PART SECOND

I

In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect. A man of imagination, however inexperienced in the art of narrative, has his instinct to guide him in the choice of his words, and in the development of the action. A grain of talent excuses many mistakes. But this is not a work of imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its artlessness. Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition.

Dropping then Mr. Razumov's record at the point where Councillor Mikulin's question "Where to?" comes in with the force of an insoluble problem, I shall simply say that I made the acquaintance of these ladies about six months before that time. By "these ladies" I mean, of course, the mother and the sister of the unfortunate Haldin.

By what arguments he had induced his mother to sell their little property and go abroad for an indefinite time, I cannot tell precisely. I have an idea that Mrs. Haldin, at her son's wish, would have set fire to her house and emigrated to the moon without any sign of surprise or apprehension; and that Miss Haldin—Nathalie, caressingly Natalka—would have given her assent to the scheme.

Their proud devotion to that young man became clear to me in a very short time. Following his directions they went straight to Switzerland—to Zurich—where they remained the best part of a year. From Zurich, which they did not like, they came to Geneva. A friend of mine in Lausanne, a lecturer in history at the University (he had married a Russian lady, a distant connection of Mrs. Haldin's), wrote to me suggesting I should call on these ladies. It was a very kindly meant business suggestion. Miss Haldin wished to go through a course of reading the best English authors with a competent teacher.

Mrs. Haldin received me very kindly. Her bad French, of which she was smilingly conscious, did away with the formality of the first interview. She was a tall woman in a black silk dress. A wide brow, regular features, and delicately cut lips, testified to her past beauty. She sat upright in an easy chair and in a rather weak, gentle voice told me that her Natalka simply thirsted after knowledge. Her thin hands were lying on her lap, her facial immobility had in it something monachal. "In Russia," she went on, "all knowledge was tainted with

falsehood. Not chemistry and all that, but education generally," she explained. The Government corrupted the teaching for its own purposes. Both her children felt that. Her Natalka had obtained a diploma of a Superior School for Women and her son was a student at the St. Petersburg University. He had a brilliant intellect, a most noble unselfish nature, and he was the oracle of his comrades. Early next year, she hoped he would join them and they would then go to Italy together. In any other country but their own she would have been certain of a great future for a man with the extraordinary abilities and the lofty character of her son—but in Russia....

The young lady sitting by the window turned her head and said—

"Come, mother. Even with us things change with years."

Her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness. She had a dark complexion, with red lips and a full figure. She gave the impression of strong vitality. The old lady sighed.

"You are both young—you two. It is easy for you to hope. But I, too, am not hopeless. Indeed, how could I be with a son like this."

I addressed Miss Haldin, asking her what authors she wished to read. She directed upon me her grey eyes shaded by black eyelashes, and I became aware, notwithstanding my years, how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity. Her glance was as direct and trustful as that of a young man yet unspoiled by the world's wise lessons. And it was intrepid, but in this intrepidity there was nothing aggressive. A naive yet thoughtful assurance is a better definition. She had reflected already (in Russia the young begin to think early), but she had never known deception as yet because obviously she had never yet fallen under the sway of passion. She was—to look at her was enough—very capable of being roused by an idea or simply by a person. At least, so I judged with I believe an unbiassed mind; for clearly my person could not be the person—and as to my ideas!...

We became excellent friends in the course of our reading. It was very pleasant. Without fear of provoking a smile, I shall confess that I became very much attached to that young girl. At the end of four months I told her that now she could very well go on reading English by herself. It was time for the teacher to depart. My pupil looked unpleasantly surprised.

Mrs. Haldin, with her immobility of feature and kindly expression of the eyes, uttered from her armchair in her uncertain French, "*Mais l'ami reviendra.*" And so it was settled. I returned—not four times a week as before, but pretty frequently. In the autumn we made some short excursions together in company with other Russians. My friendship with these ladies gave me a standing in the Russian colony which otherwise I could not have had.

The day I saw in the papers the news of Mr. de P—-'s assassination—it was a Sunday—I met the two ladies in the street and walked with them for some distance. Mrs. Haldin wore a heavy grey cloak, I remember, over her black silk dress, and her fine eyes met mine with a very quiet expression.

"We have been to the late service," she said. "Natalka came with me. Her girl-friends, the students here, of course don't.... With us in Russia the church is so identified with oppression, that it seems almost necessary when one wishes to be free in this life, to give up all hope of a future existence. But I cannot give up praying for my son."

She added with a sort of stony grimness, colouring slightly, and in French, "*Ce n'est peut etre qu'une habitude.*" ("It may be only habit.")

Miss Haldin was carrying the prayer-book. She did not glance at her mother.

"You and Victor are both profound believers," she said.

I communicated to them the news from their country which I had just read in a cafe. For a whole minute we walked together fairly briskly in silence. Then Mrs. Haldin murmured—

"There will be more trouble, more persecutions for this. They may be even closing the University. There is neither peace nor rest in Russia for one but in the grave.

"Yes. The way is hard," came from the daughter, looking straight before her at the Chain of Jura covered with snow, like a white wall closing the end of the street. "But concord is not so very far off."

"That is what my children think," observed Mrs. Haldin to me.

I did not conceal my feeling that these were strange times to talk of concord. Nathalie Haldin surprised me by saying, as if she had thought very much on the subject, that the occidentals did not understand the situation. She was very calm and youthfully superior.

"You think it is a class conflict, or a conflict of interests, as social contests are with you in Europe. But it is not that at all. It is something quite different."

"It is quite possible that I don't understand," I admitted.

That propensity of lifting every problem from the plane of the understandable by means of some sort of mystic expression, is very Russian. I knew her well enough to have discovered her scorn for all the practical forms of political liberty known to the western world. I suppose one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and hopeless cynicism. I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consists in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we

westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value. But this is a digression indeed....

I helped these ladies into the tramcar and they asked me to call in the afternoon. At least Mrs. Haldin asked me as she climbed up, and her Natalka smiled down at the dense westerner indulgently from the rear platform of the moving car. The light of the clear wintry forenoon was softened in her grey eyes.

Mr. Razumov's record, like the open book of fate, revives for me the memory of that day as something startlingly pitiless in its freedom from all forebodings. Victor Haldin was still with the living, but with the living whose only contact with life is the expectation of death. He must have been already referring to the last of his earthly affections, the hours of that obstinate silence, which for him was to be prolonged into eternity. That afternoon the ladies entertained a good many of their compatriots—more than was usual for them to receive at one time; and the drawing-room on the ground floor of a large house on the Boulevard des Philosophes was very much crowded.

I outstayed everybody; and when I rose Miss Haldin stood up too. I took her hand and was moved to revert to that morning's conversation in the street.

"Admitting that we occidentals do not understand the character of your..." I began.

It was as if she had been prepared for me by some mysterious fore-knowledge. She checked me gently—

"Their impulses—their..." she sought the proper expression and found it, but in French..."their *mouvements d'ame*."

Her voice was not much above a whisper.

"Very well," I said. "But still we are looking at a conflict. You say it is not a conflict of classes and not a conflict of interests. Suppose I admitted that. Are antagonistic ideas then to be reconciled more easily—can they be cemented with blood and violence into that concord which you proclaim to be so near?"

She looked at me searchingly with her clear grey eyes, without answering my reasonable question—my obvious, my unanswerable question.

"It is inconceivable," I added, with something like annoyance.

"Everything is inconceivable," she said. "The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas. And yet the world exists to our senses, and we exist in it. There must be a necessity superior to our conceptions. It is a very miserable and a very false thing to belong to the majority. We Russians shall find some better form of national freedom than an artificial conflict of parties—which is wrong because it is a conflict and contemptible because it is artificial. It is left for us Russians to discover a better way."

Mrs. Haldin had been looking out of the window. She turned upon me the almost lifeless beauty of her face, and the living benign glance of her big dark eyes.

"That's what my children think," she declared.

"I suppose," I addressed Miss Haldin, "that you will be shocked if I tell you that I haven't understood—I won't say a single word; I've understood all the words.... But what can be this era of disembodied concord you are looking forward to. Life is a thing of form. It has its plastic shape and a definite intellectual aspect. The most idealistic conceptions of love and forbearance must be clothed in flesh as it were before they can be made understandable."

I took my leave of Mrs. Haldin, whose beautiful lips never stirred. She smiled with her eyes only. Nathalie Haldin went with me as far as the door, very amiable.

"Mother imagines that I am the slavish echo of my brother Victor. It is not so. He understands me better than I can understand him. When he joins us and you come to know him you will see what an exceptional soul it is." She paused. "He is not a strong man in the conventional sense, you know," she added. "But his character is without a flaw."

"I believe that it will not be difficult for me to make friends with your brother Victor."

"Don't expect to understand him quite," she said, a little maliciously. "He is not at all—at all—western at bottom."

And on this unnecessary warning I left the room with another bow in the doorway to Mrs. Haldin in her armchair by the window. The shadow of autocracy all unperceived by me had already fallen upon the Boulevard des Philosophes, in the free, independent and democratic city of Geneva, where there is a quarter called "La Petite Russie." Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, tinging their thoughts, their views, their most intimate feelings, their private life, their public utterances—haunting the secret of their silences.

What struck me next in the course of a week or so was the silence of these ladies. I used to meet them walking in the public garden near the University. They greeted me with their usual friendliness, but I could not help noticing their taciturnity. By that time it was generally known that the assassin of M. de P—- had been caught, judged, and executed. So much had been declared officially to the news agencies. But for the world at large he remained anonymous. The official secrecy had withheld his name from the public. I really cannot imagine for what reason.

One day I saw Miss Haldin walking alone in the main valley of the Bastions under the naked trees.

“Mother is not very well,” she explained.

As Mrs. Haldin had, it seemed, never had a day’s illness in her life, this indisposition was disquieting. It was nothing definite, too.

“I think she is fretting because we have not heard from my brother for rather a long time.”

“No news—good news,” I said cheerfully, and we began to walk slowly side by side.

“Not in Russia,” she breathed out so low that I only just caught the words. I looked at her with more attention.

“You too are anxious?”

She admitted after a moment of hesitation that she was.

“It is really such a long time since we heard....”

And before I could offer the usual banal suggestions she confided in me.

“Oh! But it is much worse than that. I wrote to a family we know in Petersburg. They had not seen him for more than a month. They thought he was already with us. They were even offended a little that he should have left Petersburg without calling on them. The husband of the lady went at once to his lodgings. Victor had left there and they did not know his address.”

I remember her catching her breath rather pitifully. Her brother had not been seen at lectures for a very long time either. He only turned up now and then at the University gate to ask the porter for his letters. And the gentleman friend was told that the student Haldin did not come to claim the last two letters for him. But the police came to inquire if the student Haldin ever received any correspondence at the University and took them away.

“My two last letters,” she said.

We faced each other. A few snow-flakes fluttered under the naked boughs. The sky was dark.

“What do you think could have happened?” I asked.

Her shoulders moved slightly.

“One can never tell—in Russia.”

I saw then the shadow of autocracy lying upon Russian lives in their submission or their revolt. I saw it touch her handsome open face nestled in a fur collar and darken her clear eyes that shone upon me brilliantly grey in the murky light of a beclouded, inclement afternoon.

“Let us move on,” she said. “It is cold standing—to-day.”

She shuddered a little and stamped her little feet. We moved briskly to the end of the alley and back to the great gates of the garden.

“Have you told your mother?” I ventured to ask.

“No. Not yet. I came out to walk off the impression of this letter.”

I heard a rustle of paper somewhere. It came from her muff. She had the letter with her in there.

“What is it that you are afraid of?” I asked.

To us Europeans of the West, all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude inventions for the theatre or a novel. I did not like to be more definite in my inquiry.

“For us—for my mother specially, what I am afraid of is incertitude. People do disappear. Yes, they do disappear. I leave you to imagine what it is—the cruelty of the dumb weeks—months—years! This friend of ours has abandoned his inquiries when he heard of the police getting hold of the letters. I suppose he was afraid of compromising himself. He has a wife and children—and why should he, after all.... Moreover, he is without influential connections and not rich. What could he do?... Yes, I am afraid of silence—for my poor mother. She won’t be able to bear it. For my brother I am afraid of...” she became almost indistinct, “of anything.”

We were now near the gate opposite the theatre. She raised her voice.

“But lost people do turn up even in Russia. Do you know what my last hope is? Perhaps the next thing we know, we shall see him walking into our rooms.”

I raised my hat and she passed out of the gardens, graceful and strong, after a slight movement of the head to me, her hands in the muff, crumpling the cruel Petersburg letter.

On returning home I opened the newspaper I receive from London, and glancing down the correspondence from Russia—not the telegrams but the correspondence—the first thing that caught my eye was the name of Haldin. Mr. de P—-’s death was no longer an actuality, but the enterprising correspondent was proud of having ferreted out some unofficial information about that fact of modern history. He had got hold of Haldin’s name, and had picked up the story of the midnight arrest in the street. But the sensation from a journalistic point of view was already well in the past. He did not allot to it more than twenty lines out of a full column. It was quite enough to give me a sleepless night. I perceived that it would have been a sort of treason to let Miss Haldin come without preparation upon that journalistic discovery which would infallibly be reproduced on the morrow by French and Swiss newspapers. I had a very bad time of it till the morning, wakeful with nervous worry and night-marish with the feeling of being mixed up with something theatrical and morbidly affected. The incongruity of such a complication in those two women’s lives was sensible to me all night in the form of absolute anguish. It seemed due to their refined simplicity that it should remain concealed from them for ever. Arriving at an

unconscionably early hour at the door of their apartment, I felt as if I were about to commit an act of vandalism....

The middle-aged servant woman led me into the drawing-room where there was a duster on a chair and a broom leaning against the centre table. The motes danced in the sunshine; I regretted I had not written a letter instead of coming myself, and was thankful for the brightness of the day. Miss Haldin in a plain black dress came lightly out of her mother's room with a fixed uncertain smile on her lips.

I pulled the paper out of my pocket. I did not imagine that a number of the *Standard* could have the effect of Medusa's head. Her face went stony in a moment—her eyes—her limbs. The most terrible thing was that being stony she remained alive. One was conscious of her palpitating heart. I hope she forgave me the delay of my clumsy circumlocution. It was not very prolonged; she could not have kept so still from head to foot for more than a second or two; and then I heard her draw a breath. As if the shock had paralysed her moral resistance, and affected the firmness of her muscles, the contours of her face seemed to have given way. She was frightfully altered. She looked aged—ruined. But only for a moment. She said with decision—

"I am going to tell my mother at once."

"Would that be safe in her state?" I objected.

"What can be worse than the state she has been in for the last month? We understand this in another way. The crime is not at his door. Don't imagine I am defending him before you."

She went to the bedroom door, then came back to ask me in a low murmur not to go till she returned. For twenty interminable minutes not a sound reached me. At last Miss Haldin came out and walked across the room with her quick light step. When she reached the armchair she dropped into it heavily as if completely exhausted.

Mrs. Haldin, she told me, had not shed a tear. She was sitting up in bed, and her immobility, her silence, were very alarming. At last she lay down gently and had motioned her daughter away.

"She will call me in presently," added Miss Haldin. "I left a bell near the bed."

I confess that my very real sympathy had no standpoint. The Western readers for whom this story is written will understand what I mean. It was, if I may say so, the want of experience. Death is a remorseless spoliator. The anguish of irreparable loss is familiar to us all. There is no life so lonely as to be safe against that experience. But the grief I had brought to these two ladies had gruesome associations. It had the associations of bombs and gallows—a lurid, Russian colouring which made the complexion of my sympathy uncertain.

