

THE IDIOT

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PART I

I.

Towards the end of November, during a thaw, at nine o'clock one morning, a train on the Warsaw and Petersburg railway was approaching the latter city at full speed. The morning was so damp and misty that it was only with great difficulty that the day succeeded in breaking; and it was impossible to distinguish anything more than a few yards away from the carriage windows.

Some of the passengers by this particular train were returning from abroad; but the third-class carriages were the best filled, chiefly with insignificant persons of various occupations and degrees, picked up at the different stations nearer town. All of them seemed weary, and most of them had sleepy eyes and a shivering expression, while their complexions generally appeared to have taken on the colour of the fog outside.

When day dawned, two passengers in one of the third-class carriages found themselves opposite each other. Both were young fellows, both were rather poorly dressed, both had remarkable faces, and both were evidently anxious to start a conversation. If they had but known why, at this particular moment, they were both remarkable persons, they would undoubtedly have wondered at the strange chance which had set them down opposite to one another in a third-class carriage of the Warsaw Railway Company.

One of them was a young fellow of about twenty-seven, not tall, with black curling hair, and small, grey, fiery eyes. His nose was broad and flat, and he had high cheek bones; his thin lips were constantly compressed into an impudent, ironical—it might

almost be called a malicious—smile; but his forehead was high and well formed, and atoned for a good deal of the ugliness of the lower part of his face. A special feature of this physiognomy was its death-like pallor, which gave to the whole man an indescribably emaciated appearance in spite of his hard look, and at the same time a sort of passionate and suffering expression which did not harmonize with his impudent, sarcastic smile and keen, self-satisfied bearing. He wore a large fur—or rather astrachan—overcoat, which had kept him warm all night, while his neighbour had been obliged to bear the full severity of a Russian November night entirely unprepared. His wide sleeveless mantle with a large cape to it—the sort of cloak one sees upon travellers during the winter months in Switzerland or North Italy—was by no means adapted to the long cold journey through Russia, from Eydkuhnen to St. Petersburg.

The wearer of this cloak was a young fellow, also of about twenty-six or twenty-seven years of age, slightly above the middle height, very fair, with a thin, pointed and very light coloured beard; his eyes were large and blue, and had an intent look about them, yet that heavy expression which some people affirm to be a peculiarity as well as evidence, of an epileptic subject. His face was decidedly a pleasant one for all that; refined, but quite colourless, except for the circumstance that at this moment it was blue with cold. He held a bundle made up of an old faded silk handkerchief that apparently contained all his travelling wardrobe, and wore thick shoes and gaiters, his whole appearance being very un-Russian.

His black-haired neighbour inspected these peculiarities, having nothing better to do, and at length remarked, with that rude enjoyment of the discomforts of others which the common classes so often show:

“Cold?”

“Very,” said his neighbour, readily, “and this is a thaw, too. Fancy if it had been a hard frost! I never thought it would be so cold in the old country. I’ve grown quite out of the way of it.”

“What, been abroad, I suppose?”

“Yes, straight from Switzerland.”

“Wheugh! my goodness!” The black-haired young fellow whistled, and then laughed.

The conversation proceeded. The readiness of the fair-haired young man in the cloak to answer all his opposite neighbour’s questions was surprising. He seemed to have no suspicion of any impertinence or inappropriateness in the fact of such questions

being put to him. Replying to them, he made known to the inquirer that he certainly had been long absent from Russia, more than four years; that he had been sent abroad for his health; that he had suffered from some strange nervous malady—a kind of epilepsy, with convulsive spasms. His interlocutor burst out laughing several times at his answers; and more than ever, when to the question, “whether he had been cured?” the patient replied:

“No, they did not cure me.”

“Hey! that’s it! You stumped up your money for nothing, and we believe in those fellows, here!” remarked the black-haired individual, sarcastically.

“Gospel truth, sir, Gospel truth!” exclaimed another passenger, a shabbily dressed man of about forty, who looked like a clerk, and possessed a red nose and a very blotchy face. “Gospel truth! All they do is to get hold of our good Russian money free, gratis, and for nothing.”

“Oh, but you’re quite wrong in my particular instance,” said the Swiss patient, quietly. “Of course I can’t argue the matter, because I know only my own case; but my doctor gave me money—and he had very little—to pay my journey back, besides having kept me at his own expense, while there, for nearly two years.”

“Why? Was there no one else to pay for you?” asked the black-haired one.

“No—Mr. Pavlicheff, who had been supporting me there, died a couple of years ago. I wrote to Mrs. General Epanchin at the time (she is a distant relative of mine), but she did not answer my letter. And so eventually I came back.”

“And where have you come to?”

“That is—where am I going to stay? I—I really don’t quite know yet, I—”

Both the listeners laughed again.

“I suppose your whole set-up is in that bundle, then?” asked the first.

“I bet anything it is!” exclaimed the red-nosed passenger, with extreme satisfaction, “and that he has precious little in the luggage van!—though of course poverty is no crime—we must remember that!”

It appeared that it was indeed as they had surmised. The young fellow hastened to admit the fact with wonderful readiness.

“Your bundle has some importance, however,” continued the clerk, when they had laughed their fill (it was observable that the subject of their mirth joined in the laughter

when he saw them laughing); “for though I dare say it is not stuffed full of friedrichs d’or and louis d’or—judge from your costume and gaiters—still—if you can add to your possessions such a valuable property as a relation like Mrs. General Epanchin, then your bundle becomes a significant object at once. That is, of course, if you really are a relative of Mrs. Epanchin’s, and have not made a little error through—well, absence of mind, which is very common to human beings; or, say—through a too luxuriant fancy?”

“Oh, you are right again,” said the fair-haired traveller, “for I really am *almost* wrong when I say she and I are related. She is hardly a relation at all; so little, in fact, that I was not in the least surprised to have no answer to my letter. I expected as much.”

“H’m! you spent your postage for nothing, then. H’m! you are candid, however—and that is commendable. H’m! Mrs. Epanchin—oh yes! a most eminent person. I know her. As for Mr. Pavlicheff, who supported you in Switzerland, I know him too—at least, if it was Nicolai Andreevitch of that name? A fine fellow he was—and had a property of four thousand souls in his day.”

“Yes, Nicolai Andreevitch—that was his name,” and the young fellow looked earnestly and with curiosity at the all-knowing gentleman with the red nose.

This sort of character is met with pretty frequently in a certain class. They are people who know everyone—that is, they know where a man is employed, what his salary is, whom he knows, whom he married, what money his wife had, who are his cousins, and second cousins, etc., etc. These men generally have about a hundred pounds a year to live on, and they spend their whole time and talents in the amassing of this style of knowledge, which they reduce—or raise—to the standard of a science.

