loved her or whether it was a short, passing fascination.

He mused about her sometimes in the evening; but he gradually learned to forget her; and Saksaoorlov had no portrait of her. But after a few years—more precisely, only a year ago—in the spring, upon seeing a sprig of lilac sadly out of place among rich eatables in a restaurant window, he remembered Tamar. And from that time on he loved to think of Tamar again during the evenings.

Sometimes, as he fell into a light sleep, he dreamt that Tamar came to him, sat opposite him, and looked at him with unaverted, fond eyes; and that she had something to tell him.



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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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And it was painful to feel Tamar's expectant glance upon him, and not know what she wanted of him.

Now, leaving the Gorodischevs, he thought timidly : " She will come to give me the kiss of Easter."

A feeling of fear and loneliness took hold of him with such intensity that the idea came to him : " Perhaps it would be well to marry so as not to be alone on holy, mysterious nights."

He thought of Valeria Mikhailovna, the Gorodischev girl. She was by no means a beauty, but she was always dressed becomingly to set off her looks. She apparently liked him, and was not likely to reject him if he asked her.

The throng and din in the street distracted him and his usual somewhat ironic mood swayed his thoughts of the Gorodischev girl. Could he prove false to Tamar's memory for any one else ? Everything in the world seemed so paltry to him that he wished no one but Tamar to give him the kiss of Easter.

" But," thought he, " she will again look at me with expectancy. White, gentle Tamar, what does she want ? Will her gentle lips kiss me ? "

## III

Saksaoolov thought sadly of Tamar as he wandered in the streets, and looking into the faces of the passers-by he thought many of the older people unpleasantly coarse. He recalled that there was no one with whom he would exchange the kiss of Easter with real desire and joy. There would be many coarse lips and prickly beards, smelling of wine, to kiss the first day.

It was much pleasanter to kiss the children. Children's faces grew lovely in Saksaoolov's eyes.

He walked a long time, and when he was tired he entered a church enclosure just off the noisy street. A pale lad sat on a form and looked up frightened at Saksaoolov; then he once more began to gaze absently before him. His blue eyes were gentle and sad, like Tamar's. He was so small that his feet projected from the seat.

Saksaoolov, who sat near him, began to eye him, half with pity, half with curiosity. There was something in this youngster that stirred his memory with joy, and at the same time excited him. In appearance he was a most

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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ordinary urchin ; he had on ragged clothes, a white fur cap on his bright hair, and a pair of dirty boots, worse for wear.

He sat long on the form, then he rose suddenly and gave a cry. He ran out of the gate into the street, then stopped, turned quickly in another direction, and again stopped. It was clear that he did not know which way to turn. He began to weep quietly, making no ado, and large tears ran down his cheeks. A crowd gathered. A policeman came. They began to ask him where he lived.

“ At the Gliukhov house,” he lisped in a childlike but indistinct tone.

“ In what street,” the policeman asked.

The boy did not know, and only kept on repeating : “ At the Gliukhov house.”

The young and good-natured policeman thought awhile, and decided that there was no such house near.

“ With whom do you live ? ” asked a gruff workman. “ With your father ? ”

“ I have no father,” answered the boy, as he scanned the faces round him with his tearful eyes.

“ So you’ve got no father, that’s how it is,” said the workman gravely, and shook his head. “ Then where’s your mother ? ”

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“ I have a mother,” the boy replied.

“ What’s her name ? ”

“ Mamma,” said the boy ; then, upon reflection, he added, “ black mamma.”

Some one laughed in the crowd.

“ Black ? I wonder whether that’s the name of the family ? ” suggested the gruff workman.

“ First it was a white mamma, and now it’s a black mamma,” said the boy.

“ There’s no making head or tail of this,” decided the policeman. “ I’ll take him to the station. They’ll telephone about it.”

He went to the gate and rang. But the house-porter had already seen the policeman and, besom in hand, he was coming to the gate. The policeman ordered him to take the boy to the station. But the boy suddenly be-thought himself, and cried out : “ Never mind, let me go, I’ll find the way myself.”

Perhaps he was frightened of the house-porter’s besom, or perhaps he had really recalled something ; at any rate he ran off so hard that Saksaoorlov almost lost sight of him. But soon the boy walked more quietly. He turned street corners and ran from one side to the other searching for, but not finding,



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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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his home. Saksaoov followed him in silence. He was not an adept at talking to children.