I was grateful to Miss Haldin for not embarrassing me by an outward display of deep feeling. I admired her for that wonderful command over herself, even while I was a little frightened at it. It was the stillness of a great tension. What if it should suddenly snap? Even the door of Mrs. Haldin's room, with the old mother alone in there, had a rather awful aspect.

Nathalie Haldin murmured sadly—

"I suppose you are wondering what my feelings are?"

Essentially that was true. It was that very wonder which unsettled my sympathy of a dense Occidental. I could get hold of nothing but of some commonplace phrases, those futile phrases that give the measure of our impotence before each other's trials I mumbled something to the effect that, for the young, life held its hopes and compensations. It held duties too—but of that I was certain it was not necessary to remind her.

She had a handkerchief in her hands and pulled at it nervously.

"I am not likely to forget my mother," she said. "We used to be three. Now we are two—two women. She's not so very old. She may live quite a long time yet. What have we to look for in the future? For what hope and what consolation?"

"You must take a wider view," I said resolutely, thinking that with this exceptional creature this was the right note to strike. She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then the tears she had been keeping down flowed unrestrained. She jumped up and stood in the window with her back to me.

I slipped away without attempting even to approach her. Next day I was told at the door that Mrs. Haldin was better. The middle-aged servant remarked that a lot of people—Russians—had called that day, but Miss Haldin bad not seen anybody. A fortnight later, when making my daily call, I was asked in and found Mrs. Haldin sitting in her usual place by the window.

At first one would have thought that nothing was changed. I saw across the room the familiar profile, a little sharper in outline and overspread by a uniform pallor as might have been expected in an invalid. But no disease could have accounted for the change in her black eyes, smiling no longer with gentle irony. She raised them as she gave me her hand. I observed the three weeks' old number of the *Standard* folded with the correspondence from Russia uppermost, lying on a little table by the side of the armchair. Mrs. Haldin's voice was startlingly weak and colourless. Her first words to me framed a question.

"Has there been anything more in papers?"

I released her long emaciated hand, shook my head negatively, and sat down.

"The English press is wonderful. Nothing can be kept secret from it, and all the world must hear. Only our Russian news is not always easy to understand. Not always easy.... But English mothers do not look for news like that...."

She laid her hand on the newspaper and took it away again. I said—

"We too have had tragic times in our history."

"A long time ago. A very long time ago."

"Yes."

"There are nations that have made their bargain with fate," said Miss Haldin, who had approached us. "We need not envy them."

"Why this scorn?" I asked gently. "It may be that our bargain was not a very lofty one. But the terms men and nations obtain from Fate are hallowed by the price."

Mrs. Haldin turned her head away and looked out of the window for a time, with that new, sombre, extinct gaze of her sunken eyes which so completely made another woman of her.

"That Englishman, this correspondent," she addressed me suddenly, "do you think it is possible that he knew my son?"

To this strange question I could only say that it was possible of course. She saw my surprise.

"If one knew what sort of man he was one could perhaps write to him," she murmured.

"Mother thinks," explained Miss Haldin, standing between us, with one hand resting on the back of my chair, "that my poor brother perhaps did not try to save himself."

I looked up at Miss Haldin in sympathetic consternation, but Miss Haldin was looking down calmly at her mother. The latter said—

"We do not know the address of any of his friends. Indeed, we know nothing of his Petersburg comrades. He had a multitude of young friends, only he never spoke much of them. One could guess that they were his disciples and that they idolized him. But he was so modest. One would think that with so many devoted...."

She averted her head again and looked down the Boulevard des Philosophes, a singularly arid and dusty thoroughfare, where nothing could be seen at the moment but two dogs, a little girl in a pinafore hopping on one leg, and in the distance a workman wheeling a bicycle.

"Even amongst the Apostles of Christ there was found a Judas," she whispered as if to herself, but with the evident intention to be heard by me.

The Russian visitors assembled in little knots, conversed amongst themselves meantime, in low murmurs, and with brief glances in our direction. It was a great contrast to the usual loud volubility of these gatherings. Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room.

“People will come,” she said. “We cannot shut the door in their faces.”

While I was putting on my overcoat she began to talk to me of her mother. Poor Mrs. Haldin was fretting after more news. She wanted to go on hearing about her unfortunate son. She could not make up her mind to abandon him quietly to the dumb unknown. She would persist in pursuing him in there through the long days of motionless silence face to face with the empty Boulevard des Philosophes. She could not understand why he had not escaped—as so many other revolutionists and conspirators had managed to escape in other instances of that kind. It was really inconceivable that the means of secret revolutionary organisations should have failed so inexcusably to preserve her son. But in reality the inconceivable that staggered her mind was nothing but the cruel audacity of Death passing over her head to strike at that young and precious heart.

Miss Haldin mechanically, with an absorbed look, handed me my hat. I understood from her that the poor woman was possessed by the sombre and simple idea that her son must have perished because he did not want to be saved. It could not have been that he despaired of his country’s future. That was impossible. Was it possible that his mother and sister had not known how to merit his confidence; and that, after having done what he was compelled to do, his spirit became crushed by an intolerable doubt, his mind distracted by a sudden mistrust.

I was very much shocked by this piece of ingenuity.

“Our three lives were like that!” Miss Haldin twined the fingers of both her hands together in demonstration, then separated them slowly, looking straight into my face. “That’s what poor mother found to torment herself and me with, for all the years to come,” added the strange girl. At that moment her indefinable charm was revealed to me in the conjunction of passion and stoicism. I imagined what her life was likely to be by the side of Mrs. Haldin’s terrible immobility, inhabited by that fixed idea. But my concern was reduced to silence by my ignorance of her modes of feeling. Difference of nationality is a terrible obstacle for our complex Western natures. But Miss Haldin probably was too simple to suspect my embarrassment. She did not wait for me to say anything, but as if reading my thoughts on my face she went on courageously—

“At first poor mother went numb, as our peasants say; then she began to think and she will go on now thinking and thinking in that unfortunate strain. You see yourself how cruel that is....”

I never spoke with greater sincerity than when I agreed with her that it would be deplorable in the highest degree. She took an anxious breath.

“But all these strange details in the English paper,” she exclaimed suddenly. “What is the meaning of them? I suppose they are true? But is it not terrible that

my poor brother should be caught wandering alone, as if in despair, about the streets at night....”

We stood so close to each other in the dark anteroom that I could see her biting her lower lip to suppress a dry sob. After a short pause she said—

“I suggested to mother that he may have been betrayed by some false friend or simply by some cowardly creature. It may be easier for her to believe that.”

I understood now the poor woman’s whispered allusion to Judas.

“It may be easier,” I admitted, admiring inwardly the directness and the subtlety of the girl’s outlook. She was dealing with life as it was made for her by the political conditions of her country. She faced cruel realities, not morbid imaginings of her own making. I could not defend myself from a certain feeling of respect when she added simply—

“Time they say can soften every sort of bitterness. But I cannot believe that it has any power over remorse. It is better that mother should think some person guilty of Victor’s death, than that she should connect it with a weakness of her son or a shortcoming of her own.”

“But you, yourself, don’t suppose that....” I began.

She compressed her lips and shook her head. She harboured no evil thoughts against any one, she declared—and perhaps nothing that happened was unnecessary. On these words, pronounced low and sounding mysterious in the half obscurity of the ante-room, we parted with an expressive and warm handshake. The grip of her strong, shapely hand had a seductive frankness, a sort of exquisite virility. I do not know why she should have felt so friendly to me. It may be that she thought I understood her much better than I was able to do. The most precise of her sayings seemed always to me to have enigmatical prolongations vanishing somewhere beyond my reach. I am reduced to suppose that she appreciated my attention and my silence. The attention she could see was quite sincere, so that the silence could not be suspected of coldness. It seemed to satisfy her. And it is to be noted that if she confided in me it was clearly not with the expectation of receiving advice, for which, indeed she never asked.

II

Our daily relations were interrupted at this period for something like a fortnight. I had to absent myself unexpectedly from Geneva. On my return I lost no time in directing my steps up the Boulevard des Philosophes.

Through the open door of the drawing-room I was annoyed to hear a visitor holding forth steadily in an unctuous deep voice.

Mrs. Haldin’s armchair by the window stood empty. On the sofa, Nathalie Haldin raised her charming grey eyes in a glance of greeting accompanied by the

merest hint of a welcoming smile. But she made no movement. With her strong white hands lying inverted in the lap of her mourning dress she faced a man who presented to me a robust back covered with black broadcloth, and well in keeping with the deep voice. He turned his head sharply over his shoulder, but only for a moment.

"Ah! your English friend. I know. I know. That's nothing."

He wore spectacles with smoked glasses, a tall silk hat stood on the floor by the side of his chair. Flourishing slightly a big soft hand he went on with his discourse, precipitating his delivery a little more.

"I have never changed the faith I held while wandering in the forests and bogs of Siberia. It sustained me then—it sustains me now. The great Powers of Europe are bound to disappear—and the cause of their collapse will be very simple. They will exhaust themselves struggling against their proletariat. In Russia it is different. In Russia we have no classes to combat each other, one holding the power of wealth, and the other mighty with the strength of numbers. We have only an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and as incorruptible as the ocean. No, we have no classes. But we have the Russian woman. The admirable Russian woman! I receive most remarkable letters signed by women. So elevated in tone, so courageous, breathing such a noble ardour of service! The greatest part of our hopes rests on women. I behold their thirst for knowledge. It is admirable. Look how they absorb, how they are making it their own. It is miraculous. But what is knowledge? ...I understand that you have not been studying anything especially—medicine for instance. No? That's right. Had I been honoured by being asked to advise you on the use of your time when you arrived here I would have been strongly opposed to such a course. Knowledge in itself is mere dross."

He had one of those bearded Russian faces without shape, a mere appearance of flesh and hair with not a single feature having any sort of character. His eyes being hidden by the dark glasses there was an utter absence of all expression. I knew him by sight. He was a Russian refugee of mark. All Geneva knew his burly black-coated figure. At one time all Europe was aware of the story of his life written by himself and translated into seven or more languages. In his youth he had led an idle, dissolute life. Then a society girl he was about to marry died suddenly and thereupon he abandoned the world of fashion, and began to conspire in a spirit of repentance, and, after that, his native autocracy took good care that the usual things should happen to him. He was imprisoned in fortresses, beaten within an inch of his life, and condemned to work in mines, with common criminals. The great success of his book, however, was the chain.

I do not remember now the details of the weight and length of the fetters riveted on his limbs by an "Administrative" order, but it was in the number of

pounds and the thickness of links an appalling assertion of the divine right of autocracy. Appalling and futile too, because this big man managed to carry off that simple engine of government with him into the woods. The sensational clink of these fetters is heard all through the chapters describing his escape—a subject of wonder to two continents. He had begun by concealing himself successfully from his guard in a hole on a river bank. It was the end of the day; with infinite labour he managed to free one of his legs. Meantime night fell. He was going to begin on his other leg when he was overtaken by a terrible misfortune. He dropped his file.

All this is precise yet symbolic; and the file had its pathetic history. It was given to him unexpectedly one evening, by a quiet, pale-faced girl. The poor creature had come out to the mines to join one of his fellow convicts, a delicate young man, a mechanic and a social democrat, with broad cheekbones and large staring eyes. She had worked her way across half Russia and nearly the whole of Siberia to be near him, and, as it seems, with the hope of helping him to escape. But she arrived too late. Her lover had died only a week before.

Through that obscure episode, as he says, in the history of ideas in Russia, the file came into his hands, and inspired him with an ardent resolution to regain his liberty. When it slipped through his fingers it was as if it had gone straight into the earth. He could by no manner of means put his hand on it again in the dark. He groped systematically in the loose earth, in the mud, in the water; the night was passing meantime, the precious night on which he counted to get away into the forests, his only chance of escape. For a moment he was tempted by despair to give up; but recalling the quiet, sad face of the heroic girl, he felt profoundly ashamed of his weakness. She had selected him for the gift of liberty and he must show himself worthy of the favour conferred by her feminine, indomitable soul. It appeared to be a sacred trust. To fail would have been a sort of treason against the sacredness of self-sacrifice and womanly love.

There are in his book whole pages of self-analysis whence emerges like a white figure from a dark confused sea the conviction of woman’s spiritual superiority—his new faith confessed since in several volumes. His first tribute to it, the great act of his conversion, was his extraordinary existence in the endless forests of the Okhotsk Province, with the loose end of the chain wound about his waist. A strip torn off his convict shirt secured the end firmly. Other strips fastened it at intervals up his left leg to deaden the clanking and to prevent the slack links from getting hooked in the bushes. He became very fierce. He developed an unsuspected genius for the arts of a wild and hunted existence. He learned to creep into villages without betraying his presence by anything more than an occasional faint jingle. He broke into outhouses with an axe he managed to purloin in a wood-cutters’ camp. In the deserted tracts of country he lived on wild berries and hunted for honey. His clothing dropped off him gradually. His

naked tawny figure glimpsed vaguely through the bushes with a cloud of mosquitoes and flies hovering about the shaggy head, spread tales of terror through whole districts. His temper grew savage as the days went by, and he was glad to discover that that there was so much of a brute in him. He had nothing else to put his trust in. For it was as though there had been two human beings indissolubly joined in that enterprise. The civilized man, the enthusiast of advanced humanitarian ideals thirsting for the triumph of spiritual love and political liberty; and the stealthy, primeval savage, pitilessly cunning in the preservation of his freedom from day to day, like a tracked wild beast.

The wild beast was making its way instinctively eastward to the Pacific coast, and the civilised humanitarian in fearful anxious dependence watched the proceedings with awe. Through all these weeks he could never make up his mind to appeal to human compassion. In the wary primeval savage this shyness might have been natural, but the other too, the civilized creature, the thinker, the escaping "political" had developed an absurd form of morbid pessimism, a form of temporary insanity, originating perhaps in the physical worry and discomfort of the chain. These links, he fancied, made him odious to the rest of mankind. It was a repugnant and suggestive load. Nobody could feel any pity at the disgusting sight of a man escaping with a broken chain. His imagination became affected by his fetters in a precise, matter-of-fact manner. It seemed to him impossible that people could resist the temptation of fastening the loose end to a staple in the wall while they went for the nearest police official. Crouching in holes or hidden in thickets, he had tried to read the faces of unsuspecting free settlers working in the clearings or passing along the paths within a foot or two of his eyes. His feeling was that no man on earth could be trusted with the temptation of the chain.

One day, however, he chanced to come upon a solitary woman. It was on an open slope of rough grass outside the forest. She sat on the bank of a narrow stream; she had a red handkerchief on her head and a small basket was lying on the ground near her hand. At a little distance could be seen a cluster of log cabins, with a water-mill over a dammed pool shaded by birch trees and looking bright as glass in the twilight. He approached her silently, his hatchet stuck in his iron belt, a thick cudgel in his hand; there were leaves and bits of twig in his tangled hair, in his matted beard; bunches of rags he had wound round the links fluttered from his waist. A faint clink of his fetters made the woman turn her head. Too terrified by this savage apparition to jump up or even to scream, she was yet too stout-hearted to faint.... Expecting nothing less than to be murdered on the spot she covered her eyes with her hands to avoid the sight of the descending axe. When at last she found courage to look again, she saw the shaggy wild man sitting on the bank six feet away from her. His thin, sinewy arms hugged his naked legs; the long beard covered the knees on which he

rested his chin; all these clasped, folded limbs, the bare shoulders, the wild head with red staring eyes, shook and trembled violently while the bestial creature was making efforts to speak. It was six weeks since he had heard the sound of his own voice. It seemed as though he had lost the faculty of speech. He had become a dumb and despairing brute, till the woman's sudden, unexpected cry of profound pity, the insight of her feminine compassion discovering the complex misery of the man under the terrifying aspect of the monster, restored him to the ranks of humanity. This point of view is presented in his book, with a very effective eloquence. She ended, he says, by shedding tears over him, sacred, redeeming tears, while he also wept with joy in the manner of a converted sinner. Directing him to hide in the bushes and wait patiently (a police patrol was expected in the Settlement) she went away towards the houses, promising to return at night.