During the latter part of the conversation the black-haired young man had become very impatient. He stared out of the window, and fidgeted, and evidently longed for the end of the journey. He was very absent; he would appear to listen—and heard nothing; and he would laugh of a sudden, evidently with no idea of what he was laughing about.

“Excuse me,” said the red-nosed man to the young fellow with the bundle, rather suddenly; “whom have I the honour to be talking to?”

“Prince Lef Nicolaievitch Muishkin,” replied the latter, with perfect readiness.

“Prince Muishkin? Lef Nicolaievitch? H’m! I don’t know, I’m sure! I may say I have never heard of such a person,” said the clerk, thoughtfully. “At least, the name, I admit,

is historical. Karamsin must mention the family name, of course, in his history—but as an individual—one never hears of any Prince Muishkin nowadays.”

“Of course not,” replied the prince; “there are none, except myself. I believe I am the last and only one. As to my forefathers, they have always been a poor lot; my own father was a sublieutenant in the army. I don’t know how Mrs. Epanchin comes into the Muishkin family, but she is descended from the Princess Muishkin, and she, too, is the last of her line.”

“And did you learn science and all that, with your professor over there?” asked the black-haired passenger.

“Oh yes—I did learn a little, but—”

“I’ve never learned anything whatever,” said the other.

“Oh, but I learned very little, you know!” added the prince, as though excusing himself. “They could not teach me very much on account of my illness.”

“Do you know the Rogojins?” asked his questioner, abruptly.

“No, I don’t—not at all! I hardly know anyone in Russia. Why, is that your name?”

“Yes, I am Rogojin, Parfen Rogojin.”

“Parfen Rogojin? dear me—then don’t you belong to those very Rogojins, perhaps—” began the clerk, with a very perceptible increase of civility in his tone.

“Yes—those very ones,” interrupted Rogojin, impatiently, and with scant courtesy. I may remark that he had not once taken any notice of the blotchy-faced passenger, and had hitherto addressed all his remarks direct to the prince.

“Dear me—is it possible?” observed the clerk, while his face assumed an expression of great deference and servility—if not of absolute alarm: “what, a son of that very Semen Rogojin—hereditary honourable citizen—who died a month or so ago and left two million and a half of roubles?”

“And how do *you* know that he left two million and a half of roubles?” asked Rogojin, disdainfully, and not deigning so much as to look at the other. “However, it’s true enough that my father died a month ago, and that here am I returning from Pskoff, a month after, with hardly a boot to my foot. They’ve treated me like a dog! I’ve been ill of fever at Pskoff the whole time, and not a line, nor farthing of money, have I received from my mother or my confounded brother!”

“And now you’ll have a million roubles, at least—goodness gracious me!” exclaimed the clerk, rubbing his hands.

“Five weeks since, I was just like yourself,” continued Rogojin, addressing the prince, “with nothing but a bundle and the clothes I wore. I ran away from my father and came to Pskoff to my aunt’s house, where I caved in at once with fever, and he went and died while I was away. All honour to my respected father’s memory—but he uncommonly nearly killed me, all the same. Give you my word, prince, if I hadn’t cut and run then, when I did, he’d have murdered me like a dog.”

“I suppose you angered him somehow?” asked the prince, looking at the millionaire with considerable curiosity. But though there may have been something remarkable in the fact that this man was heir to millions of roubles there was something about him which surprised and interested the prince more than that. Rogojin, too, seemed to have taken up the conversation with unusual alacrity it appeared that he was still in a considerable state of excitement, if not absolutely feverish, and was in real need of someone to talk to for the mere sake of talking, as safety-valve to his agitation.

As for his red-nosed neighbour, the latter—since the information as to the identity of Rogojin—hung over him, seemed to be living on the honey of his words and in the breath of his nostrils, catching at every syllable as though it were a pearl of great price.

“Oh, yes; I angered him—I certainly did anger him,” replied Rogojin. “But what puts me out so is my brother. Of course my mother couldn’t do anything—she’s too old—and whatever brother Senka says is law for her! But why couldn’t he let me know? He sent a telegram, they say. What’s the good of a telegram? It frightened my aunt so that she sent it back to the office unopened, and there it’s been ever since! It’s only thanks to Konief that I heard at all; he wrote me all about it. He says my brother cut off the gold tassels from my father’s coffin, at night ‘because they’re worth a lot of money!’ says he. Why, I can get him sent off to Siberia for that alone, if I like; it’s sacrilege. Here, you—scarecrow!” he added, addressing the clerk at his side, “is it sacrilege or not, by law?”

“Sacrilege, certainly—certainly sacrilege,” said the latter.

“And it’s Siberia for sacrilege, isn’t it?”

“Undoubtedly so; Siberia, of course!”

“They will think that I’m still ill,” continued Rogojin to the prince, “but I sloped off quietly, seedy as I was, took the train and came away. Aha, brother Senka, you’ll have to open your gates and let me in, my boy! I know he told tales about me to my father—I

know that well enough but I certainly did rile my father about Nastasia Philipovna that's very sure, and that was my own doing."

"Nastasia Philipovna?" said the clerk, as though trying to think out something.

"Come, you know nothing about *her*," said Rogojin, impatiently.

"And supposing I do know something?" observed the other, triumphantly.

"Bosh! there are plenty of Nastasia Philipovnas. And what an impertinent beast you are!" he added angrily. "I thought some creature like you would hang on to me as soon as I got hold of my money."

"Oh, but I do know, as it happens," said the clerk in an aggravating manner. "Lebedeff knows all about her. You are pleased to reproach me, your excellency, but what if I prove that I am right after all? Nastasia Philipovna's family name is Barashkoff—I know, you see—and she is a very well known lady, indeed, and comes of a good family, too. She is connected with one Totski, Afanasy Ivanovitch, a man of considerable property, a director of companies, and so on, and a great friend of General Epanchin, who is interested in the same matters as he is."

"My eyes!" said Rogojin, really surprised at last. "The devil take the fellow, how does he know that?"

"Why, he knows everything—Lebedeff knows everything! I was a month or two with Lihachof after his father died, your excellency, and while he was knocking about—he's in the debtor's prison now—I was with him, and he couldn't do a thing without Lebedeff; and I got to know Nastasia Philipovna and several people at that time."

"Nastasia Philipovna? Why, you don't mean to say that she and Lihachof—" cried Rogojin, turning quite pale.

"No, no, no, no, no! Nothing of the sort, I assure you!" said Lebedeff, hastily. "Oh dear no, not for the world! Totski's the only man with any chance there. Oh, no! He takes her to his box at the opera at the French theatre of an evening, and the officers and people all look at her and say, 'By Jove, there's the famous Nastasia Philipovna!' but no one ever gets any further than that, for there is nothing more to say."