At last the boy grew tired. He stopped before a lamp-post and leant against it. Tears gleamed in his eyes.

“My dear boy,” said Saksaoov, “haven’t you found it yet?”

The lad looked at him with his sad, soft eyes, and Saksaoov suddenly understood what had impelled him to follow the boy with such resolution. There was something in the face and glance of the little wanderer that gave him an unusual likeness to Tamar.

“My dear boy, what’s your name?” asked Saksaoov in a tender and agitated voice.

“Lesha,” said the boy.

“Tell me, dear Lesha, do you live with your mother?”

“Yes, with mamma. Only now it’s a black mamma—and before it was a white mamma.”

Saksaoov thought that by black mamma he meant a nun.

“How did you get lost?” he asked.

“I walked with mamma, and we walked and walked. She told me to sit down and wait, and then she went away. And I got frightened.”

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“ Who is your mother ? ”

“ My mamma ? She’s so black and so angry.”

“ What does she do ? ”

The boy thought awhile.

“ She drinks coffee,” he said.

“ What else does she do ? ”

“ She quarrels with the lodgers,” answered Lesha after a pause.

“ And where is your white mamma ? ”

“ She was carried away. She was put into a coffin and carried away. And papa was carried away.”

The boy pointed into the distance somewhere and burst into tears.

“ What’s to be done with him ? ” thought Saksaoorlov.

Then suddenly the boy began to run again. After he had turned a few corners he went more quietly. Saksaoorlov overtook him a second time. The lad’s face expressed a strange mixture of joy and fear.

“ Here’s the Gliukhov house,” he said to Saksaoorlov, as he pointed to a huge, five-storeyed monstrosity.

At this moment there appeared at the gates of the Gliukhov house a black-haired,

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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black-eyed woman in a black dress, a black kerchief with white dots on her head. The boy shrank back in fear.

“Mamma,” he whispered.

His stepmother looked at him with astonishment.

“How did you get here, you young whelp!” she shrieked out. “I told you to sit on the bench, didn’t I?”

She seemed to be on the point of whipping him when she noticed that some sort of gentleman, serious and dignified in appearance, was watching them, and she spoke more softly.

“Can’t I leave you for a half-hour anywhere without you taking to your heels? I’ve walked my feet off looking for you, you young whelp!”

She caught the child’s very small hand in her own huge one and dragged him within the gate. Saksaoov made a note of the house number and the name of the street, and went home.

### IV

Saksaoov liked to listen to the opinions of Fedota. When he returned home he told him about the boy, Lesha.

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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“She did it on purpose,” decided Fedota. “Just think what a witch she is to take the boy such a way from home!”

“Why should she?” Saksaoorlov asked.

“It’s simple enough. What can you expect of a stupid woman! She thought the boy would get lost somewhere, and some one would pick him up. After all, she’s a stepmother. What’s a homeless child to her?”

Saksaoorlov was incredulous. He observed: “But the police would have found her out.”

“Of course they would; but you can’t tell, she may have meant to leave town; then find her if you can.”

Saksaoorlov smiled.

“Really,” he thought, “my Fedota should be a district attorney.”

He fell into a doze that evening as he sat reading before a lamp. Tamar appeared to him—the gentle, white Tamar—and sat down beside him. Her face was strangely like Leshka’s face. She looked steadily and persistently, and awaited something. It tormented Saksaoorlov to see her bright, pleading eyes, and not to know what she wanted. He rose quickly and went to the armchair where he



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thought he saw Tamar sitting. He stopped before her and asked loudly and with emotion :

“What do you wish? Tell me.”

But she was no longer there.

“It was only a dream,” thought Saksaoorlov sadly.

### V

The next day, as he was leaving the academy exhibition, Saksaoorlov met the Gorodischevs. He told the girl about Lesha.

“Poor boy,” said Valeria Mikhailovna quietly. “His stepmother is trying to get rid of him.”

“That’s yet to be proved,” said Saksaoorlov.

He felt annoyed that every one, including Fedota and Valeria, should look so tragically upon a simple incident.

“That’s quite evident,” said Valeria Mikhailovna warmly. “There’s no father, and only a stepmother to whom he is simply a burden. No good will come of it—the boy will have a sad end.”