As if providentially appointed to be the newly wedded wife of the village blacksmith, the woman persuaded her husband to come out with her, bringing some tools of his trade, a hammer, a chisel, a small anvil.... "My fetters"—the book says—"were struck off on the banks of the stream, in the starlight of a calm night by an athletic, taciturn young man of the people, kneeling at my feet, while the woman like a liberating genius stood by with clasped hands." Obviously a symbolic couple. At the same time they furnished his regained humanity with some decent clothing, and put heart into the new man by the information that the seacoast of the Pacific was only a very few miles away. It could be seen, in fact, from the top of the next ridge....

The rest of his escape does not lend itself to mystic treatment and symbolic interpretation. He ended by finding his way to the West by the Suez Canal route in the usual manner. Reaching the shores of South Europe he sat down to write his autobiography—the great literary success of its year. This book was followed by other books written with the declared purpose of elevating humanity. In these works he preached generally the cult of the woman. For his own part he practised it under the rites of special devotion to the transcendental merits of a certain Madame de S—, a lady of advanced views, no longer very young, once upon a time the intriguing wife of a now dead and forgotten diplomat. Her loud pretensions to be one of the leaders of modern thought and of modern sentiment, she sheltered (like Voltaire and Mme. de Stael) on the republican territory of Geneva. Driving through the streets in her big landau she exhibited to the indifference of the natives and the stares of the tourists a long-waisted, youthful figure of hieratic stiffness, with a pair of big gleaming eyes, rolling restlessly behind a short veil of black lace, which, coming down no further than her vividly red lips, resembled a mask. Usually the "heroic fugitive" (this name was bestowed upon him in a review of the English edition of his book)—the "heroic fugitive" accompanied her, sitting, portentously bearded and darkly

bespectacled, not by her side, but opposite her, with his back to the horses. Thus, facing each other, with no one else in the roomy carriage, their airings suggested a conscious public manifestation. Or it may have been unconscious. Russian simplicity often marches innocently on the edge of cynicism for some lofty purpose. But it is a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe to try and understand these doings. Considering the air of gravity extending even to the physiognomy of the coachman and the action of the showy horses, this quaint display might have possessed a mystic significance, but to the corrupt frivolity of a Western mind, like my own, it seemed hardly decent.

However, it is not becoming for an obscure teacher of languages to criticize a "heroic fugitive" of worldwide celebrity. I was aware from hearsay that he was an industrious busy-body, hunting up his compatriots in hotels, in private lodgings, and—I was told—conferring upon them the honour of his notice in public gardens when a suitable opening presented itself. I was under the impression that after a visit or two, several months before, he had given up the ladies Haldin—no doubt reluctantly, for there could be no question of his being a determined person. It was perhaps to be expected that he should reappear again on this terrible occasion, as a Russian and a revolutionist, to say the right thing, to strike the true, perhaps a comforting, note. But I did not like to see him sitting there. I trust that an unbecoming jealousy of my privileged position had nothing to do with it. I made no claim to a special standing for my silent friendship. Removed by the difference of age and nationality as if into the sphere of another existence, I produced, even upon myself, the effect of a dumb helpless ghost, of an anxious immaterial thing that could only hover about without the power to protect or guide by as much as a whisper. Since Miss Haldin with her sure instinct had refrained from introducing me to the burly celebrity, I would have retired quietly and returned later on, had I not met a peculiar expression in her eyes which I interpreted as a request to stay, with the view, perhaps, of shortening an unwelcome visit.

He picked up his hat, but only to deposit it on his knees.

"We shall meet again, Natalia Victorovna. To-day I have called only to mark those feelings towards your honoured mother and yourself, the nature of which you cannot doubt. I needed no urging, but Eleanor—Madame de S— herself has in a way sent me. She extends to you the hand of feminine fellowship. There is positively in all the range of human sentiments no joy and no sorrow that woman cannot understand, elevate, and spiritualize by her interpretation. That young man newly arrived from St. Petersburg, I have mentioned to you, is already under the charm."

At this point Miss Haldin got up abruptly. I was glad. He did not evidently expect anything so decisive and, at first, throwing his head back, he tilted up his

dark glasses with bland curiosity. At last, recollecting himself, he stood up hastily, seizing his hat off his knees with great adroitness.

"How is it, Natalia Victorovna, that you have kept aloof so long, from what after all is—let disparaging tongues say what they like—a unique centre of intellectual freedom and of effort to shape a high conception of our future? In the case of your honoured mother I understand in a measure. At her age new ideas—new faces are not perhaps.... But you! Was it mistrust—or indifference? You must come out of your reserve. We Russians have no right to be reserved with each other. In our circumstances it is almost a crime against humanity. The luxury of private grief is not for us. Nowadays the devil is not combated by prayers and fasting. And what is fasting after all but starvation. You must not starve yourself, Natalia Victorovna. Strength is what we want. Spiritual strength, I mean. As to the other kind, what could withstand us Russians if we only put it forth? Sin is different in our day, and the way of salvation for pure souls is different too. It is no longer to be found in monasteries but in the world, in the..."

The deep sound seemed to rise from under the floor, and one felt steeped in it to the lips. Miss Haldin's interruption resembled the effort of a drowning person to keep above water. She struck in with an accent of impatience—

"But, Peter Ivanovitch, I don't mean to retire into a monastery. Who would look for salvation there?"

"I spoke figuratively," he boomed.

"Well, then, I am speaking figuratively too. But sorrow is sorrow and pain is pain in the old way. They make their demands upon people. One has got to face them the best way one can. I know that the blow which has fallen upon us so unexpectedly is only an episode in the fate of a people. You may rest assured that I don't forget that. But just now I have to think of my mother. How can you expect me to leave her to herself...?"

"That is putting it in a very crude way," he protested in his great effortless voice.

Miss Haldin did not wait for the vibration to die out.

"And run about visiting amongst a lot of strange people. The idea is distasteful for me; and I do not know what else you may mean?"

He towered before her, enormous, deferential, cropped as close as a convict and this big pinkish poll evoked for me the vision of a wild head with matted locks peering through parted bushes, glimpses of naked, tawny limbs slinking behind the masses of sodden foliage under a cloud of flies and mosquitoes. It was an involuntary tribute to the vigour of his writing. Nobody could doubt that he had wandered in Siberian forests, naked and girt with a chain. The black broadcloth coat invested his person with a character of austere decency—something recalling a missionary.

“Do you know what I want, Natalia Victorovna?” he uttered solemnly. “I want you to be a fanatic.”

“A fanatic?”

“Yes. Faith alone won’t do.”

His voice dropped to a still lower tone. He raised for a moment one thick arm; the other remained hanging down against his thigh, with the fragile silk hat at the end.

“I shall tell you now something which I entreat you to ponder over carefully. Listen, we need a force that would move heaven and earth—nothing less.”

The profound, subterranean note of this “nothing less” made one shudder, almost, like the deep muttering of wind in the pipes of an organ.

“And are we to find that force in the salon of Madame de S—? Excuse me, Peter Ivanovitch, if I permit myself to doubt it. Is not that lady a woman of the great world, an aristocrat?”

“Prejudice!” he cried. “You astonish me. And suppose she was all that! She is also a woman of flesh and blood. There is always something to weigh down the spiritual side in all of us. But to make of it a reproach is what I did not expect from you. No! I did not expect that. One would think you have listened to some malevolent scandal.”

“I have heard no gossip, I assure you. In our province how could we? But the world speaks of her. What can there be in common in a lady of that sort and an obscure country girl like me?”

“She is a perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit,” he broke in. “Her charm—no, I shall not speak of her charm. But, of course, everybody who approaches her falls under the spell.... Contradictions vanish, trouble falls away from one.... Unless I am mistaken—but I never make a mistake in spiritual matters—you are troubled in your soul, Natalia Victorovna.”

Miss Haldin’s clear eyes looked straight at his soft enormous face; I received the impression that behind these dark spectacles of his he could be as impudent as he chose.

“Only the other evening walking back to town from Chateau Borel with our latest interesting arrival from Petersburg, I could notice the powerful soothing influence—I may say reconciling influence.... There he was, all these kilometres along the shores of the lake, silent, like a man who has been shown the way of peace. I could feel the leaven working in his soul, you understand. For one thing he listened to me patiently. I myself was inspired that evening by the firm and exquisite genius of Eleanor—Madame de S—, you know. It was a full moon and I could observe his face. I cannot be deceived....”

Miss Haldin, looking down, seemed to hesitate.

“Well! I will think of what you said, Peter Ivanovitch. I shall try to call as soon as I can leave mother for an hour or two safely.”

Coldly as these words were said I was amazed at the concession. He snatched her right hand with such fervour that I thought he was going to press it to his lips or his breast. But he only held it by the finger-tips in his great paw and shook it a little up and down while he delivered his last volley of words.

“That’s right. That’s right. I haven’t obtained your full confidence as yet, Natalia Victorovna, but that will come. All in good time. The sister of Viktor Haldin cannot be without importance.... It’s simply impossible. And no woman can remain sitting on the steps. Flowers, tears, applause—that has had its time; it’s a mediaeval conception. The arena, the arena itself is the place for women!”

He relinquished her hand with a flourish, as if giving it to her for a gift, and remained still, his head bowed in dignified submission before her femininity.

“The arena!... You must descend into the arena, Natalia.”

He made one step backwards, inclined his enormous body, and was gone swiftly. The door fell to behind him. But immediately the powerful resonance of his voice was heard addressing in the ante-room the middle-aged servant woman who was letting him out. Whether he exhorted her too to descend into the arena I cannot tell. The thing sounded like a lecture, and the slight crash of the outer door cut it short suddenly.

III

“We remained looking at each other for a time.”

“Do you know who he is?”

Miss Haldin, coming forward, put this question to me in English.

I took her offered hand.

“Everybody knows. He is a revolutionary feminist, a great writer, if you like, and—how shall I say it—the—the familiar guest of Madame de S—‘s mystic revolutionary salon.”

Miss Haldin passed her hand over her forehead.

“You know, he was with me for more than an hour before you came in. I was so glad mother was lying down. She has many nights without sleep, and then sometimes in the middle of the day she gets a rest of several hours. It is sheer exhaustion—but still, I am thankful.... If it were not for these intervals....”

She looked at me and, with that extraordinary penetration which used to disconcert me, shook her head.

“No. She would not go mad.”

“My dear young lady,” I cried, by way of protest, the more shocked because in my heart I was far from thinking Mrs. Haldin quite sane.

“You don’t know what a fine, lucid intellect mother had,” continued Nathalie Haldin, with her calm, clear-eyed simplicity, which seemed to me always to have a quality of heroism.

“I am sure....” I murmured.

“I darkened mother’s room and came out here. I’ve wanted for so long to think quietly.”

She paused, then, without giving any sign of distress, added, “It’s so difficult,” and looked at me with a strange fixity, as if watching for a sign of dissent or surprise.

I gave neither. I was irresistibly impelled to say—

“The visit from that gentleman has not made it any easier, I fear.”

Miss Haldin stood before me with a peculiar expression in her eyes.

“I don’t pretend to understand completely. Some guide one must have, even if one does not wholly give up the direction of one’s conduct to him. I am an inexperienced girl, but I am not slavish, There has been too much of that in Russia. Why should I not listen to him? There is no harm in having one’s thoughts directed. But I don’t mind confessing to you that I have not been completely candid with Peter Ivanovitch. I don’t quite know what prevented me at the moment....”

She walked away suddenly from me to a distant part of the room; but it was only to open and shut a drawer in a bureau. She returned with a piece of paper in her hand. It was thin and blackened with close handwriting. It was obviously a letter.

“I wanted to read you the very words,” she said. “This is one of my poor brother’s letters. He never doubted. How could he doubt? They make only such a small handful, these miserable oppressors, before the unanimous will of our people.”

“Your brother believed in the power of a people’s will to achieve anything?”

“It was his religion,” declared Miss Haldin.

I looked at her calm face and her animated eyes.

“Of course the will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated,” she went on. “That is the true task of real agitators. One has got to give up one’s life to it. The degradation of servitude, the absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. Reform is impossible. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality, there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel—perhaps blind—officials against a nation.”

The letter rustled slightly in her hand. I glanced down at the flimsy blackened pages whose very handwriting seemed cabalistic, incomprehensible to the experience of Western Europe.

“Stated like this,” I confessed, “the problem seems simple enough. But I fear I shall not see it solved. And if you go back to Russia I know that I shall not see you again. Yet once more I say: go back! Don’t suppose that I am thinking of your preservation. No! I know that you will not be returning to personal safety. But I had much rather think of you in danger there than see you exposed to what may be met here.”

“I tell you what,” said Miss Haldin, after a moment of reflection. “I believe that you hate revolution; you fancy it’s not quite honest. You belong to a people which has made a bargain with fate and wouldn’t like to be rude to it. But we have made no bargain. It was never offered to us—so much liberty for so much hard cash. You shrink from the idea of revolutionary action for those you think well of as if it were something—how shall I say it—not quite decent.”

I bowed my head.

“You are quite right,” I said. “I think very highly of you”

“Don’t suppose I do not know it,” she began hurriedly. “Your friendship has been very valuable.”

“I have done little else but look on.”

She was a little flushed under the eyes.

“There is a way of looking on which is valuable I have felt less lonely because of it. It’s difficult to explain.”

“Really? Well, I too have felt less lonely. That’s easy to explain, though. But it won’t go on much longer. The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution—not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions—in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement—but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment—often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. But enough of that. My meaning is that I don’t want you to be a victim.”

“If I could believe all you have said I still wouldn’t think of myself,” protested Miss Haldin. “I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread. The true progress must begin after. And for that the right men shall be found. They are already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity, unknown, preparing themselves....”

She spread out the letter she had kept in her hand all the time, and looking down at it—

"Yes! One comes upon such men!" she repeated, and then read out the words, "Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences."

Folding up the letter, while I looked at her interrogatively, she explained—

"These are the words which my brother applies to a young man he came to know in St. Petersburg. An intimate friend, I suppose. It must be. His is the only name my brother mentions in all his correspondence with me. Absolutely the only one, and—would you believe it?—the man is here. He arrived recently in Geneva."

"Have you seen him?" I inquired. "But, of course; you must have seen him."

"No! No! I haven't! I didn't know he was here. It's Peter Ivanovitch himself who told me. You have heard him yourself mentioning a new arrival from Petersburg.... Well, that is the man of 'unstained, lofty, and solitary existence.' My brother's friend!"

"Compromised politically, I suppose," I remarked.

"I don't know. Yes. It must be so. Who knows! Perhaps it was this very friendship with my brother which.... But no! It is scarcely possible. Really, I know nothing except what Peter Ivanovitch told me of him. He has brought a letter of introduction from Father Zosim—you know, the priest-democrat; you have heard of Father Zosim?"

"Oh yes. The famous Father Zosim was staying here in Geneva for some two months about a year ago," I said. "When he left here he seems to have disappeared from the world."

"It appears that he is at work in Russia again. Somewhere in the centre," Miss Haldin said, with animation. "But please don't mention that to any one—don't let it slip from you, because if it got into the papers it would be dangerous for him."