"Yes, it's quite true," said Rogojin, frowning gloomily; "so Zaleshoff told me. I was walking about the Nefsky one fine day, prince, in my father's old coat, when she suddenly came out of a shop and stepped into her carriage. I swear I was all of a blaze at once. Then I met Zaleshoff—looking like a hair-dresser's assistant, got up as fine as I don't know who, while I looked like a tinker. 'Don't flatter yourself, my boy,' said he;

‘she’s not for such as you; she’s a princess, she is, and her name is Nastasia Philipovna Barashkoff, and she lives with Totski, who wishes to get rid of her because he’s growing rather old—fifty-five or so—and wants to marry a certain beauty, the loveliest woman in all Petersburg.’ And then he told me that I could see Nastasia Philipovna at the opera-house that evening, if I liked, and described which was her box. Well, I’d like to see my father allowing any of us to go to the theatre; he’d sooner have killed us, any day. However, I went for an hour or so and saw Nastasia Philipovna, and I never slept a wink all night after. Next morning my father happened to give me two government loan bonds to sell, worth nearly five thousand roubles each. ‘Sell them,’ said he, ‘and then take seven thousand five hundred roubles to the office, give them to the cashier, and bring me back the rest of the ten thousand, without looking in anywhere on the way; look sharp, I shall be waiting for you.’ Well, I sold the bonds, but I didn’t take the seven thousand roubles to the office; I went straight to the English shop and chose a pair of earrings, with a diamond the size of a nut in each. They cost four hundred roubles more than I had, so I gave my name, and they trusted me. With the earrings I went at once to Zaleshoff’s. ‘Come on!’ I said, ‘come on to Nastasia Philipovna’s,’ and off we went without more ado. I tell you I hadn’t a notion of what was about me or before me or below my feet all the way; I saw nothing whatever. We went straight into her drawing-room, and then she came out to us.

“I didn’t say right out who I was, but Zaleshoff said: ‘From Parfen Rogojin, in memory of his first meeting with you yesterday; be so kind as to accept these!’

“She opened the parcel, looked at the earrings, and laughed.

“‘Thank your friend Mr. Rogojin for his kind attention,’ says she, and bowed and went off. Why didn’t I die there on the spot? The worst of it all was, though, that the beast Zaleshoff got all the credit of it! I was short and abominably dressed, and stood and stared in her face and never said a word, because I was shy, like an ass! And there was he all in the fashion, pomaded and dressed out, with a smart tie on, bowing and scraping; and I bet anything she took him for me all the while!

“‘Look here now,’ I said, when we came out, ‘none of your interference here after this—do you understand?’ He laughed: ‘And how are you going to settle up with your father?’ says he. I thought I might as well jump into the Neva at once without going home first; but it struck me that I wouldn’t, after all, and I went home feeling like one of the damned.”

“My goodness!” shivered the clerk. “And his father,” he added, for the prince’s instruction, “and his father would have given a man a ticket to the other world for ten roubles any day—not to speak of ten thousand!”

The prince observed Rogojin with great curiosity; he seemed paler than ever at this moment.

“What do you know about it?” cried the latter. “Well, my father learned the whole story at once, and Zaleshoff blabbed it all over the town besides. So he took me upstairs and locked me up, and swore at me for an hour. ‘This is only a foretaste,’ says he; ‘wait a bit till night comes, and I’ll come back and talk to you again.’

“Well, what do you think? The old fellow went straight off to Nastasia Philipovna, touched the floor with his forehead, and began blubbing and beseeching her on his knees to give him back the diamonds. So after awhile she brought the box and flew out at him. ‘There,’ she says, ‘take your earrings, you wretched old miser; although they are ten times dearer than their value to me now that I know what it must have cost Parfen to get them! Give Parfen my compliments,’ she says, ‘and thank him very much!’ Well, I meanwhile had borrowed twenty-five roubles from a friend, and off I went to Pskoff to my aunt’s. The old woman there lectured me so that I left the house and went on a drinking tour round the public-houses of the place. I was in a high fever when I got to Pskoff, and by nightfall I was lying delirious in the streets somewhere or other!”

“Oho! we’ll make Nastasia Philipovna sing another song now!” giggled Lebedeff, rubbing his hands with glee. “Hey, my boy, we’ll get her some proper earrings now! We’ll get her such earrings that—”

“Look here,” cried Rogojin, seizing him fiercely by the arm, “look here, if you so much as name Nastasia Philipovna again, I’ll tan your hide as sure as you sit there!”

“Aha! do—by all means! if you tan my hide you won’t turn me away from your society. You’ll bind me to you, with your lash, for ever. Ha, ha! here we are at the station, though.”

Sure enough, the train was just steaming in as he spoke.

Though Rogojin had declared that he left Pskoff secretly, a large collection of friends had assembled to greet him, and did so with profuse waving of hats and shouting.

“Why, there’s Zaleshoff here, too!” he muttered, gazing at the scene with a sort of triumphant but unpleasant smile. Then he suddenly turned to the prince: “Prince, I don’t know why I have taken a fancy to you; perhaps because I met you just when I did. But no, it can’t be that, for I met this fellow” (nodding at Lebedeff) “too, and I have not taken a fancy to him by any means. Come to see me, prince; we’ll take off those gaiters of yours and dress you up in a smart fur coat, the best we can buy. You shall

have a dress coat, best quality, white waistcoat, anything you like, and your pocket shall be full of money. Come, and you shall go with me to Nastasia Philipovna's. Now then will you come or no?"

"Accept, accept, Prince Lef Nicolaievitch" said Lebedeff solemnly; "don't let it slip! Accept, quick!"

Prince Muishkin rose and stretched out his hand courteously, while he replied with some cordiality:

"I will come with the greatest pleasure, and thank you very much for taking a fancy to me. I dare say I may even come today if I have time, for I tell you frankly that I like you very much too. I liked you especially when you told us about the diamond earrings; but I liked you before that as well, though you have such a dark-clouded sort of face. Thanks very much for the offer of clothes and a fur coat; I certainly shall require both clothes and coat very soon. As for money, I have hardly a copeck about me at this moment."

"You shall have lots of money; by the evening I shall have plenty; so come along!"

"That's true enough, he'll have lots before evening!" put in Lebedeff.

"But, look here, are you a great hand with the ladies? Let's know that first?" asked Rogojin.

"Oh no, oh no!" said the prince; "I couldn't, you know—my illness—I hardly ever saw a soul."

"H'm! well—here, you fellow—you can come along with me now if you like!" cried Rogojin to Lebedeff, and so they all left the carriage.

Lebedeff had his desire. He went off with the noisy group of Rogojin's friends towards the Voznesensky, while the prince's route lay towards the Litaynaya. It was damp and wet. The prince asked his way of passers-by, and finding that he was a couple of miles or so from his destination, he determined to take a droshky.