“You take too gloomy a view of the matter,” observed Saksaoorlov, with a smile.

“You ought to take him to yourself,” Valeria Mikhailovna advised him.

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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“ I ? ” asked Saksaoov with astonishment.

“ You are living alone,” Valeria Mikhailovna persisted. “ You have no one. Here’s a chance for you to do a good deed at Eastertime ! At least, you’ll have some one with whom to exchange the kiss of Easter.”

“ I beg you to tell me, Valeria Mikhailovna, what am I to do with a child ? ”

“ You might engage a governess. Fate itself is sending the boy to you.”

Saksaoov looked with amazement and involuntary tenderness at the girl’s flushed, animated face.

When Tamar again appeared to him that evening he seemed already to know her wish. It was as though, in the silence of the room, he heard her tranquilly spoken words : “ Do as she advised you.”

Saksaoov rose joyously and rubbed his drowsy eyes with his hand. He saw a sprig of white lilac on the table, and was astonished. How did it come there ? Did Tamar leave it there as a sign of her wish ?

And he suddenly thought that if he married the Gorodischeva girl and took Lesha into his house he would be carrying out the will of Tamar. He breathed in the lilac’s aroma

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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happily. He suddenly remembered that he himself had bought the sprig of lilac that same day.

Then he argued with himself: "It really doesn't matter that I had bought it myself; its real significance is that I had an impulse to buy it; and that later I forgot that I had bought it."

### VI

Next morning he went to fetch Lesha. The boy met him at the gate and showed him where he lived. Lesha's black mamma was drinking coffee, and was quarrelling with her red-nosed lodger. Saksaoov learnt something about Lesha from her.

The lad lost his mother when he was three. His father married this black woman, and himself died within a year. The black woman, Irina Ivanovna, had her own son, now a year old. She was about to marry again. The wedding would take place in a few days and after the ceremony she would go with her husband to the provinces. Lesha was a stranger to her and she would rather do without him.

"Give him to me," suggested Saksaoov.

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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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“With great pleasure,” said Irina Ivanovna with unconcealed and malignant joy.

She added after a short silence: “Only you will pay for his clothes.”

And so Lesha was presently installed at Saksaoolov’s. The Gorodischeva girl helped in the finding of a governess and in other details of Lesha’s comfort. This required her to visit Saksaoolov’s apartments. She assumed a different appearance in Saksaoolov’s eyes as she busied herself in these various cares. It was as though the door to her soul opened itself to him. Her eyes had become beaming and gentle, and she was permeated with almost the same tranquillity that breathed from Tamar.

### VII

Lesha’s stories about the white mamma won over Fedota and his wife. As they put him to bed on Easter eve, they hung a white candied egg above his head.

“It’s from the white mamma,” said Christina, “only you darling mustn’t touch it; at least not until the resurrection, when you’ll hear the bell ring.”



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## THE WHITE MOTHER

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Lesha lay down obediently. He looked long at the egg of joy and at last fell asleep.

Saksaoolov was sitting alone in another room. Just before midnight an unconquerable drowsiness again closed his eyes, and he was glad that he would soon see Tamar.

At last she came, all in white, joyous, bringing with her glad tidings from afar. She smiled gently, then bent over him, and—unspeakable happiness!—Saksaoolov's lips felt a tender contact.

A sweet voice said softly: "*Christoss Voskress!*" (Christ has risen).

Saksaoolov, without opening his eyes stretched out his arms and embraced a slender, gentle body. It was Lesha who climbed on his knees and gave him the kiss of Easter.

The church bell had awakened the boy. He seized the white egg and ran to Saksaooolov.

Saksaoolov opened his eyes. Lesha laughed as he showed him the egg.

"White mamma has sent it," he lisped, "and I'll give it to you, and you can give it to Aunt Valeria."

"Very well, my dear boy, I'll do as you say," said Saksaooolov.

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He put Lesha to bed, then went to Valeria Mikhailovna with Lesha's white egg, a gift from the white mamma, but which really seemed to him at that moment to be a gift from Tamar herself.

THE END

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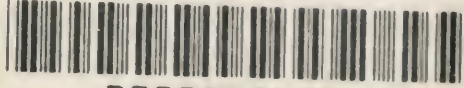
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