"You are anxious, of course, to meet that friend of your brother?" I asked.

Miss Haldin put the letter into her pocket. Her eyes looked beyond my shoulder at the door of her mother's room.

"Not here," she murmured. "Not for the first time, at least."

After a moment of silence I said good-bye, but Miss Haldin followed me into the ante-room, closing the door behind us carefully.

"I suppose you guess where I mean to go tomorrow?"

"You have made up your mind to call on Madame de S—."

"Yes. I am going to the Chateau Borel. I must."

"What do you expect to hear there?" I asked, in a low voice.

I wondered if she were not deluding herself with some impossible hope. It was not that, however.

"Only think—such a friend. The only man mentioned in his letters. He would have something to give me, if nothing more than a few poor words. It may be something said and thought in those last days. Would you want me to turn my back on what is left of my poor brother—a friend?"

"Certainly not," I said. "I quite understand your pious curiosity."

"—Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences," she murmured to herself. "There are! There are! Well, let me question one of them about the loved dead."

"How do you know, though, that you will meet him there? Is he staying in the Chateau as a guest—do you suppose?"

"I can't really tell," she confessed. "He brought a written introduction from Father Zosim—who, it seems, is a friend of Madame de S— too. She can't be such a worthless woman after all."

"There were all sorts of rumours afloat about Father Zosim himself," I observed.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Calumny is a weapon of our government too. It's well known. Oh yes! It is a fact that Father Zosim had the protection of the Governor-General of a certain province. We talked on the subject with my brother two years ago, I remember. But his work was good. And now he is proscribed. What better proof can one require. But no matter what that priest was or is. All that cannot affect my brother's friend. If I don't meet him there I shall ask these people for his address. And, of course, mother must see him too, later on. There is no guessing what he may have to tell us. It would be a mercy if mamma could be soothed. You know what she imagines. Some explanation perhaps may be found, or—or even made up, perhaps. It would be no sin."

"Certainly," I said, "it would be no sin. It may be a mistake, though."

"I want her only to recover some of her old spirit. While she is like this I cannot think of anything calmly."

"Do you mean to invent some sort of pious fraud for your mother's sake?" I asked.

"Why fraud? Such a friend is sure to know something of my brother in these last days. He could tell us.... There is something in the facts which will not let me rest. I am certain he meant to join us abroad—that he had some plans—some great patriotic action in view; not only for himself, but for both of us. I trusted in that. I looked forward to the time! Oh! with such hope and impatience. I could have helped. And now suddenly this appearance of recklessness—as if he had not cared...."

She remained silent for a time, then obstinately she concluded—

"I want to know...."

Thinking it over, later on, while I walked slowly away from the Boulevard des Philosophes, I asked myself critically, what precisely was it that she wanted to know? What I had heard of her history was enough to give me a clue. In the educational establishment for girls where Miss Haldin finished her studies she was looked upon rather unfavourably. She was suspected of holding independent views on matters settled by official teaching. Afterwards, when the two ladies returned to their country place, both mother and daughter, by speaking their minds openly on public events, had earned for themselves a reputation of liberalism. The three-horse trap of the district police-captain began to be seen frequently in their village. "I must keep an eye on the peasants"—so he explained his visits up at the house. "Two lonely ladies must be looked after a little." He would inspect the walls as though he wanted to pierce them with his eyes, peer at the photographs, turn over the books in the drawing-room negligently, and after the usual refreshments, would depart. But the old priest of the village came one evening in the greatest distress and agitation, to confess that he—the priest—had been ordered to watch and ascertain in other ways too (such as using his spiritual power with the servants) all that was going on in the house, and especially in respect of the visitors these ladies received, who they were, the length of their stay, whether any of them were strangers to that part of the country, and so on. The poor, simple old man was in an agony of humiliation and terror. "I came to warn you. Be cautious in your conduct, for the love of God. I am burning with shame, but there is no getting out from under the net. I shall have to tell them what I see, because if I did not there is my deacon. He would make the worst of things to curry favour. And then my son-in-law, the husband of my Parasha, who is a writer in the Government Domain office; they would soon kick him out—and maybe send him away somewhere." The old man lamented the necessities of the times—"when people do not agree somehow" and wiped his eyes. He did not wish to spend the evening of his days with a shaven head in the penitent's cell of some monastery—"and subjected to all the severities of ecclesiastical discipline; for they would show no mercy to an old man," he groaned. He became almost hysterical, and the two ladies, full of commiseration, soothed him the best they could before they let him go back to his cottage. But, as a matter of fact, they had very few visitors. The neighbours—some of them old friends—began to keep away; a few from timidity, others with marked disdain, being grand people that came only for the summer—Miss Haldin explained to me—aristocrats, reactionaries. It was a solitary existence for a young girl. Her relations with her mother were of the tenderest and most open kind; but Mrs. Haldin had seen the experiences of her own generation, its sufferings, its deceptions, its apostasies too. Her affection for

her children was expressed by the suppression of all signs of anxiety. She maintained a heroic reserve. To Nathalie Haldin, her brother with his Petersburg existence, not enigmatical in the least (there could be no doubt of what he felt or thought) but conducted a little mysteriously, was the only visible representative of a proscribed liberty. All the significance of freedom, its indefinite promises, lived in their long discussions, which breathed the loftiest hope of action and faith in success. Then, suddenly, the action, the hopes, came to an end with the details ferreted out by the English journalist. The concrete fact, the fact of his death remained! but it remained obscure in its deeper causes. She felt herself abandoned without explanation. But she did not suspect him. What she wanted was to learn almost at any cost how she could remain faithful to his departed spirit.

IV

Several days elapsed before I met Nathalie Haldin again. I was crossing the place in front of the theatre when I made out her shapely figure in the very act of turning between the gate pillars of the unattractive public promenade of the Bastions. She walked away from me, but I knew we should meet as she returned down the main alley—unless, indeed, she were going home. In that case, I don't think I should have called on her yet. My desire to keep her away from these people was as strong as ever, but I had no illusions as to my power. I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not listen to my wisdom; and as to my desire of listening to her voice, it were better, I thought, not to indulge overmuch in that pleasure. No, I should not have gone to the Boulevard des Philosophes; but when at about the middle of the principal alley I saw Miss Haldin coming towards me, I was too curious, and too honest, perhaps, to run away.

There was something of the spring harshness in the air. The blue sky was hard, but the young leaves clung like soft mist about the uninteresting range of trees; and the clear sun put little points of gold into the grey of Miss Haldin's frank eyes, turned to me with a friendly greeting.

I inquired after the health of her mother.

She had a slight movement of the shoulders and a little sad sigh.

"But, you see, I did come out for a walk...for exercise, as you English say."

I smiled approvingly, and she added an unexpected remark—

"It is a glorious day."

Her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction. I was glad of it. It was as though she had become aware of her youth—for there was but little of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees, framed visibly by the orderly roof-slopes of that town, comely without grace, and hospitable without

sympathy. In the very air through which she moved there was but little warmth; and the sky, the sky of a land without horizons, swept and washed clean by the April showers, extended a cold cruel blue, without elevation, narrowed suddenly by the ugly, dark wall of the Jura where, here and there, lingered yet a few miserable trails and patches of snow. All the glory of the season must have been within herself—and I was glad this feeling had come into her life, if only for a little time.

"I am pleased to hear you say these words." She gave me a quick look. Quick, not stealthy. If there was one thing of which she was absolutely incapable, it was stealthiness, Her sincerity was expressed in the very rhythm of her walk. It was I who was looking at her covertly—if I may say so. I knew where she had been, but I did not know what she had seen and heard in that nest of aristocratic conspiracies. I use the word aristocratic, for want of a better term. The Chateau Borel, embowered in the trees and thickets of its neglected grounds, had its fame in our day, like the residence of that other dangerous and exiled woman, Madame de Stael, in the Napoleonic era. Only the Napoleonic despotism, the booted heir of the Revolution, which counted that intellectual woman for an enemy worthy to be watched, was something quite unlike the autocracy in mystic vestments, engendered by the slavery of a Tartar conquest. And Madame de S— was very far from resembling the gifted author of *Corinne*. She made a great noise about being persecuted. I don't know if she were regarded in certain circles as dangerous. As to being watched, I imagine that the Chateau Borel could be subjected only to a most distant observation. It was in its exclusiveness an ideal abode for hatching superior plots—whether serious or futile. But all this did not interest me. I wanted to know the effect its extraordinary inhabitants and its special atmosphere had produced on a girl like Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced! Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses. And there was also that friend of her brother, the significant new arrival from Russia.... I wondered whether she had managed to meet him.

We walked for some time, slowly and in silence.

"You know," I attacked her suddenly, "if you don't intend telling me anything, you must say so distinctly, and then, of course, it shall be final. But I won't play at delicacy. I ask you point-blank for all the details."

She smiled faintly at my threatening tone.

"You are as curious as a child."

"No. I am only an anxious old man," I replied earnestly.

She rested her glance on me as if to ascertain the degree of my anxiety or the number of my years. My physiognomy has never been expressive, I believe, and as to my years I am not ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit. I have no

long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad; my footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque advantages are not mine. I am old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way. And it seemed to me as though there were some pity for me in Miss Haldin's prolonged glance. She stepped out a little quicker.

"You ask for all the details. Let me see. I ought to remember them. It was novel enough for a—a village girl like me."

After a moment of silence she began by saying that the Chateau Borel was almost as neglected inside as outside. It was nothing to wonder at, a Hamburg banker, I believe, retired from business, had it built to cheer his remaining days by the view of that lake whose precise, orderly, and well-to-do beauty must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a business man. But he died soon. His wife departed too (but only to Italy), and this house of moneyed ease, presumably unsaleable, had stood empty for several years. One went to it up a gravel drive, round a large, coarse grass-plot, with plenty of time to observe the degradation of its stuccoed front. Miss Haldin said that the impression was unpleasant. It grew more depressing as one came nearer.

She observed green stains of moss on the steps of the terrace. The front door stood wide open. There was no one about. She found herself in a wide, lofty, and absolutely empty hall, with a good many doors. These doors were all shut. A broad, bare stone staircase faced her, and the effect of the whole was of an untenanted house. She stood still, disconcerted by the solitude, but after a while she became aware of a voice speaking continuously somewhere.

"You were probably being observed all the time," I suggested. "There must have been eyes."

"I don't see how that could be," she retorted. "I haven't seen even a bird in the grounds. I don't remember hearing a single twitter in the trees. The whole place appeared utterly deserted except for the voice."

She could not make out the language—Russian, French, or German. No one seemed to answer it. It was as though the voice had been left behind by the departed inhabitants to talk to the bare walls. It went on volubly, with a pause now and then. It was lonely and sad. The time seemed very long to Miss Haldin. An invincible repugnance prevented her from opening one of the doors in the hall. It was so hopeless. No one would come, the voice would never stop. She confessed to me that she had to resist an impulse to turn round and go away unseen, as she had come.

"Really? You had that impulse?" I cried, full of regret. "What a pity you did not obey it."

She shook her head.

“What a strange memory it would have been for one. Those deserted grounds, that empty hall, that impersonal, voluble voice, and—nobody, nothing, not a soul.”

The memory would have been unique and harmless. But she was not a girl to run away from an intimidating impression of solitude and mystery. “No, I did not run away,” she said. “I stayed where I was—and I did see a soul. Such a strange soul.”

As she was gazing up the broad staircase, and had concluded that the voice came from somewhere above, a rustle of dress attracted her attention. She looked down and saw a woman crossing the hall, having issued apparently through one of the many doors. Her face was averted, so that at first she was not aware of Miss Haldin.

On turning her head and seeing a stranger, she appeared very much startled. From her slender figure Miss Haldin had taken her for a young girl; but if her face was almost childishly round, it was also sallow and wrinkled, with dark rings under the eyes. A thick crop of dusty brown hair was parted boyishly on the side with a lateral wave above the dry, furrowed forehead. After a moment of dumb blinking, she suddenly squatted down on the floor.

“What do you mean by squatted down?” I asked, astonished. “This is a very strange detail.”

Miss Haldin explained the reason. This person when first seen was carrying a small bowl in her hand. She had squatted down to put it on the floor for the benefit of a large cat, which appeared then from behind her skirts, and hid its head into the bowl greedily. She got up, and approaching Miss Haldin asked with nervous bluntness—

“What do you want? Who are you?”

Miss Haldin mentioned her name and also the name of Peter Ivanovitch. The girlish, elderly woman nodded and puckered her face into a momentary expression of sympathy. Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby. She continued to blink at close quarters, and her eyelashes and eyebrows seemed shabby too. Miss Haldin, speaking gently to her, as if to an unhappy and sensitive person, explained how it was that her visit could not be an altogether unexpected event to Madame de S—.

“Ah! Peter Ivanovitch brought you an invitation. How was I to know? A *dame de compangnie* is not consulted, as you may imagine.”

The shabby woman laughed a little. Her teeth, splendidly white and admirably even, looked absurdly out of place, like a string of pearls on the neck of a ragged tramp. “Peter Ivanovitch is the greatest genius of the century perhaps, but he is

the most inconsiderate man living. So if you have an appointment with him you must not be surprised to hear that he is not here."

Miss Haldin explained that she had no appointment with Peter Ivanovitch. She became interested at once in that bizarre person.

"Why should he put himself out for you or any one else? Oh! these geniuses. If you only knew! Yes! And their books—I mean, of course, the books that the world admires, the inspired books. But you have not been behind the scenes. Wait till you have to sit at a table for a half a day with a pen in your hand. He can walk up and down his rooms for hours and hours. I used to get so stiff and numb that I was afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair all at once."

She kept her hands folded in front of her, and her eyes, fixed on Miss Haldin's face, betrayed no animation whatever. Miss Haldin, gathering that the lady who called herself a *dame de compangnie* was proud of having acted as secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, made an amiable remark.

"You could not imagine a more trying experience," declared the lady. "There is an Anglo-American journalist interviewing Madame de S— now, or I would take you up," she continued in a changed tone and glancing towards the staircase. "I act as master of ceremonies."

It appeared that Madame de S— could not bear Swiss servants about her person; and, indeed, servants would not stay for very long in the Chateau Borel. There were always difficulties. Miss Haldin had already noticed that the hall was like a dusty barn of marble and stucco with cobwebs in the corners and faint tracks of mud on the black and white tessellated floor.

"I look also after this animal," continued the *dame de compagnie*, keeping her hands folded quietly in front of her; and she bent her worn gaze upon the cat. "I don't mind a bit. Animals have their rights; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But of course they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only, in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution. I used to be a Republican. I suppose you are a Republican?"

Miss Haldin confessed to me that she did not know what to say. But she nodded slightly, and asked in her turn—

"And are you no longer a Republican?"

"After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything. First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movement you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing—God forbid! Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window, while waiting for him to go on with

his dictation. That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot, and would roar, 'Look down on the paper!' It seems my expression, my face, put him off. Well, I know that I am not beautiful, and that my expression is not hopeful either. He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words."

Miss Haldin was shocked, but admitted to me that she was not altogether surprised.

"Is it possible that Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely?" she cried.

The *dame de compagnie* nodded several times with an air of discretion, then assured Miss Haldin that she did not mind in the least. The trying part of it was to have the secret of the composition laid bare before her; to see the great author of the revolutionary gospels grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say.