II.

General Epanchin lived in his own house near the Litaynaya. Besides this large residence—five-sixths of which was let in flats and lodgings—the general was owner of another enormous house in the Sadovaya bringing in even more rent than the first. Besides these houses he had a delightful little estate just out of town, and some sort of factory in another part of the city. General Epanchin, as everyone knew, had a good deal to do with certain government monopolies; he was also a voice, and an important

one, in many rich public companies of various descriptions; in fact, he enjoyed the reputation of being a well-to-do man of busy habits, many ties, and affluent means. He had made himself indispensable in several quarters, amongst others in his department of the government; and yet it was a known fact that Fedor Ivanovitch Epanchin was a man of no education whatever, and had absolutely risen from the ranks.

This last fact could, of course, reflect nothing but credit upon the general; and yet, though unquestionably a sagacious man, he had his own little weaknesses—very excusable ones,—one of which was a dislike to any allusion to the above circumstance. He was undoubtedly clever. For instance, he made a point of never asserting himself when he would gain more by keeping in the background; and in consequence many exalted personages valued him principally for his humility and simplicity, and because “he knew his place.” And yet if these good people could only have had a peep into the mind of this excellent fellow who “knew his place” so well! The fact is that, in spite of his knowledge of the world and his really remarkable abilities, he always liked to appear to be carrying out other people’s ideas rather than his own. And also, his luck seldom failed him, even at cards, for which he had a passion that he did not attempt to conceal. He played for high stakes, and moved, altogether, in very varied society.

As to age, General Epanchin was in the very prime of life; that is, about fifty-five years of age,—the flowering time of existence, when real enjoyment of life begins. His healthy appearance, good colour, sound, though discoloured teeth, sturdy figure, preoccupied air during business hours, and jolly good humour during his game at cards in the evening, all bore witness to his success in life, and combined to make existence a bed of roses to his excellency. The general was lord of a flourishing family, consisting of his wife and three grown-up daughters. He had married young, while still a lieutenant, his wife being a girl of about his own age, who possessed neither beauty nor education, and who brought him no more than fifty souls of landed property, which little estate served, however, as a nest-egg for far more important accumulations. The general never regretted his early marriage, or regarded it as a foolish youthful escapade; and he so respected and feared his wife that he was very near loving her. Mrs. Epanchin came of the princely stock of Muishkin, which if not a brilliant, was, at all events, a decidedly ancient family; and she was extremely proud of her descent.

With a few exceptions, the worthy couple had lived through their long union very happily. While still young the wife had been able to make important friends among the aristocracy, partly by virtue of her family descent, and partly by her own exertions;

while, in after life, thanks to their wealth and to the position of her husband in the service, she took her place among the higher circles as by right.

During these last few years all three of the general's daughters—Alexandra, Adelaida, and Aglaya—had grown up and matured. Of course they were only Epanchins, but their mother's family was noble; they might expect considerable fortunes; their father had hopes of attaining to very high rank indeed in his country's service—all of which was satisfactory. All three of the girls were decidedly pretty, even the eldest, Alexandra, who was just twenty-five years old. The middle daughter was now twenty-three, while the youngest, Aglaya, was twenty. This youngest girl was absolutely a beauty, and had begun of late to attract considerable attention in society. But this was not all, for every one of the three was clever, well educated, and accomplished.

It was a matter of general knowledge that the three girls were very fond of one another, and supported each other in every way; it was even said that the two elder ones had made certain sacrifices for the sake of the idol of the household, Aglaya. In society they not only disliked asserting themselves, but were actually retiring. Certainly no one could blame them for being too arrogant or haughty, and yet everybody was well aware that they were proud and quite understood their own value. The eldest was musical, while the second was a clever artist, which fact she had concealed until lately. In a word, the world spoke well of the girls; but they were not without their enemies, and occasionally people talked with horror of the number of books they had read.

They were in no hurry to marry. They liked good society, but were not too keen about it. All this was the more remarkable, because everyone was well aware of the hopes and aims of their parents.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when the prince rang the bell at General Epanchin's door. The general lived on the first floor or flat of the house, as modest a lodging as his position permitted. A liveried servant opened the door, and the prince was obliged to enter into long explanations with this gentleman, who, from the first glance, looked at him and his bundle with grave suspicion. At last, however, on the repeated positive assurance that he really was Prince Muishkin, and must absolutely see the general on business, the bewildered domestic showed him into a little ante-chamber leading to a waiting-room that adjoined the general's study, there handing him over to another servant, whose duty it was to be in this ante-chamber all the morning, and announce visitors to the general. This second individual wore a dress coat, and was some forty years of age; he was the general's special study servant, and well aware of his own importance.

“Wait in the next room, please; and leave your bundle here,” said the door-keeper, as he sat down comfortably in his own easy-chair in the ante-chamber. He looked at the prince in severe surprise as the latter settled himself in another chair alongside, with his bundle on his knees.

“If you don’t mind, I would rather sit here with you,” said the prince; “I should prefer it to sitting in there.”

“Oh, but you can’t stay here. You are a visitor—a guest, so to speak. Is it the general himself you wish to see?”

The man evidently could not take in the idea of such a shabby-looking visitor, and had decided to ask once more.

“Yes—I have business—” began the prince.

“I do not ask you what your business may be, all I have to do is to announce you; and unless the secretary comes in here I cannot do that.”

The man’s suspicions seemed to increase more and more. The prince was too unlike the usual run of daily visitors; and although the general certainly did receive, on business, all sorts and conditions of men, yet in spite of this fact the servant felt great doubts on the subject of this particular visitor. The presence of the secretary as an intermediary was, he judged, essential in this case.

“Surely you—are from abroad?” he inquired at last, in a confused sort of way. He had begun his sentence intending to say, “Surely you are not Prince Muishkin, are you?”

“Yes, straight from the train! Did not you intend to say, ‘Surely you are not Prince Muishkin?’ just now, but refrained out of politeness?”

“H’m!” grunted the astonished servant.

“I assure you I am not deceiving you; you shall not have to answer for me. As to my being dressed like this, and carrying a bundle, there’s nothing surprising in that—the fact is, my circumstances are not particularly rosy at this moment.”

“H’m!—no, I’m not afraid of that, you see; I have to announce you, that’s all. The secretary will be out directly—that is, unless you—yes, that’s the rub—unless you—come, you must allow me to ask you—you’ve not come to beg, have you?”

“Oh dear no, you can be perfectly easy on that score. I have quite another matter on hand.”

“You must excuse my asking, you know. Your appearance led me to think—but just wait for the secretary; the general is busy now, but the secretary is sure to come out.”