"I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends. To give one's life for the cause is nothing. But to have one's illusions destroyed—that is really almost more than one can bear. I really don't exaggerate," she insisted. "It seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me—the more so that when we worked in winter Peter Ivanovitch, walking up and down the room, required no artificial heat to keep himself warm. Even when we move to the South of France there are bitterly cold days, especially when you have to sit still for six hours at a stretch. The walls of these villas on the Riviera are so flimsy. Peter Ivanovitch did not seem to be aware of anything. It is true that I kept down my shivers from fear of putting him out. I used to set my teeth till my jaws felt absolutely locked. In the moments when Peter Ivanovitch interrupted his dictation, and sometimes these intervals were very long—often twenty minutes, no less, while he walked to and fro behind my back muttering to himself—I felt I was dying by inches, I assure you. Perhaps if I had let my teeth rattle Peter Ivanovitch might have noticed my distress, but I don't think it would have had any practical effect. She's very miserly in such matters."

The *dame de compagnie* glanced up the staircase. The big cat had finished the milk and was rubbing its whiskered cheek sinuously against her skirt. She dived to snatch it up from the floor.

"Miserliness is rather a quality than otherwise, you know," she continued, holding the cat in her folded arms. "With us it is misers who can spare money for worthy objects—not the so-called generous natures. But pray don't think I am a sybarite. My father was a clerk in the Ministry of Finances with no position at all. You may guess by this that our home was far from luxurious, though of course we did not actually suffer from cold. I ran away from my parents, you

know, directly I began to think by myself. It is not very easy, such thinking. One has got to be put in the way of it, awakened to the truth. I am indebted for my salvation to an old apple-woman, who had her stall under the gateway of the house we lived in. She had a kind wrinkled face, and the most friendly voice imaginable. One day, casually, we began to talk about a child, a ragged little girl we had seen begging from men in the streets at dusk; and from one thing to another my eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world, only in order that governments might exist. After I once understood the crime of the upper classes, I could not go on living with my parents. Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year's end to year's end; there was nothing but the talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and of salaries, and of courting the favour of the chiefs. The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder. I don't mean that there was anyone wanting to marry me. There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances? I kissed my old folks on both cheeks, and went away from them to live in cellars, with the proletariat. I tried to make myself useful to the utterly hopeless. I suppose you understand what I mean? I mean the people who have nowhere to go and nothing to look forward to in this life. Do you understand how frightful that is—nothing to look forward to! Sometimes I think that it is only in Russia that there are such people and such a depth of misery can be reached. Well, I plunged into it, and—do you know—there isn't much that one can do in there. No, indeed—at least as long as there are Ministries of Finances and such like grotesque horrors to stand in the way. I suppose I would have gone mad there just trying to fight the vermin, if it had not been for a man. It was my old friend and teacher, the poor saintly apple-woman, who discovered him for me, quite accidentally. She came to fetch me late one evening in her quiet way. I followed her where she would lead; that part of my life was in her hands altogether, and without her my spirit would have perished miserably. The man was a young workman, a lithographer by trade, and he had got into trouble in connexion with that affair of temperance tracts—you remember. There was a lot of people put in prison for that. The Ministry of Finances again! What would become of it if the poor folk ceased making beasts of themselves with drink? Upon my word, I would think that finances and all the rest of it are an invention of the devil; only that a belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. Finances indeed!"

Hatred and contempt hissed in her utterance of the word "finances," but at the very moment she gently stroked the cat reposing in her arms. She even raised

them slightly, and inclining her head rubbed her cheek against the fur of the animal, which received this caress with the complete detachment so characteristic of its kind. Then looking at Miss Haldin she excused herself once more for not taking her upstairs to Madame S— The interview could not be interrupted. Presently the journalist would be seen coming down the stairs. The best thing was to remain in the hall; and besides, all these rooms (she glanced all round at the many doors), all these rooms on the ground floor were unfurnished.

"Positively there is no chair down here to offer you," she continued. "But if you prefer your own thoughts to my chatter, I will sit down on the bottom step here and keep silent."

Miss Haldin hastened to assure her that, on the contrary, she was very much interested in the story of the journeyman lithographer. He was a revolutionist, of course.

"A martyr, a simple man," said the *dame de compangnie*, with a faint sigh, and gazing through the open front door dreamily. She turned her misty brown eyes on Miss Haldin.

"I lived with him for four months. It was like a nightmare."

As Miss Haldin looked at her inquisitively she began to describe the emaciated face of the man, his fleshless limbs, his destitution. The room into which the apple-woman had led her was a tiny garret, a miserable den under the roof of a sordid house. The plaster fallen off the walls covered the floor, and when the door was opened a horrible tapestry of black cobwebs waved in the draught. He had been liberated a few days before—flung out of prison into the streets. And Miss Haldin seemed to see for the first time, a name and a face upon the body of that suffering people whose hard fate had been the subject of so many conversations, between her and her brother, in the garden of their country house.

He had been arrested with scores and scores of other people in that affair of the lithographed temperance tracts. Unluckily, having got hold of a great many suspected persons, the police thought they could extract from some of them other information relating to the revolutionist propaganda.

"They beat him so cruelly in the course of investigation," went on the *dame de compagnie*, "that they injured him internally. When they had done with him he was doomed. He could do nothing for himself. I beheld him lying on a wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags, lent to him out of charity by an old rag-picker, who happened to live in the basement of the house. There he was, uncovered, burning with fever, and there was not even a jug in the room for the water to quench his thirst with. There was nothing whatever—just that bedstead and the bare floor."

“Was there no one in all that great town amongst the liberals and revolutionaries, to extend a helping hand to a brother?” asked Miss Haldin indignantly.

“Yes. But you do not know the most terrible part of that man’s misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that, at last, his firmness gave way, and he did let out some information. Poor soul, the flesh is weak, you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body. Nothing I found to say could make him whole. When they let him out, he crept into that hole, and bore his remorse stoically. He would not go near anyone he knew. I would have sought assistance for him, but, indeed, where could I have gone looking for it? Where was I to look for anyone who had anything to spare or any power to help? The people living round us were all starving and drunken. They were the victims of the Ministry of Finances. Don’t ask me how we lived. I couldn’t tell you. It was like a miracle of wretchedness. I had nothing to sell, and I assure you my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out in the daytime. I was indecent. I had to wait till it was dark before I ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread, or whatever I could get, to keep him and me alive. Often I got nothing, and then I would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch. Oh yes, I can sleep quite soundly on bare boards. That is nothing, and I am only mentioning it to you so that you should not think I am a sybarite. It was infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation. But you shall see yourself what that is like, so I needn’t say any more about it.”

“It is by no means certain that I will ever take Peter Ivanovitch from dictation,” said Miss Haldin.

“No!” cried the other incredulously. “Not certain? You mean to say that you have not made up your mind?”

When Miss Haldin assured her that there never had been any question of that between her and Peter Ivanovitch, the woman with the cat compressed her lips tightly for a moment.

“Oh, you will find yourself settled at the table before you know that you have made up your mind. Don’t make a mistake, it is disenchanting to hear Peter Ivanovitch dictate, but at the same time there is a fascination about it. He is a man of genius. Your face is certain not to irritate him; you may perhaps even help his inspiration, make it easier for him to deliver his message. As I look at you, I feel certain that you are the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration.”

Miss Haldin thought it useless to protest against all these assumptions.

“But this man—this workman did he die under your care?” she said, after a short silence.

The *dame de compagnie*, listening up the stairs where now two voices were alternating with some animation, made no answer for a time. When the loud sounds of the discussion had sunk into an almost inaudible murmur, she turned to Miss Haldin.

"Yes, he died, but not, literally speaking, in my arms, as you might suppose. As a matter of fact, I was asleep when he breathed his last. So even now I cannot say I have seen anybody die. A few days before the end, some young men found us out in our extremity. They were revolutionists, as you might guess. He ought to have trusted in his political friends when he came out of prison. He had been liked and respected before, and nobody would have dreamed of reproaching him with his indiscretion before the police. Everybody knows how they go to work, and the strongest man has his moments of weakness before pain. Why, even hunger alone is enough to give one queer ideas as to what may be done. A doctor came, our lot was alleviated as far as physical comforts go, but otherwise he could not be consoled—poor man. I assure you, Miss Haldin, that he was very lovable, but I had not the strength to weep. I was nearly dead myself. But there were kind hearts to take care of me. A dress was found to clothe my nakedness. I tell you, I was not decent—and after a time the revolutionists placed me with a Jewish family going abroad, as governess. Of course I could teach the children, I finished the sixth class of the Lyceum; but the real object was, that I should carry some important papers across the frontier. I was entrusted with a packet which I carried next my heart. The gendarmes at the station did not suspect the governess of a Jewish family, busy looking after three children. I don't suppose those Hebrews knew what I had on me, for I had been introduced to them in a very roundabout way by persons who did not belong to the revolutionary movement, and naturally I had been instructed to accept a very small salary. When we reached Germany I left that family and delivered my papers to a revolutionist in Stuttgart; after this I was employed in various ways. But you do not want to hear all that. I have never felt that I was very useful, but I live in hopes of seeing all the Ministries destroyed, finances and all. The greatest joy of my life has been to hear what your brother has done."

She directed her round eyes again to the sunshine outside, while the cat reposed within her folded arms in lordly beatitude and sphinx-like meditation.

"Yes! I rejoiced," she began again. "For me there is a heroic ring about the very name of Haldin. They must have been trembling with fear in their Ministries—all those men with fiendish hearts. Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the cruelties, oppressions, and injustices that are going on at this very moment, my head begins to swim. I have looked closely at what would seem inconceivable if one's own eyes had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had

no power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that would not become unhinged. Ah! I have seen things. And you?"

Miss Haldin was moved. She shook her head slightly.

"No, I have seen nothing for myself as yet," she murmured "We have always lived in the country. It was my brother's wish."

"It is a curious meeting—this—between you and me," continued the other. "Do you believe in chance, Miss Haldin? How could I have expected to see you, his sister, with my own eyes? Do you know that when the news came the revolutionaries here were as much surprised as pleased, every bit? No one seemed to know anything about your brother. Peter Ivanovitch himself had not foreseen that such a blow was going to be struck. I suppose your brother was simply inspired. I myself think that such deeds should be done by inspiration. It is a great privilege to have the inspiration and the opportunity. Did he resemble you at all? Don't you rejoice, Miss Haldin?"

"You must not expect too much from me," said Miss Haldin, repressing an inclination to cry which came over her suddenly. She succeeded, then added calmly, "I am not a heroic person!"

"You think you couldn't have done such a thing yourself perhaps?"

"I don't know. I must not even ask myself till I have lived a little longer, seen more...."

The other moved her head appreciatively. The purring of the cat had a loud complacency in the empty hall. No sound of voices came from upstairs. Miss Haldin broke the silence.

"What is it precisely that you heard people say about my brother? You said that they were surprised. Yes, I supposed they were. Did it not seem strange to them that my brother should have failed to save himself after the most difficult part—that is, getting away from the spot—was over? Conspirators should understand these things well. There are reasons why I am very anxious to know how it is he failed to escape."

The *dame de compagnie* had advanced to the open hall-door. She glanced rapidly over her shoulder at Miss Haldin, who remained within the hall.

"Failed to escape," she repeated absently. "Didn't he make the sacrifice of his life? Wasn't he just simply inspired? Wasn't it an act of abnegation? Aren't you certain?"

"What I am certain of," said Miss Haldin, "is that it was not an act of despair. Have you not heard some opinion expressed here upon his miserable capture?"

The *dame de compagnie* mused for a while in the doorway.

"Did I hear? Of course, everything is discussed here. Has not all the world been speaking about your brother? For my part, the mere mention of his

achievement plunges me into an envious ecstasy. Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?"

She kept her back turned to Miss Haldin. Upstairs from behind a great dingy white and gold door, visible behind the balustrade of the first floor landing, a deep voice began to drone formally, as if reading over notes or something of the sort. It paused frequently, and then ceased altogether.

"I don't think I can stay any longer now," said Miss Haldin. "I may return another day."

She waited for the *dame de compagnie* to make room for her exit; but the woman appeared lost in the contemplation of sunshine and shadows, sharing between themselves the stillness of the deserted grounds. She concealed the view of the drive from Miss Haldin. Suddenly she said—

"It will not be necessary; here is Peter Ivanovitch himself coming up. But he is not alone. He is seldom alone now."

Hearing that Peter Ivanovitch was approaching, Miss Haldin was not so pleased as she might have been expected to be. Somehow she had lost the desire to see either the heroic captive or Madame de S—, and the reason of that shrinking which came upon her at the very last minute is accounted for by the feeling that those two people had not been treating the woman with the cat kindly.

"Would you please let me pass?" said Miss Haldin at last, touching lightly the shoulder of the *dame de compagnie*.

But the other, pressing the cat to her breast, did not budge.

"I know who is with him," she said, without even looking back.

More unaccountably than ever Miss Haldin felt a strong impulse to leave the house.

"Madame de S— may be engaged for some time yet, and what I have got to say to Peter Ivanovitch is just a simple question which I might put to him when I meet him in the grounds on my way down. I really think I must go. I have been some time here, and I am anxious to get back to my mother. Will you let me pass, please?"

The *dame de compagnie* turned her head at last.

"I never supposed that you really wanted to see Madame de S—," she said, with unexpected insight. "Not for a moment." There was something confidential and mysterious in her tone. She passed through the door, with Miss Haldin following her, on to the terrace, and they descended side by side the moss-grown stone steps. There was no one to be seen on the part of the drive visible from the front of the house.

“They are hidden by the trees over there,” explained Miss Haldin’s new acquaintance, “but you shall see them directly. I don’t know who that young man is to whom Peter Ivanovitch has taken such a fancy. He must be one of us, or he would not be admitted here when the others come. You know what I mean by the others. But I must say that he is not at all mystically inclined. I don’t know that I have made him out yet. Naturally I am never for very long in the drawing-room. There is always something to do for me, though the establishment here is not so extensive as the villa on the Riviera. But still there are plenty of opportunities for me to make myself useful.”

To the left, passing by the ivy-grown end of the stables, appeared Peter Ivanovitch and his companion. They walked very slowly, conversing with some animation. They stopped for a moment, and Peter Ivanovitch was seen to gesticulate, while the young man listened motionless, with his arms hanging down and his head bowed a little. He was dressed in a dark brown suit and a black hat. The round eyes of the *dame de compagnie* remained fixed on the two figures, which had resumed their leisurely approach.

“An extremely polite young man,” she said. “You shall see what a bow he will make; and it won’t altogether be so exceptional either. He bows in the same way when he meets me alone in the hall.”

She moved on a few steps, with Miss Haldin by her side, and things happened just as she had foretold. The young man took off his hat, bowed and fell back, while Peter Ivanovitch advanced quicker, his black, thick arms extended heartily, and seized hold of both Miss Haldin’s hands, shook them, and peered at her through his dark glasses.

“That’s right, that’s right!” he exclaimed twice, approvingly. “And so you have been looked after by....” He frowned slightly at the *dame de compagnie*, who was still nursing the cat. “I conclude Eleanor—Madame de S— is engaged. I know she expected somebody to-day. So the newspaper man did turn up, eh? She is engaged?”

For all answer the *dame de compagnie* turned away her head.

“It is very unfortunate—very unfortunate indeed. I very much regret that you should have been....” He lowered suddenly his voice. “But what is it—surely you are not departing, Natalia Victorovna? You got bored waiting, didn’t you?”

“Not in the least,” Miss Haldin protested. “Only I have been here some time, and I am anxious to get back to my mother.”

“The time seemed long, eh? I am afraid our worthy friend here” (Peter Ivanovitch suddenly jerked his head sideways towards his right shoulder and jerked it up again),—“our worthy friend here has not the art of shortening the moments of waiting. No, distinctly she has not the art; and in that respect good intentions alone count for nothing.”

The *dame de compagnie* dropped her arms, and the cat found itself suddenly on the ground. It remained quite still after alighting, one hind leg stretched backwards. Miss Haldin was extremely indignant on behalf of the lady companion.

"Believe me, Peter Ivanovitch, that the moments I have passed in the hall of this house have been not a little interesting, and very instructive too. They are memorable. I do not regret the waiting, but I see that the object of my call here can be attained without taking up Madame de S—'s time."

At this point I interrupted Miss Haldin. The above relation is founded on her narrative, which I have not so much dramatized as might be supposed. She had rendered, with extraordinary feeling and animation, the very accent almost of the disciple of the old apple-woman, the irreconcilable hater of Ministries, the voluntary servant of the poor. Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity had been extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance, that lady companion, secretary, whatever she was. For my own part, I was pleased to discover in it one more obstacle to intimacy with Madame de S—. I had a positive abhorrence for the painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. I do not know what was her attitude to the unseen, but I know that in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous. It was within my knowledge that she had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist. Some very august personages indeed (whom in her fury she had insisted upon scandalously involving in her affairs) had incurred her animosity. I find it perfectly easy to believe that she had come to within an ace of being spirited away, for reasons of state, into some discreet *maison de sante*—a madhouse of sorts, to be plain. It appears, however, that certain high-placed personages opposed it for reasons which....

But it's no use to go into details.

Wonder may be expressed at a man in the position of a teacher of languages knowing all this with such definiteness. A novelist says this and that of his personages, and if only he knows how to say it earnestly enough he may not be questioned upon the inventions of his brain in which his own belief is made sufficiently manifest by a telling phrase, a poetic image, the accent of emotion. Art is great! But I have no art, and not having invented Madame de S—, I feel bound to explain how I came to know so much about her.

My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University. It was from her that I learned the last fact of Madame de S—'s history, with which I intend to trouble my readers. She told me, speaking positively, as a person who trusts her sources, of the cause of Madame de S—'s flight from Russia, some years before. It was neither more nor

less than this: that she became suspect to the police in connexion with the assassination of the Emperor Alexander. The ground of this suspicion was either some unguarded expressions that escaped her in public, or some talk overheard in her salon. Overheard, we must believe, by some guest, perhaps a friend, who hastened to play the informer, I suppose. At any rate, the overheard matter seemed to imply her foreknowledge of that event, and I think she was wise in not waiting for the investigation of such a charge. Some of my readers may remember a little book from her pen, published in Paris, a mystically bad-tempered, declamatory, and frightfully disconnected piece of writing, in which she all but admits the foreknowledge, more than hints at its supernatural origin, and plainly suggests in venomous innuendoes that the guilt of the act was not with the terrorists, but with a palace intrigue. When I observed to my friend, the professor's wife, that the life of Madame de S—, with its unofficial diplomacy, its intrigues, lawsuits, favours, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism, and charlatanism, was more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our own time, she assented with a smile, but a moment after went on in a reflective tone: "Charlatanism?—yes, in a certain measure. Still, times are changed. There are forces now which were non-existent in the eighteenth century. I should not be surprised if she were more dangerous than an Englishman would be willing to believe. And what's more, she is looked upon as really dangerous by certain people—*chez nous*."

Chez nous in this connexion meant Russia in general, and the Russian political police in particular. The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin's relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Chateau Borel, was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor's wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov's presence in Geneva, a little more credible—for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. And this I state as my excuse for having left Miss Haldin standing, one of the little group of two women and two men who had come together below the terrace of the Chateau Borel.

The knowledge which I have just stated was in my mind when, as I have said, I interrupted Miss Haldin. I interrupted her with the cry of profound satisfaction—

"So you never saw Madame de S—, after all?"

Miss Haldin shook her head. It was very satisfactory to me. She had not seen Madame de S—! That was excellent, excellent! I welcomed the conviction that she would never know Madame de S— now. I could not explain the reason of the conviction but by the knowledge that Miss Haldin was standing face to face with her brother's wonderful friend. I preferred him to Madame de S— as the

companion and guide of that young girl, abandoned to her inexperience by the miserable end of her brother. But, at any rate, that life now ended had been sincere, and perhaps its thoughts might have been lofty, its moral sufferings profound, its last act a true sacrifice. It is not for us, the staid lovers calmed by the possession of a conquered liberty, to condemn without appeal the fierceness of thwarted desire.

I am not ashamed of the warmth of my regard for Miss Haldin. It was, it must be admitted, an unselfish sentiment, being its own reward. The late Victor Haldin—in the light of that sentiment—appeared to me not as a sinister conspirator, but as a pure enthusiast. I did not wish indeed to judge him, but the very fact that he did not escape, that fact which brought so much trouble to both his mother and his sister, spoke to me in his favour. Meantime, in my fear of seeing the girl surrender to the influence of the Chateau Borel revolutionary feminism, I was more than willing to put my trust in that friend of the late Victor Haldin. He was nothing but a name, you will say. Exactly! A name! And what's more, the only name; the only name to be found in the correspondence between brother and sister. The young man had turned up; they had come face to face, and, fortunately, without the direct interference of Madame de S—. What will come of it? what will she tell me presently? I was asking myself.

It was only natural that my thought should turn to the young man, the bearer of the only name uttered in all the dream-talk of a future to be brought about by a revolution. And my thought took the shape of asking myself why this young man had not called upon these ladies. He had been in Geneva for some days before Miss Haldin heard of him first in my presence from Peter Ivanovitch. I regretted that last's presence at their meeting. I would rather have had it happen somewhere out of his spectacled sight. But I supposed that, having both these young people there, he introduced them to each other.

I broke the silence by beginning a question on that point—

"I suppose Peter Ivanovitch...."

Miss Haldin gave vent to her indignation. Peter Ivanovitch directly he had got his answer from her had turned upon the *dame de compagnie* in a shameful manner.

"Turned upon her?" I wondered. "What about? For what reason?"

"It was unheard of; it was shameful," Miss Haldin pursued, with angry eyes. "*Il lui a fait une scene*—like this, before strangers. And for what? You would never guess. For some eggs.... Oh!"

I was astonished. "Eggs, did you say?"

"For Madame de S—. That lady observes a special diet, or something of the sort. It seems she complained the day before to Peter Ivanovitch that the eggs were not rightly prepared. Peter Ivanovitch suddenly remembered this against

the poor woman, and flew out at her. It was most astonishing. I stood as if rooted."

"Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?" I asked.

"Oh, not that! It was something you have no conception of. It was an odious performance. Imagine, he raised his hat to begin with. He made his voice soft and deprecatory. 'Ah! you are not kind to us—you will not deign to remember....' This sort of phrases, that sort of tone. The poor creature was terribly upset. Her eyes ran full of tears. She did not know where to look. I shouldn't wonder if she would have preferred abuse, or even a blow."

I did not remark that very possibly she was familiar with both on occasions when no one was by. Miss Haldin walked by my side, her head up in scornful and angry silence.

"Great men have their surprising peculiarities," I observed inanely. "Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up for ever. How did the great feminist wind up this very characteristic episode?"

Miss Haldin, without turning her face my way, told me that the end was brought about by the appearance of the interviewer, who had been closeted with Madame de S—.

He came up rapidly, unnoticed, lifted his hat slightly, and paused to say in French: "The Baroness has asked me, in case I met a lady on my way out, to desire her to come in at once."

After delivering this message, he hurried down the drive. The *dame de compagnie* flew towards the house, and Peter Ivanovitch followed her hastily, looking uneasy. In a moment Miss Haldin found herself alone with the young man, who undoubtedly must have been the new arrival from Russia. She wondered whether her brother's friend had not already guessed who she was.

I am in a position to say that, as a matter of fact, he had guessed. It is clear to me that Peter Ivanovitch, for some reason or other, had refrained from alluding to these ladies' presence in Geneva. But Razumov had guessed. The trustful girl! Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised. The most vivid amongst them was the mention of the sister. The girl had existed for him ever since. But he did not recognize her at once. Coming up with Peter Ivanovitch, he did observe her; their eyes had met, even. He had responded, as no one could help responding, to the harmonious charm of her whole person, its strength, its grace, its tranquil frankness—and then he had turned his gaze away. He said to himself that all this was not for him; the beauty of women and the friendship of men were not for him. He accepted that feeling with a purposeful sternness, and tried to pass on. It was only her outstretched hand which brought about the recognition. It stands

recorded in the pages of his self-confession, that it nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay, as though her appearance had been a piece of accomplished treachery.

He faced about. The considerable elevation of the terrace concealed them from anyone lingering in the doorway of the house; and even from the upstairs windows they could not have been seen. Through the thickets run wild, and the trees of the gently sloping grounds, he had cold, placid glimpses of the lake. A moment of perfect privacy had been vouchsafed to them at this juncture. I wondered to myself what use they had made of that fortunate circumstance.

"Did you have time for more than a few words?" I asked.

That animation with which she had related to me the incidents of her visit to the Chateau Borel had left her completely. Strolling by my side, she looked straight before her; but I noticed a little colour on her cheek. She did not answer me.

After some little time I observed that they could not have hoped to remain forgotten for very long, unless the other two had discovered Madame de S— swooning with fatigue, perhaps, or in a state of morbid exaltation after the long interview. Either would require their devoted ministrations. I could depict to myself Peter Ivanovitch rushing busily out of the house again, bareheaded, perhaps, and on across the terrace with his swinging gait, the black skirts of the frock-coat floating clear of his stout light grey legs. I confess to having looked upon these young people as the quarry of the "heroic fugitive." I had the notion that they would not be allowed to escape capture. But of that I said nothing to Miss Haldin, only as she still remained uncommunicative, I pressed her a little.

"Well—but you can tell me at least your impression."

She turned her head to look at me, and turned away again.

"Impression?" she repeated slowly, almost dreamily; then in a quicker tone—

"He seems to be a man who has suffered more from his thoughts than from evil fortune."

"From his thoughts, you say?"

"And that is natural enough in a Russian," she took me up. "In a young Russian; so many of them are unfit for action, and yet unable to rest."

"And you think he is that sort of man?"

"No, I do not judge him. How could I, so suddenly? You asked for my impression—I explain my impression. I—I—don't know the world, nor yet the people in it; I have been too solitary—I am too young to trust my own opinions."

"Trust your instinct," I advised her. "Most women trust to that, and make no worse mistakes than men. In this case you have your brother's letter to help you."

She drew a deep breath like a light sigh. “Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences,” she quoted as if to herself. But I caught the wistful murmur distinctly.

“High praise,” I whispered to her.

“The highest possible.”

“So high that, like the award of happiness, it is more fit to come only at the end of a life. But still no common or altogether unworthy personality could have suggested such a confident exaggeration of praise and...”

“Ah!” She interrupted me ardently. “And if you had only known the heart from which that judgment has come!”

She ceased on that note, and for a space I reflected on the character of the words which I perceived very well must tip the scale of the girl’s feelings in that young man’s favour. They had not the sound of a casual utterance. Vague they were to my Western mind and to my Western sentiment, but I could not forget that, standing by Miss Haldin’s side, I was like a traveller in a strange country. It had also become clear to me that Miss Haldin was unwilling to enter into the details of the only material part of their visit to the Chateau Borel. But I was not hurt. Somehow I didn’t feel it to be a want of confidence. It was some other difficulty—a difficulty I could not resent. And it was without the slightest resentment that I said—

“Very well. But on that high ground, which I will not dispute, you, like anyone else in such circumstances, you must have made for yourself a representation of that exceptional friend, a mental image of him, and—please tell me—you were not disappointed?”

“What do you mean? His personal appearance?”

“I don’t mean precisely his good looks, or otherwise.”

We turned at the end of the alley and made a few steps without looking at each other.

“His appearance is not ordinary,” said Miss Haldin at last.

“No, I should have thought not—from the little you’ve said of your first impression. After all, one has to fall back on that word. Impression! What I mean is that something indescribable which is likely to mark a ‘not ordinary’ person.”

I perceived that she was not listening. There was no mistaking her expression; and once more I had the sense of being out of it—not because of my age, which at any rate could draw inferences—but altogether out of it, on another plane whence I could only watch her from afar. And so ceasing to speak I watched her stepping out by my side.

“No,” she exclaimed suddenly, “I could not have been disappointed with a man of such strong feeling.”

“Aha! Strong feeling,” I muttered, thinking to myself censoriously: like this, at once, all in a moment!

“What did you say?” inquired Miss Haldin innocently.

“Oh, nothing. I beg your pardon. Strong feeling. I am not surprised.”

“And you don’t know how abruptly I behaved to him!” she cried remorsefully.

I suppose I must have appeared surprised, for, looking at me with a still more heightened colour, she said she was ashamed to admit that she had not been sufficiently collected; she had failed to control her words and actions as the situation demanded. She lost the fortitude worthy of both the men, the dead and the living; the fortitude which should have been the note of the meeting of Victor Haldin’s sister with Victor Haldin’s only known friend. He was looking at her keenly, but said nothing, and she was—she confessed—painfully affected by his want of comprehension. All she could say was: “You are Mr. Razumov.” A slight frown passed over his forehead. After a short, watchful pause, he made a little bow of assent, and waited.

At the thought that she had before her the man so highly regarded by her brother, the man who had known his value, spoken to him, understood him, had listened to his confidences, perhaps had encouraged him—her lips trembled, her eyes ran full of tears; she put out her hand, made a step towards him impulsively, saying with an effort to restrain her emotion, “Can’t you guess who I am?” He did not take the proffered hand. He even recoiled a pace, and Miss Haldin imagined that he was unpleasantly affected. Miss Haldin excused him, directing her displeasure at herself. She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl. A manifestation of that kind could not be welcomed by a man of stern, self-contained character.

He must have been stern indeed, or perhaps very timid with women, not to respond in a more human way to the advances of a girl like Nathalie Haldin—I thought to myself. Those lofty and solitary existences (I remembered the words suddenly) make a young man shy and an old man savage—often.

“Well,” I encouraged Miss Haldin to proceed.

She was still very dissatisfied with herself.

“I went from bad to worse,” she said, with an air of discouragement very foreign to her. “I did everything foolish except actually bursting into tears. I am thankful to say I did not do that. But I was unable to speak for quite a long time.”

She had stood before him, speechless, swallowing her sobs, and when she managed at last to utter something, it was only her brother's name—"Victor—Victor Haldin!" she gasped out, and again her voice failed her.

"Of course," she commented to me, "this distressed him. He was quite overcome. I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling—it is impossible to doubt it. You should have seen his face. He positively reeled. He leaned against the wall of the terrace. Their friendship must have been the very brotherhood of souls! I was grateful to him for that emotion, which made me feel less ashamed of my own lack of self-control. Of course I had regained the power of speech at once, almost. All this lasted not more than a few seconds. 'I am his sister,' I said. 'Maybe you have heard of me.'"

"And had he?" I interrupted.

"I don't know. How could it have been otherwise? And yet.... But what does that matter? I stood there before him, near enough to be touched and surely not looking like an impostor. All I know is, that he put out both his hands then to me, I may say flung them out at me, with the greatest readiness and warmth, and that I seized and pressed them, feeling that I was finding again a little of what I thought was lost to me for ever, with the loss of my brother—some of that hope, inspiration, and support which I used to get from my dear dead...."

I understood quite well what she meant. We strolled on slowly. I refrained from looking at her. And it was as if answering my own thoughts that I murmured—

"No doubt it was a great friendship—as you say. And that young man ended by welcoming your name, so to speak, with both hands. After that, of course, you would understand each other. Yes, you would understand each other quickly."

It was a moment before I heard her voice.