“Oh—well, look here, if I have some time to wait, would you mind telling me, is there any place about where I could have a smoke? I have my pipe and tobacco with me.”

“*Smoke?*” said the man, in shocked but disdainful surprise, blinking his eyes at the prince as though he could not believe his senses. “No, sir, you cannot smoke here, and I wonder you are not ashamed of the very suggestion. Ha, ha! a cool idea that, I declare!”

“Oh, I didn’t mean in this room! I know I can’t smoke here, of course. I’d adjourn to some other room, wherever you like to show me to. You see, I’m used to smoking a good deal, and now I haven’t had a puff for three hours; however, just as you like.”

“Now how on earth am I to announce a man like that?” muttered the servant. “In the first place, you’ve no right in here at all; you ought to be in the waiting-room, because you’re a sort of visitor—a guest, in fact—and I shall catch it for this. Look here, do you intend to take up your abode with us?” he added, glancing once more at the prince’s bundle, which evidently gave him no peace.

“No, I don’t think so. I don’t think I should stay even if they were to invite me. I’ve simply come to make their acquaintance, and nothing more.”

“Make their acquaintance?” asked the man, in amazement, and with redoubled suspicion. “Then why did you say you had business with the general?”

“Oh well, very little business. There is one little matter—some advice I am going to ask him for; but my principal object is simply to introduce myself, because I am Prince Muishkin, and Madame Epanchin is the last of her branch of the house, and besides herself and me there are no other Muishkins left.”

“What—you’re a relation then, are you?” asked the servant, so bewildered that he began to feel quite alarmed.

“Well, hardly so. If you stretch a point, we are relations, of course, but so distant that one cannot really take cognizance of it. I once wrote to your mistress from abroad, but she did not reply. However, I have thought it right to make acquaintance with her on my arrival. I am telling you all this in order to ease your mind, for I see you are still far from comfortable on my account. All you have to do is to announce me as Prince Muishkin, and the object of my visit will be plain enough. If I am received—very good; if not, well, very good again. But they are sure to receive me, I should think; Madame

Epanchin will naturally be curious to see the only remaining representative of her family. She values her Muishkin descent very highly, if I am rightly informed.”

The prince’s conversation was artless and confiding to a degree, and the servant could not help feeling that as from visitor to common serving-man this state of things was highly improper. His conclusion was that one of two things must be the explanation—either that this was a begging impostor, or that the prince, if prince he were, was simply a fool, without the slightest ambition; for a sensible prince with any ambition would certainly not wait about in ante-rooms with servants, and talk of his own private affairs like this. In either case, how was he to announce this singular visitor?

“I really think I must request you to step into the next room!” he said, with all the insistence he could muster.

“Why? If I had been sitting there now, I should not have had the opportunity of making these personal explanations. I see you are still uneasy about me and keep eyeing my cloak and bundle. Don’t you think you might go in yourself now, without waiting for the secretary to come out?”

“No, no! I can’t announce a visitor like yourself without the secretary. Besides the general said he was not to be disturbed—he is with the Colonel C—. Gavril Ardalionovitch goes in without announcing.”

“Who may that be? a clerk?”

“What? Gavril Ardalionovitch? Oh no; he belongs to one of the companies. Look here, at all events put your bundle down, here.”

“Yes, I will if I may; and—can I take off my cloak?”

“Of course; you can’t go in *there* with it on, anyhow.”

The prince rose and took off his mantle, revealing a neat enough morning costume—a little worn, but well made. He wore a steel watch chain and from this chain there hung a silver Geneva watch. Fool the prince might be, still, the general’s servant felt that it was not correct for him to continue to converse thus with a visitor, in spite of the fact that the prince pleased him somehow.

“And what time of day does the lady receive?” the latter asked, reseating himself in his old place.

“Oh, that’s not in *my* province! I believe she receives at any time; it depends upon the visitors. The dressmaker goes in at eleven. Gavril Ardalionovitch is allowed much earlier than other people, too; he is even admitted to early lunch now and then.”

“It is much warmer in the rooms here than it is abroad at this season,” observed the prince; “but it is much warmer there out of doors. As for the houses—a Russian can’t live in them in the winter until he gets accustomed to them.”

“Don’t they heat them at all?”

“Well, they do heat them a little; but the houses and stoves are so different to ours.”

“H’m! were you long away?”

“Four years! and I was in the same place nearly all the time,—in one village.”

“You must have forgotten Russia, hadn’t you?”

“Yes, indeed I had—a good deal; and, would you believe it, I often wonder at myself for not having forgotten how to speak Russian? Even now, as I talk to you, I keep saying to myself ‘how well I am speaking it.’ Perhaps that is partly why I am so talkative this morning. I assure you, ever since yesterday evening I have had the strongest desire to go on and on talking Russian.”

“H’m! yes; did you live in Petersburg in former years?”

This good flunkey, in spite of his conscientious scruples, really could not resist continuing such a very genteel and agreeable conversation.

“In Petersburg? Oh no! hardly at all, and now they say so much is changed in the place that even those who did know it well are obliged to relearn what they knew. They talk a good deal about the new law courts, and changes there, don’t they?”

“H’m! yes, that’s true enough. Well now, how is the law over there, do they administer it more justly than here?”

“Oh, I don’t know about that! I’ve heard much that is good about our legal administration, too. There is no capital punishment here for one thing.”

“Is there over there?”

“Yes—I saw an execution in France—at Lyons. Schneider took me over with him to see it.”

“What, did they hang the fellow?”

“No, they cut off people’s heads in France.”

“What did the fellow do?—yell?”

“Oh no—it’s the work of an instant. They put a man inside a frame and a sort of broad knife falls by machinery—they call the thing a guillotine—it falls with fearful force and weight—the head springs off so quickly that you can’t wink your eye in between. But all the preparations are so dreadful. When they announce the sentence, you know, and prepare the criminal and tie his hands, and cart him off to the scaffold—that’s the fearful part of the business. The people all crowd round—even women—though they don’t at all approve of women looking on.”

“No, it’s not a thing for women.”

“Of course not—of course not!—bah! The criminal was a fine intelligent fearless man; Le Gros was his name; and I may tell you—believe it or not, as you like—that when that man stepped upon the scaffold he *cried*, he did indeed,—he was as white as a bit of paper. Isn’t it a dreadful idea that he should have cried—cried! Whoever heard of a grown man crying from fear—not a child, but a man who never had cried before—a grown man of forty-five years. Imagine what must have been going on in that man’s mind at such a moment; what dreadful convulsions his whole spirit must have endured; it is an outrage on the soul that’s what it is. Because it is said ‘thou shalt not kill,’ is he to be killed because he murdered some one else? No, it is not right, it’s an impossible theory. I assure you, I saw the sight a month ago and it’s dancing before my eyes to this moment. I dream of it, often.”

The prince had grown animated as he spoke, and a tinge of colour suffused his pale face, though his way of talking was as quiet as ever. The servant followed his words with sympathetic interest. Clearly he was not at all anxious to bring the conversation to an end. Who knows? Perhaps he too was a man of imagination and with some capacity for thought.

“Well, at all events it is a good thing that there’s no pain when the poor fellow’s head flies off,” he remarked.

“Do you know, though,” cried the prince warmly, “you made that remark now, and everyone says the same thing, and the machine is designed with the purpose of avoiding pain, this guillotine I mean; but a thought came into my head then: what if it be a bad plan after all? You may laugh at my idea, perhaps—but I could not help its occurring to me all the same. Now with the rack and tortures and so on—you suffer terrible pain of course; but then your torture is bodily pain only (although no doubt you have plenty of that) until you die. But *here* I should imagine the most terrible part of the whole punishment is, not the bodily pain at all—but the certain knowledge that in an hour,—then in ten minutes, then in half a minute, then now—this very *instant*—your soul must quit your body and that you will no longer be a man—and that this is

certain, *certain!* That's the point—the certainty of it. Just that instant when you place your head on the block and hear the iron grate over your head—then—that quarter of a second is the most awful of all.

“This is not my own fantastical opinion—many people have thought the same; but I feel it so deeply that I'll tell you what I think. I believe that to execute a man for murder is to punish him immeasurably more dreadfully than is equivalent to his crime. A murder by sentence is far more dreadful than a murder committed by a criminal. The man who is attacked by robbers at night, in a dark wood, or anywhere, undoubtedly hopes and hopes that he may yet escape until the very moment of his death. There are plenty of instances of a man running away, or imploring for mercy—at all events hoping on in some degree—even after his throat was cut. But in the case of an execution, that last hope—having which it is so immeasurably less dreadful to die,—is taken away from the wretch and *certainty* substituted in its place! There is his sentence, and with it that terrible certainty that he cannot possibly escape death—which, I consider, must be the most dreadful anguish in the world. You may place a soldier before a cannon's mouth in battle, and fire upon him—and he will still hope. But read to that same soldier his death-sentence, and he will either go mad or burst into tears. Who dares to say that any man can suffer this without going mad? No, no! it is an abuse, a shame, it is unnecessary—why should such a thing exist? Doubtless there may be men who have been sentenced, who have suffered this mental anguish for a while and then have been reprieved; perhaps such men may have been able to relate their feelings afterwards. Our Lord Christ spoke of this anguish and dread. No! no! no! No man should be treated so, no man, no man!”

The servant, though of course he could not have expressed all this as the prince did, still clearly entered into it and was greatly conciliated, as was evident from the increased amiability of his expression. “If you are really very anxious for a smoke,” he remarked, “I think it might possibly be managed, if you are very quick about it. You see they might come out and inquire for you, and you wouldn't be on the spot. You see that door there? Go in there and you'll find a little room on the right; you can smoke there, only open the window, because I ought not to allow it really, and—.” But there was no time, after all.

A young fellow entered the ante-room at this moment, with a bundle of papers in his hand. The footman hastened to help him take off his overcoat. The new arrival glanced at the prince out of the corners of his eyes.

“This gentleman declares, Gavril Ardalionovitch,” began the man, confidentially and almost familiarly, “that he is Prince Muishkin and a relative of Madame Epanchin’s. He has just arrived from abroad, with nothing but a bundle by way of luggage—.”

The prince did not hear the rest, because at this point the servant continued his communication in a whisper.

Gavril Ardalionovitch listened attentively, and gazed at the prince with great curiosity. At last he motioned the man aside and stepped hurriedly towards the prince.

“Are you Prince Muishkin?” he asked, with the greatest courtesy and amiability.

He was a remarkably handsome young fellow of some twenty-eight summers, fair and of middle height; he wore a small beard, and his face was most intelligent. Yet his smile, in spite of its sweetness, was a little thin, if I may so call it, and showed his teeth too evenly; his gaze though decidedly good-humoured and ingenuous, was a trifle too inquisitive and intent to be altogether agreeable.

“Probably when he is alone he looks quite different, and hardly smiles at all!” thought the prince.

He explained about himself in a few words, very much the same as he had told the footman and Rogojin beforehand.

Gavril Ardalionovitch meanwhile seemed to be trying to recall something.

“Was it not you, then, who sent a letter a year or less ago—from Switzerland, I think it was—to Elizabetha Prokofievna (Mrs. Epanchin)?”

“It was.”

“Oh, then, of course they will remember who you are. You wish to see the general? I’ll tell him at once—he will be free in a minute; but you—you had better wait in the ante-chamber,—hadn’t you? Why is he here?” he added, severely, to the man.

“I tell you, sir, he wished it himself!”

At this moment the study door opened, and a military man, with a portfolio under his arm, came out talking loudly, and after bidding good-bye to someone inside, took his departure.

“You there, Gania?” cried a voice from the study, “come in here, will you?”

Gavril Ardalionovitch nodded to the prince and entered the room hastily.

A couple of minutes later the door opened again and the affable voice of Gania cried:

“Come in please, prince!”

III.

General Ivan Fedorovitch Epanchin was standing in the middle of the room, and gazed with great curiosity at the prince as he entered. He even advanced a couple of steps to meet him.

The prince came forward and introduced himself.

“Quite so,” replied the general, “and what can I do for you?”

“Oh, I have no special business; my principal object was to make your acquaintance. I should not like to disturb you. I do not know your times and arrangements here, you see, but I have only just arrived. I came straight from the station. I am come direct from Switzerland.”

The general very nearly smiled, but thought better of it and kept his smile back. Then he reflected, blinked his eyes, stared at his guest once more from head to foot; then abruptly motioned him to a chair, sat down himself, and waited with some impatience for the prince to speak.

Gania stood at his table in the far corner of the room, turning over papers.

“I have not much time for making acquaintances, as a rule,” said the general, “but as, of course, you have your object in coming, I—”

“I felt sure you would think I had some object in view when I resolved to pay you this visit,” the prince interrupted; “but I give you my word, beyond the pleasure of making your acquaintance I had no personal object whatever.”

“The pleasure is, of course, mutual; but life is not all pleasure, as you are aware. There is such a thing as business, and I really do not see what possible reason there can be, or what we have in common to—”

“Oh, there is no reason, of course, and I suppose there is nothing in common between us, or very little; for if I am Prince Muishkin, and your wife happens to be a member of my house, that can hardly be called a ‘reason.’ I quite understand that. And yet that was my whole motive for coming. You see I have not been in Russia for four years, and knew very little about anything when I left. I had been very ill for a long time, and I feel now the need of a few good friends. In fact, I have a certain question upon which I much need advice, and do not know whom to go to for it. I thought of your family when I was passing through Berlin. ‘They are almost relations,’ I said to myself, ‘so I’ll begin

with them; perhaps we may get on with each other, I with them and they with me, if they are kind people;’ and I have heard that you are very kind people!”