"Mr. Razumov seems to be a man of few words. A reserved man—even when he is strongly moved."

Unable to forget—-or even to forgive—the bass-toned expansiveness of Peter Ivanovitch, the Archpatron of revolutionary parties, I said that I took this for a favourable trait of character. It was associated with sincerity—in my mind.

"And, besides, we had not much time," she added.

"No, you would not have, of course." My suspicion and even dread of the feminist and his Egeria was so ineradicable that I could not help asking with real anxiety, which I made smiling—

"But you escaped all right?"

She understood me, and smiled too, at my uneasiness.

“Oh yes! I escaped, if you like to call it that. I walked away quickly. There was no need to run. I am neither frightened nor yet fascinated, like that poor woman who received me so strangely.”

“And Mr.—Mr. Razumov...?”

“He remained there, of course. I suppose he went into the house after I left him. You remember that he came here strongly recommended to Peter Ivanovitch—possibly entrusted with important messages for him.”

“Ah yes! From that priest who...”

“Father Zosim—yes. Or from others, perhaps.”

“You left him, then. But have you seen him since, may I ask?”

For some time Miss Haldin made no answer to this very direct question, then—

“I have been expecting to see him here to-day,” she said quietly.

“You have! Do you meet, then, in this garden? In that case I had better leave you at once.”

“No, why leave me? And we don’t meet in this garden. I have not seen Mr. Razumov since that first time. Not once. But I have been expecting him....”

She paused. I wondered to myself why that young revolutionist should show so little alacrity.

“Before we parted I told Mr. Razumov that I walked here for an hour every day at this time. I could not explain to him then why I did not ask him to come and see us at once. Mother must be prepared for such a visit. And then, you see, I do not know myself what Mr. Razumov has to tell us. He, too, must be told first how it is with poor mother. All these thoughts flashed through my mind at once. So I told him hurriedly that there was a reason why I could not ask him to see us at home, but that I was in the habit of walking here.... This is a public place, but there are never many people about at this hour. I thought it would do very well. And it is so near our apartments. I don’t like to be very far away from mother. Our servant knows where I am in case I should be wanted suddenly.”

“Yes. It is very convenient from that point of view,” I agreed.

In fact, I thought the Bastions a very convenient place, since the girl did not think it prudent as yet to introduce that young man to her mother. It was here, then, I thought, looking round at that plot of ground of deplorable banality, that their acquaintance will begin and go on in the exchange of generous indignations and of extreme sentiments, too poignant, perhaps, for a non-Russian mind to conceive. I saw these two, escaped out of four score of millions of human beings ground between the upper and nether millstone, walking under these trees, their young heads close together. Yes, an excellent place to stroll and talk in. It even occurred to me, while we turned once more away from the wide iron gates, that

when tired they would have plenty of accommodation to rest themselves. There was a quantity of tables and chairs displayed between the restaurant chalet and the bandstand, a whole raft of painted deals spread out under the trees. In the very middle of it I observed a solitary Swiss couple, whose fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of ones hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the woman, rustic and placid, leaning back in the rough chair, gazed idly around.

There is little logic to be expected on this earth, not only in the matter of thought, but also of sentiment. I was surprised to discover myself displeased with that unknown young man. A week had gone by since they met. Was he callous, or shy, or very stupid? I could not make it out.

"Do you think," I asked Miss Haldin, after we had gone some distance up the great alley, "that Mr Razumov understood your intention?"

"Understood what I meant?" she wondered. "He was greatly moved. That I know! In my own agitation I could see it. But I spoke distinctly. He heard me; he seemed, indeed, to hang on my words..."

Unconsciously she had hastened her pace. Her utterance, too, became quicker.

I waited a little before I observed thoughtfully—

"And yet he allowed all these days to pass."

"How can we tell what work he may have to do here? He is not an idler travelling for his pleasure. His time may not be his own—nor yet his thoughts, perhaps."

She slowed her pace suddenly, and in a lowered voice added—

"Or his very life"—then paused and stood still "For all I know, he may have had to leave Geneva the very day he saw me."

"Without telling you!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"I did not give him time. I left him quite abruptly. I behaved emotionally to the end. I am sorry for it. Even if I had given him the opportunity he would have been justified in taking me for a person not to be trusted. An emotional, tearful girl is not a person to confide in. But even if he has left Geneva for a time, I am confident that we shall meet again."

"Ah! you are confident.... I dare say. But on what ground?"

"Because I've told him that I was in great need of some one, a fellow-countryman, a fellow-believer, to whom I could give my confidence in a certain matter."

"I see. I don't ask you what answer he made. I confess that this is good ground for your belief in Mr. Razumov's appearance before long. But he has not turned up to-day?"

“No,” she said quietly, “not to-day;” and we stood for a time in silence, like people that have nothing more to say to each other and let their thoughts run widely asunder before their bodies go off their different ways. Miss Haldin glanced at the watch on her wrist and made a brusque movement. She had already overstayed her time, it seemed.

“I don’t like to be away from mother,” she murmured, shaking her head. “It is not that she is very ill now. But somehow when I am not with her I am more uneasy than ever.”

Mrs. Haldin had not made the slightest allusion to her son for the last week or more. She sat, as usual, in the arm-chair by the window, looking out silently on that hopeless stretch of the Boulevard des Philosophes. When she spoke, a few lifeless words, it was of indifferent, trivial things.

“For anyone who knows what the poor soul is thinking of, that sort of talk is more painful than her silence. But that is bad too; I can hardly endure it, and I dare not break it.”

Miss Haldin sighed, refastening a button of her glove which had come undone. I knew well enough what a hard time of it she must be having. The stress, its causes, its nature, would have undermined the health of an Occidental girl; but Russian natures have a singular power of resistance against the unfair strains of life. Straight and supple, with a short jacket open on her black dress, which made her figure appear more slender and her fresh but colourless face more pale, she compelled my wonder and admiration.

“I can’t stay a moment longer. You ought to come soon to see mother. You know she calls you ‘*L’ami.*’ It is an excellent name, and she really means it. And now *au revoir*; I must run.”

She glanced vaguely down the broad walk—the hand she put out to me eluded my grasp by an unexpected upward movement, and rested upon my shoulder. Her red lips were slightly parted, not in a smile, however, but expressing a sort of startled pleasure. She gazed towards the gates and said quickly, with a gasp—

“There! I knew it. Here he comes!”

I understood that she must mean Mr. Razumov. A young man was walking up the alley, without haste. His clothes were some dull shade of brown, and he carried a stick. When my eyes first fell on him, his head was hanging on his breast as if in deep thought. While I was looking at him he raised it sharply, and at once stopped. I am certain he did, but that pause was nothing more perceptible than a faltering check in his gait, instantaneously overcome. Then he continued his approach, looking at us steadily. Miss Haldin signed to me to remain, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

I turned my head away from that meeting, and did not look at them again till I heard Miss Haldin’s voice uttering his name in the way of introduction. Mr.

Razumov was informed, in a warm, low tone, that, besides being a wonderful teacher, I was a great support "in our sorrow and distress."

Of course I was described also as an Englishman. Miss Haldin spoke rapidly, faster than I have ever heard her speak, and that by contrast made the quietness of her eyes more expressive.

"I have given him my confidence," she added, looking all the time at Mr. Razumov. That young man did, indeed, rest his gaze on Miss Haldin, but certainly did not look into her eyes which were so ready for him. Afterwards he glanced backwards and forwards at us both, while the faint commencement of a forced smile, followed by the suspicion of a frown, vanished one after another; I detected them, though neither could have been noticed by a person less intensely bent upon divining him than myself. I don't know what Nathalie Haldin had observed, but my attention seized the very shades of these movements. The attempted smile was given up, the incipient frown was checked, and smoothed so that there should be no sign; but I imagined him exclaiming inwardly—

"Her confidence! To this elderly person—this foreigner!"

I imagined this because he looked foreign enough to me. I was upon the whole favourably impressed. He had an air of intelligence and even some distinction quite above the average of the students and other inhabitants of the *Petite Russie*. His features were more decided than in the generality of Russian faces; he had a line of the jaw, a clean-shaven, sallow cheek; his nose was a ridge, and not a mere protuberance. He wore the hat well down over his eyes, his dark hair curled low on the nape of his neck; in the ill-fitting brown clothes there were sturdy limbs; a slight stoop brought out a satisfactory breadth of shoulders. Upon the whole I was not disappointed. Studious—robust—shy.

Before Miss Haldin had ceased speaking I felt the grip of his hand on mine, a muscular, firm grip, but unexpectedly hot and dry. Not a word or even a mutter assisted this short and arid handshake.

I intended to leave them to themselves, but Miss Haldin touched me lightly on the forearm with a significant contact, conveying a distinct wish. Let him smile who likes, but I was only too ready to stay near Nathalie Haldin, and I am not ashamed to say that it was no smiling matter to me. I stayed, not as a youth would have stayed, uplifted, as it were poised in the air, but soberly, with my feet on the ground and my mind trying to penetrate her intention. She had turned to Razumov.

"Well. This is the place. Yes, it is here that I meant you to come. I have been walking every day.... Don't excuse yourself—I understand. I am grateful to you for coming to-day, but all the same I cannot stay now. It is impossible. I must hurry off home. Yes, even with you standing before me, I must run off. I have been too long away.... You know how it is?"

These last words were addressed to me. I noticed that Mr. Razumov passed the tip of his tongue over his lips just as a parched, feverish man might do. He took her hand in its black glove, which closed on his, and held it—detained it quite visibly to me against a drawing-back movement.

"Thank you once more for—for understanding me," she went on warmly. He interrupted her with a certain effect of roughness. I didn't like him speaking to this frank creature so much from under the brim of his hat, as it were. And he produced a faint, rasping voice quite like a man with a parched throat.

"What is there to thank me for? Understand you?... How did I understand you?... You had better know that I understand nothing. I was aware that you wanted to see me in this garden. I could not come before. I was hindered. And even to-day, you see...late."

She still held his hand.

"I can, at any rate, thank you for not dismissing me from your mind as a weak, emotional girl. No doubt I want sustaining. I am very ignorant. But I can be trusted. Indeed I can!"

"You are ignorant," he repeated thoughtfully. He had raised his head, and was looking straight into her face now, while she held his hand. They stood like this for a long moment. She released his hand.

"Yes. You did come late. It was good of you to come on the chance of me having loitered beyond my time. I was talking with this good friend here. I was talking of you. Yes, Kirylo Sidorovitch, of you. He was with me when I first heard of your being here in Geneva. He can tell you what comfort it was to my bewildered spirit to hear that news. He knew I meant to seek you out. It was the only object of my accepting the invitation of Peter Ivanovitch....

"Peter Ivanovitch talked to you of me," he interrupted, in that wavering, hoarse voice which suggested a horribly dry throat.

"Very little. Just told me your name, and that you had arrived here. Why should I have asked for more? What could he have told me that I did not know already from my brother's letter? Three lines! And how much they meant to me! I will show them to you one day, Kirylo Sidorovitch. But now I must go. The first talk between us cannot be a matter of five minutes, so we had better not begin...."

I had been standing a little aside, seeing them both in profile. At that moment it occurred to me that Mr. Razumov's face was older than his age.

"If mother"—the girl had turned suddenly to me, "were to wake up in my absence (so much longer than usual) she would perhaps question me. She seems to miss me more, you know, of late. She would want to know what delayed me—and, you see, it would be painful for me to dissemble before her."

I understood the point very well. For the same reason she checked what seemed to be on Mr. Razumov's part a movement to accompany her.

"No! No! I go alone, but meet me here as soon as possible." Then to me in a lower, significant tone—

"Mother may be sitting at the window at this moment, looking down the street. She must not know anything of Mr. Razumov's presence here till—till something is arranged." She paused before she added a little louder, but still speaking to me, "Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is."

V

With a quick inclination of the head for us both, and an earnest, friendly glance at the young man, Miss Haldin left us covering our heads and looking after her straight, supple figure receding rapidly. Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding affected by some women, but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward. Rapidly she increased the distance—disappeared with suddenness at last. I discovered only then that Mr. Razumov, after ramming his hat well over his brow, was looking me over from head to foot. I dare say I was a very unexpected fact for that young Russian to stumble upon. I caught in his physiognomy, in his whole bearing, an expression compounded of curiosity and scorn, tempered by alarm—as though he had been holding his breath while I was not looking. But his eyes met mine with a gaze direct enough. I saw then for the first time that they were of a clear brown colour and fringed with thick black eyelashes. They were the youngest feature of his face. Not at all unpleasant eyes. He swayed slightly, leaning on his stick and generally hung in the wind. It flashed upon me that in leaving us together Miss Haldin had an intention—that something was entrusted to me, since, by a mere accident I had been found at hand. On this assumed ground I put all possible friendliness into my manner. I cast about for some right thing to say, and suddenly in Miss Haldin's last words I perceived the clue to the nature of my mission.

"No," I said gravely, if with a smile, "you cannot be expected to understand."

His clean-shaven lip quivered ever so little before he said, as if wickedly amused—

"But haven't you heard just now? I was thanked by that young lady for understanding so well."

I looked at him rather hard. Was there a hidden and inexplicable sneer in this retort? No. It was not that. It might have been resentment. Yes. But what had he to resent? He looked as though he had not slept very well of late. I could almost feel on me the weight of his unrefreshed, motionless stare, the stare of a man who lies unwinking in the dark, angrily passive in the toils of disastrous thoughts. Now, when I know how true it was, I can honestly affirm that this was

the effect he produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way—for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance. This new sort of uneasiness which he seemed to be forcing upon me I attempted to put down by assuming a conversational, easy familiarity.

"That extremely charming and essentially admirable young girl (I am—as you see—old enough to be frank in my expressions) was referring to her own feelings. Surely you must have understood that much?"

He made such a brusque movement that he even tottered a little.

"Must understand this! Not expected to understand that! I may have other things to do. And the girl is charming and admirable. Well—and if she is! I suppose I can see that for myself."

This sally would have been insulting if his voice had not been practically extinct, dried up in his throat; and the rustling effort of his speech too painful to give real offence.

I remained silent, checked between the obvious fact and the subtle impression. It was open to me to leave him there and then; but the sense of having been entrusted with a mission, the suggestion of Miss Haldin's last glance, was strong upon me. After a moment of reflection I said—

"Shall we walk together a little?"

He shrugged his shoulders so violently that he tottered again. I saw it out of the corner of my eye as I moved on, with him at my elbow. He had fallen back a little and was practically out of my sight, unless I turned my head to look at him. I did not wish to indispose him still further by an appearance of marked curiosity. It might have been distasteful to such a young and secret refugee from under the pestilential shadow hiding the true, kindly face of his land. And the shadow, the attendant of his countrymen, stretching across the middle of Europe, was lying on him too, darkening his figure to my mental vision. "Without doubt," I said to myself, "he seems a sombre, even a desperate revolutionist; but he is young, he may be unselfish and humane, capable of compassion, of...."

I heard him clear gratingly his parched throat, and became all attention.

"This is beyond everything," were his first words. "It is beyond everything! I find you here, for no reason that I can understand, in possession of something I cannot be expected to understand! A confidant! A foreigner! Talking about an admirable Russian girl. Is the admirable girl a fool, I begin to wonder? What are you at? What is your object?"

He was barely audible, as if his throat had no more resonance than a dry rag, a piece of tinder. It was so pitiful that I found it extremely easy to control my indignation.

“When you have lived a little longer, Mr. Razumov, you will discover that no woman is an absolute fool. I am not a feminist, like that illustrious author, Peter Ivanovitch, who, to say the truth, is not a little suspect to me....”

He interrupted me, in a surprising note of whispering astonishment.