“Oh, thank you, thank you, I’m sure,” replied the general, considerably taken aback. “May I ask where you have taken up your quarters?”

“Nowhere, as yet.”

“What, straight from the station to my house? And how about your luggage?”

“I only had a small bundle, containing linen, with me, nothing more. I can carry it in my hand, easily. There will be plenty of time to take a room in some hotel by the evening.”

“Oh, then you *do* intend to take a room?”

“Of course.”

“To judge from your words, you came straight to my house with the intention of staying there.”

“That could only have been on your invitation. I confess, however, that I should not have stayed here even if you had invited me, not for any particular reason, but because it is—well, contrary to my practice and nature, somehow.”

“Oh, indeed! Then it is perhaps as well that I neither *did* invite you, nor *do* invite you now. Excuse me, prince, but we had better make this matter clear, once for all. We have just agreed that with regard to our relationship there is not much to be said, though, of course, it would have been very delightful to us to feel that such relationship did actually exist; therefore, perhaps—”

“Therefore, perhaps I had better get up and go away?” said the prince, laughing merrily as he rose from his place; just as merrily as though the circumstances were by no means strained or difficult. “And I give you my word, general, that though I know nothing whatever of manners and customs of society, and how people live and all that, yet I felt quite sure that this visit of mine would end exactly as it has ended now. Oh, well, I suppose it’s all right; especially as my letter was not answered. Well, good-bye, and forgive me for having disturbed you!”

The prince’s expression was so good-natured at this moment, and so entirely free from even a suspicion of unpleasant feeling was the smile with which he looked at the general as he spoke, that the latter suddenly paused, and appeared to gaze at his guest from quite a new point of view, all in an instant.

“Do you know, prince,” he said, in quite a different tone, “I do not know you at all, yet, and after all, Elizabetha Prokofievna would very likely be pleased to have a peep at a man of her own name. Wait a little, if you don’t mind, and if you have time to spare?”

“Oh, I assure you I’ve lots of time, my time is entirely my own!” And the prince immediately replaced his soft, round hat on the table. “I confess, I thought Elizabetha Prokofievna would very likely remember that I had written her a letter. Just now your servant—outside there—was dreadfully suspicious that I had come to beg of you. I noticed that! Probably he has very strict instructions on that score; but I assure you I did not come to beg. I came to make some friends. But I am rather bothered at having disturbed you; that’s all I care about.—”

“Look here, prince,” said the general, with a cordial smile, “if you really are the sort of man you appear to be, it may be a source of great pleasure to us to make your better acquaintance; but, you see, I am a very busy man, and have to be perpetually sitting here and signing papers, or off to see his excellency, or to my department, or somewhere; so that though I should be glad to see more of people, nice people—you see, I—however, I am sure you are so well brought up that you will see at once, and—but how old are you, prince?”

“Twenty-six.”

“No? I thought you very much younger.”

“Yes, they say I have a ‘young’ face. As to disturbing you I shall soon learn to avoid doing that, for I hate disturbing people. Besides, you and I are so differently constituted, I should think, that there must be very little in common between us. Not that I will ever believe there is *nothing* in common between any two people, as some declare is the case. I am sure people make a great mistake in sorting each other into groups, by appearances; but I am boring you, I see, you—”

“Just two words: have you any means at all? Or perhaps you may be intending to undertake some sort of employment? Excuse my questioning you, but—”

“Oh, my dear sir, I esteem and understand your kindness in putting the question. No; at present I have no means whatever, and no employment either, but I hope to find some. I was living on other people abroad. Schneider, the professor who treated me and taught me, too, in Switzerland, gave me just enough money for my journey, so that now I have but a few copecks left. There certainly is one question upon which I am anxious to have advice, but—”

“Tell me, how do you intend to live now, and what are your plans?” interrupted the general.

“I wish to work, somehow or other.”

“Oh yes, but then, you see, you are a philosopher. Have you any talents, or ability in any direction—that is, any that would bring in money and bread? Excuse me again—”

“Oh, don’t apologize. No, I don’t think I have either talents or special abilities of any kind; on the contrary. I have always been an invalid and unable to learn much. As for bread, I should think—”

The general interrupted once more with questions; while the prince again replied with the narrative we have heard before. It appeared that the general had known Pavlicheff; but why the latter had taken an interest in the prince, that young gentleman could not explain; probably by virtue of the old friendship with his father, he thought.

The prince had been left an orphan when quite a little child, and Pavlicheff had entrusted him to an old lady, a relative of his own, living in the country, the child needing the fresh air and exercise of country life. He was educated, first by a governess, and afterwards by a tutor, but could not remember much about this time of his life. His fits were so frequent then, that they made almost an idiot of him (the prince used the expression “idiot” himself). Pavlicheff had met Professor Schneider in Berlin, and the latter had persuaded him to send the boy to Switzerland, to Schneider’s establishment there, for the cure of his epilepsy, and, five years before this time, the prince was sent off. But Pavlicheff had died two or three years since, and Schneider had himself supported the young fellow, from that day to this, at his own expense. Although he had not quite cured him, he had greatly improved his condition; and now, at last, at the prince’s own desire, and because of a certain matter which came to the ears of the latter, Schneider had despatched the young man to Russia.

The general was much astonished.

“Then you have no one, absolutely *no* one in Russia?” he asked.

“No one, at present; but I hope to make friends; and then I have a letter from—”

“At all events,” put in the general, not listening to the news about the letter, “at all events, you must have learned *something*, and your malady would not prevent your undertaking some easy work, in one of the departments, for instance?”

“Oh dear no, oh no! As for a situation, I should much like to find one for I am anxious to discover what I really am fit for. I have learned a good deal in the last four years, and, besides, I read a great many Russian books.”

“Russian books, indeed? Then, of course, you can read and write quite correctly?”

“Oh dear, yes!”

“Capital! And your handwriting?”

“Ah, there I am *really* talented! I may say I am a real caligraphist. Let me write you something, just to show you,” said the prince, with some excitement.

“With pleasure! In fact, it is very necessary. I like your readiness, prince; in fact, I must say—I—I—like you very well, altogether,” said the general.

“What delightful writing materials you have here, such a lot of pencils and things, and what beautiful paper! It’s a charming room altogether. I know that picture, it’s a Swiss view. I’m sure the artist painted it from nature, and that I have seen the very place—”

“Quite likely, though I bought it here. Gania, give the prince some paper. Here are pens and paper; now then, take this table. What’s this?” the general continued to Gania, who had that moment taken a large photograph out of his portfolio, and shown it to his senior. “Halloa! Nastasia Philipovna! Did she send it you herself? Herself?” he inquired, with much curiosity and great animation.