“Suspect to you! Peter Ivanovitch suspect to you! To you!...”

“Yes, in a certain aspect he is,” I said, dismissing my remark lightly. “As I was saying, Mr. Razumov, when you have lived long enough, you will learn to discriminate between the noble trustfulness of a nature foreign to every meanness and the flattered credulity of some women; though even the credulous, silly as they may be, unhappy as they are sure to be, are never absolute fools. It is my belief that no woman is ever completely deceived. Those that are lost leap into the abyss with their eyes open, if all the truth were known.”

“Upon my word,” he cried at my elbow, “what is it to me whether women are fools or lunatics? I really don’t care what you think of them. I—I am not interested in them. I let them be. I am not a young man in a novel. How do you know that I want to learn anything about women?... What is the meaning of all this?”

“The object, you mean, of this conversation, which I admit I have forced upon you in a measure.”

“Forced! Object!” he repeated, still keeping half a pace or so behind me. “You wanted to talk about women, apparently. That’s a subject. But I don’t care for it. I have never.... In fact, I have had other subjects to think about.”

“I am concerned here with one woman only—a young girl—the sister of your dead friend—Miss Haldin. Surely you can think a little of her. What I meant from the first was that there is a situation which you cannot be expected to understand.”

I listened to his unsteady footfalls by my side for the space of several strides.

“I think that it may prepare the ground for your next interview with Miss Haldin if I tell you of it. I imagine that she might have had something of the kind in her mind when she left us together. I believe myself authorized to speak. The peculiar situation I have alluded to has arisen in the first grief and distress of Victor Haldin’s execution. There was something peculiar in the circumstances of his arrest. You no doubt know the whole truth....”

I felt my arm seized above the elbow, and next instant found myself swung so as to face Mr. Razumov.

“You spring up from the ground before me with this talk. Who the devil are you? This is not to be borne! Why! What for? What do you know what is or is not peculiar? What have you to do with any confounded circumstances, or with anything that happens in Russia, anyway?”

He leaned on his stick with his other hand, heavily; and when he let go my arm, I was certain in my mind that he was hardly able to keep on his feet.

"Let us sit down at one of these vacant tables," I proposed, disregarding this display of unexpectedly profound emotion. It was not without its effect on me, I confess. I was sorry for him.

"What tables? What are you talking about? Oh—the empty tables? The tables there. Certainly. I will sit at one of the empty tables."

I led him away from the path to the very centre of the raft of deals before the *chalet*. The Swiss couple were gone by that time. We were alone on the raft, so to speak. Mr. Razumov dropped into a chair, let fall his stick, and propped on his elbows, his head between his hands, stared at me persistently, openly, and continuously, while I signalled the waiter and ordered some beer. I could not quarrel with this silent inspection very well, because, truth to tell, I felt somewhat guilty of having been sprung on him with some abruptness—of having "sprung from the ground," as he expressed it.

While waiting to be served I mentioned that, born from parents settled in St. Petersburg, I had acquired the language as a child. The town I did not remember, having left it for good as a boy of nine, but in later years I had renewed my acquaintance with the language. He listened, without as much as moving his eyes the least little bit. He had to change his position when the beer came, and the instant draining of his glass revived him. He leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms across his chest, continued to stare at me squarely. It occurred to me that his clean-shaven, almost swarthy face was really of the very mobile sort, and that the absolute stillness of it was the acquired habit of a revolutionist, of a conspirator everlastingly on his guard against self-betrayal in a world of secret spies.

"But you are an Englishman—a teacher of English literature," he murmured, in a voice that was no longer issuing from a parched throat. "I have heard of you. People told me you have lived here for years."

"Quite true. More than twenty years. And I have been assisting Miss Haldin with her English studies."

"You have been reading English poetry with her," he said, immovable now, like another man altogether, a complete stranger to the man of the heavy and uncertain footfalls a little while ago—at my elbow.

"Yes, English poetry," I said. "But the trouble of which I speak was caused by an English newspaper."

He continued to stare at me. I don't think he was aware that the story of the midnight arrest had been ferreted out by an English journalist and given to the world. When I explained this to him he muttered contemptuously, "It may have been altogether a lie."

“I should think you are the best judge of that,” I retorted, a little disconcerted. “I must confess that to me it looks to be true in the main.”

“How can you tell truth from lies?” he queried in his new, immovable manner.

“I don’t know how you do it in Russia,” I began, rather nettled by his attitude. He interrupted me.

“In Russia, and in general everywhere—in a newspaper, for instance. The colour of the ink and the shapes of the letters are the same.”

“Well, there are other trifles one can go by. The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on. I don’t trust blindly the accuracy of special correspondents—but why should this one have gone to the trouble of concocting a circumstantial falsehood on a matter of no importance to the world?”

“That’s what it is,” he grumbled. “What’s going on with us is of no importance—a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers—the superior contemptuous Europe. It is hateful to think of. But let them wait a bit!”

He broke off on this sort of threat addressed to the western world. Disregarding the anger in his stare, I pointed out that whether the journalist was well- or ill-informed, the concern of the friends of these ladies was with the effect the few lines of print in question had produced—the effect alone. And surely he must be counted as one of the friends—if only for the sake of his late comrade and intimate fellow-revolutionist. At that point I thought he was going to speak vehemently; but he only astounded me by the convulsive start of his whole body. He restrained himself, folded his loosened arms tighter across his chest, and sat back with a smile in which there was a twitch of scorn and malice.

“Yes, a comrade and an intimate.... Very well,” he said.

“I ventured to speak to you on that assumption. And I cannot be mistaken. I was present when Peter Ivanovitch announced your arrival here to Miss Haldin, and I saw her relief and thankfulness when your name was mentioned. Afterwards she showed me her brother’s letter, and read out the few words in which he alludes to you. What else but a friend could you have been?”

“Obviously. That’s perfectly well known. A friend. Quite correct.... Go on. You were talking of some effect.”

I said to myself: “He puts on the callousness of a stern revolutionist, the insensibility to common emotions of a man devoted to a destructive idea. He is young, and his sincerity assumes a pose before a stranger, a foreigner, an old man. Youth must assert itself....” As concisely as possible I exposed to him the state of mind poor Mrs. Haldin had been thrown into by the news of her son’s untimely end.

He listened—I felt it—with profound attention. His level stare deflected gradually downwards, left my face, and rested at last on the ground at his feet.

"You can enter into the sister's feelings. As you said, I have only read a little English poetry with her, and I won't make myself ridiculous in your eyes by trying to speak of her. But you have seen her. She is one of these rare human beings that do not want explaining. At least I think so. They had only that son, that brother, for a link with the wider world, with the future. The very groundwork of active existence for Nathalie Haldin is gone with him. Can you wonder then that she turns with eagerness to the only man her brother mentions in his letters. Your name is a sort of legacy."

"What could he have written of me?" he cried, in a low, exasperated tone.

"Only a few words. It is not for me to repeat them to you, Mr. Razumov; but you may believe my assertion that these words are forcible enough to make both his mother and his sister believe implicitly in the worth of your judgment and in the truth of anything you may have to say to them. It's impossible for you now to pass them by like strangers."

I paused, and for a moment sat listening to the footsteps of the few people passing up and down the broad central walk. While I was speaking his head had sunk upon his breast above his folded arms. He raised it sharply.

"Must I go then and lie to that old woman!"

It was not anger; it was something else, something more poignant, and not so simple. I was aware of it sympathetically, while I was profoundly concerned at the nature of that exclamation.

"Dear me! Won't the truth do, then? I hoped you could have told them something consoling. I am thinking of the poor mother now. Your Russia *is* a cruel country."

He moved a little in his chair.

"Yes," I repeated. "I thought you would have had something authentic to tell."

The twitching of his lips before he spoke was curious.

"What if it is not worth telling?"

"Not worth—from what point of view? I don't understand."

"From every point of view."

I spoke with some asperity.

"I should think that anything which could explain the circumstances of that midnight arrest...."

"Reported by a journalist for the amusement of the civilized Europe," he broke in scornfully.

“Yes, reported.... But aren’t they true? I can’t make out your attitude in this? Either the man is a hero to you, or...”

He approached his face with fiercely distended nostrils close to mine so suddenly that I had the greatest difficulty in not starting back.

“You ask me! I suppose it amuses you, all this. Look here! I am a worker. I studied. Yes, I studied very hard. There is intelligence here.” (He tapped his forehead with his finger-tips.) “Don’t you think a Russian may have sane ambitions? Yes—I had even prospects. Certainly! I had. And now you see me here, abroad, everything gone, lost, sacrificed. You see me here—and you ask! You see me, don’t you?—sitting before you.”

He threw himself back violently. I kept outwardly calm.

“Yes, I see you here; and I assume you are here on account of the Haldin affair?”

His manner changed.

“You call it the Haldin affair—do you?” he observed indifferently.

“I have no right to ask you anything,” I said. “I wouldn’t presume. But in that case the mother and the sister of him who must be a hero in your eyes cannot be indifferent to you. The girl is a frank and generous creature, having the noblest—well—illusions. You will tell her nothing—or you will tell her everything. But speaking now of the object with which I’ve approached you first, we have to deal with the morbid state of the mother. Perhaps something could be invented under your authority as a cure for a distracted and suffering soul filled with maternal affection.”

His air of weary indifference was accentuated, I could not help thinking, wilfully.

“Oh yes. Something might,” he mumbled carelessly.

He put his hand over his mouth to conceal a yawn. When he uncovered his lips they were smiling faintly.

“Pardon me. This has been a long conversation, and I have not had much sleep the last two nights.”

This unexpected, somewhat insolent sort of apology had the merit of being perfectly true. He had had no nightly rest to speak of since that day when, in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, the sister of Victor Haldin had appeared before him. The perplexities and the complex terrors—I may say—of this sleeplessness are recorded in the document I was to see later—the document which is the main source of this narrative. At the moment he looked to me convincingly tired, gone slack all over, like a man who has passed through some sort of crisis.

“I have had a lot of urgent writing to do,” he added.

I rose from my chair at once, and he followed my example, without haste, a little heavily.

“I must apologize for detaining you so long,” I said.

“Why apologize? One can’t very well go to bed before night. And you did not detain me. I could have left you at any time.”

I had not stayed with him to be offended.

“I am glad you have been sufficiently interested,” I said calmly. “No merit of mine, though—the commonest sort of regard for the mother of your friend was enough.... As to Miss Haldin herself, she at one time was disposed to think that her brother had been betrayed to the police in some way.”

To my great surprise Mr. Razumov sat down again suddenly. I stared at him, and I must say that he returned my stare without winking for quite a considerable time.

“In some way,” he mumbled, as if he had not understood or could not believe his ears.

“Some unforeseen event, a sheer accident might have done that,” I went on. “Or, as she characteristically put it to me, the folly or weakness of some unhappy fellow-revolutionist.”

“Folly or weakness,” he repeated bitterly.

“She is a very generous creature,” I observed after a time. The man admired by Victor Haldin fixed his eyes on the ground. I turned away and moved off, apparently unnoticed by him. I nourished no resentment of the moody brusqueness with which he had treated me. The sentiment I was carrying away from that conversation was that of hopelessness. Before I had got fairly clear of the raft of chairs and tables he had rejoined me.

“H’m, yes!” I heard him at my elbow again. “But what do you think?”

I did not look round even.

“I think that you people are under a curse.”

He made no sound. It was only on the pavement outside the gate that I heard him again.

“I should like to walk with you a little.”

After all, I preferred this enigmatical young man to his celebrated compatriot, the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I saw no reason for being particularly gracious.

“I am going now to the railway station, by the shortest way from here, to meet a friend from England,” I said, for all answer to his unexpected proposal. I hoped that something informing could come of it. As we stood on the curbstone waiting for a tramcar to pass, he remarked gloomily—

“I like what you said just now.”

“Do you?”

We stepped off the pavement together.

“The great problem,” he went on, “is to understand thoroughly the nature of the curse.”

“That’s not very difficult, I think.”

“I think so too,” he agreed with me, and his readiness, strangely enough, did not make him less enigmatical in the least.

“A curse is an evil spell,” I tried him again. “And the important, the great problem, is to find the means to break it.”

“Yes. To find the means.”

That was also an assent, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. We had crossed diagonally the open space before the theatre, and began to descend a broad, sparely frequented street in the direction of one of the smaller bridges. He kept on by my side without speaking for a long time.

“You are not thinking of leaving Geneva soon?” I asked.

He was silent for so long that I began to think I had been indiscreet, and should get no answer at all. Yet on looking at him I almost believed that my question had caused him something in the nature of positive anguish. I detected it mainly in the clasping of his hands, in which he put a great force stealthily. Once, however, he had overcome that sort of agonizing hesitation sufficiently to tell me that he had no such intention, he became rather communicative—at least relatively to the former off-hand curtness of his speeches. The tone, too, was more amiable. He informed me that he intended to study and also to write. He went even so far as to tell me he had been to Stuttgart. Stuttgart, I was aware, was one of the revolutionary centres. The directing committee of one of the Russian parties (I can’t tell now which) was located in that town. It was there that he got into touch with the active work of the revolutionists outside Russia.

“I have never been abroad before,” he explained, in a rather inanimate voice now. Then, after a slight hesitation, altogether different from the agonizing irresolution my first simple question “whether he meant to stay in Geneva” had aroused, he made me an unexpected confidence—

“The fact is, I have received a sort of mission from them.”

“Which will keep you here in Geneva?”

“Yes. Here. In this odious....”

I was satisfied with my faculty for putting two and two together when I drew the inference that the mission had something to do with the person of the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I kept that surmise to myself naturally, and Mr. Razumov said nothing more for some considerable time. It was only when we were nearly on the bridge we had been making for that he opened his lips again, abruptly—

“Could I see that precious article anywhere?”

I had to think for a moment before I saw what he was referring to.

“It has been reproduced in parts by the Press here. There are files to be seen in various places. My copy of the English newspaper I have left with Miss Haldin, I remember, on the day after it reached me. I was sufficiently worried by seeing it lying on a table by the side of the poor mother’s chair for weeks. Then it disappeared. It was a relief, I assure you.”

He had stopped short.

“I trust,” I continued, “that you will find time to see these ladies fairly often—that you will make time.”

He stared at me so queerly that I hardly know how to define his aspect. I could not understand it in this connexion at all. What ailed him? I asked myself. What strange thought had come into his head? What vision of all the horrors that can be seen in his hopeless country had come suddenly to haunt his brain? If it were anything connected with the fate of Victor Haldin, then I hoped earnestly he would keep it to himself for ever. I was, to speak plainly, so shocked that I tried to conceal my impression by—Heaven forgive me—a smile and the assumption of a light manner.

“Surely,” I exclaimed, “that needn’t cost you a great effort.”

He turned away from me and leaned over the parapet of the bridge. For a moment I waited, looking at his back. And yet, I assure you, I was not anxious just then to look at his face again. He did not move at all. He did not mean to move. I walked on slowly on my way towards the station, and at the end of the bridge I glanced over my shoulder. No, he had not moved. He hung well over the parapet, as if captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch. The current there is swift, extremely swift; it makes some people dizzy; I myself can never look at it for any length of time without experiencing a dread of being suddenly snatched away by its destructive force. Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of irresistible power and of headlong motion.

It apparently had a charm for Mr. Razumov. I left him hanging far over the parapet of the bridge. The way he had behaved to me could not be put down to mere boorishness. There was something else under his scorn and impatience. Perhaps, I thought, with sudden approach to hidden truth, it was the same thing which had kept him over a week, nearly ten days indeed, from coming near Miss Haldin. But what it was I could not tell.