“She gave it me just now, when I called in to congratulate her. I asked her for it long ago. I don’t know whether she meant it for a hint that I had come empty-handed, without a present for her birthday, or what,” added Gania, with an unpleasant smile.

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense,” said the general, with decision. “What extraordinary ideas you have, Gania! As if she would hint; that’s not her way at all. Besides, what could *you* give her, without having thousands at your disposal? You might have given her your portrait, however. Has she ever asked you for it?”

“No, not yet. Very likely she never will. I suppose you haven’t forgotten about tonight, have you, Ivan Fedorovitch? You were one of those specially invited, you know.”

“Oh no, I remember all right, and I shall go, of course. I should think so! She’s twenty-five years old today! And, you know, Gania, you must be ready for great things; she has promised both myself and Afanasy Ivanovitch that she will give a decided answer tonight, yes or no. So be prepared!”

Gania suddenly became so ill at ease that his face grew paler than ever.

“Are you sure she said that?” he asked, and his voice seemed to quiver as he spoke.

“Yes, she promised. We both worried her so that she gave in; but she wished us to tell you nothing about it until the day.”

The general watched Gania’s confusion intently, and clearly did not like it.

“Remember, Ivan Fedorovitch,” said Gania, in great agitation, “that I was to be free too, until her decision; and that even then I was to have my ‘yes or no’ free.”

“Why, don’t you, aren’t you—” began the general, in alarm.

“Oh, don’t misunderstand—”

“But, my dear fellow, what are you doing, what do you mean?”

“Oh, I’m not rejecting her. I may have expressed myself badly, but I didn’t mean that.”

“Reject her! I should think not!” said the general with annoyance, and apparently not in the least anxious to conceal it. “Why, my dear fellow, it’s not a question of your rejecting her, it is whether you are prepared to receive her consent joyfully, and with proper satisfaction. How are things going on at home?”

“At home? Oh, I can do as I like there, of course; only my father will make a fool of himself, as usual. He is rapidly becoming a general nuisance. I don’t ever talk to him now, but I hold him in check, safe enough. I swear if it had not been for my mother, I should have shown him the way out, long ago. My mother is always crying, of course, and my sister sulks. I had to tell them at last that I intended to be master of my own destiny, and that I expect to be obeyed at home. At least, I gave my sister to understand as much, and my mother was present.”

“Well, I must say, I cannot understand it!” said the general, shrugging his shoulders and dropping his hands. “You remember your mother, Nina Alexandrovna, that day she came and sat here and groaned—and when I asked her what was the matter, she says, ‘Oh, it’s such a *dishonour* to us!’ dishonour! Stuff and nonsense! I should like to know who can reproach Nastasia Philipovna, or who can say a word of any kind against her. Did she mean because Nastasia had been living with Totski? What nonsense it is! You would not let her come near your daughters, says Nina Alexandrovna. What next, I wonder? I don’t see how she can fail to—to understand—”

“Her own position?” prompted Gania. “She does understand. Don’t be annoyed with her. I have warned her not to meddle in other people’s affairs. However, although there’s comparative peace at home at present, the storm will break if anything is finally settled tonight.”

The prince heard the whole of the foregoing conversation, as he sat at the table, writing. He finished at last, and brought the result of his labour to the general's desk.

"So this is Nastasia Philipovna," he said, looking attentively and curiously at the portrait. "How wonderfully beautiful!" he immediately added, with warmth. The picture was certainly that of an unusually lovely woman. She was photographed in a black silk dress of simple design, her hair was evidently dark and plainly arranged, her eyes were deep and thoughtful, the expression of her face passionate, but proud. She was rather thin, perhaps, and a little pale. Both Gania and the general gazed at the prince in amazement.

"How do you know it's Nastasia Philipovna?" asked the general; "you surely don't know her already, do you?"

"Yes, I do! I have only been one day in Russia, but I have heard of the great beauty!" And the prince proceeded to narrate his meeting with Rogojin in the train and the whole of the latter's story.

"There's news!" said the general in some excitement, after listening to the story with engrossed attention.

"Oh, of course it's nothing but humbug!" cried Gania, a little disturbed, however. "It's all humbug; the young merchant was pleased to indulge in a little innocent recreation! I have heard something of Rogojin!"

"Yes, so have I!" replied the general. "Nastasia Philipovna told us all about the earrings that very day. But now it is quite a different matter. You see the fellow really has a million of roubles, and he is passionately in love. The whole story smells of passion, and we all know what this class of gentry is capable of when infatuated. I am much afraid of some disagreeable scandal, I am indeed!"

"You are afraid of the million, I suppose," said Gania, grinning and showing his teeth.

"And you are *not*, I presume, eh?"

"How did he strike you, prince?" asked Gania, suddenly. "Did he seem to be a serious sort of a man, or just a common rowdy fellow? What was your own opinion about the matter?"

While Gania put this question, a new idea suddenly flashed into his brain, and blazed out, impatiently, in his eyes. The general, who was really agitated and disturbed, looked at the prince too, but did not seem to expect much from his reply.

“I really don’t quite know how to tell you,” replied the prince, “but it certainly did seem to me that the man was full of passion, and not, perhaps, quite healthy passion. He seemed to be still far from well. Very likely he will be in bed again in a day or two, especially if he lives fast.”

“No! do you think so?” said the general, catching at the idea.

“Yes, I do think so!”

“Yes, but the sort of scandal I referred to may happen at any moment. It may be this very evening,” remarked Gania to the general, with a smile.

“Of course; quite so. In that case it all depends upon what is going on in her brain at this moment.”

“You know the kind of person she is at times.”

“How? What kind of person is she?” cried the general, arrived at the limits of his patience. “Look here, Gania, don’t you go annoying her tonight. What you are to do is to be as agreeable towards her as ever you can. Well, what are you smiling at? You must understand, Gania, that I have no interest whatever in speaking like this. Whichever way the question is settled, it will be to my advantage. Nothing will move Totski from his resolution, so I run no risk. If there is anything I desire, you must know that it is your benefit only. Can’t you trust me? You are a sensible fellow, and I have been counting on you; for, in this matter, that, that—”

“Yes, that’s the chief thing,” said Gania, helping the general out of his difficulties again, and curling his lips in an envenomed smile, which he did not attempt to conceal. He gazed with his fevered eyes straight into those of the general, as though he were anxious that the latter might read his thoughts.

The general grew purple with anger.

“Yes, of course it is the chief thing!” he cried, looking sharply at Gania. “What a very curious man you are, Gania! You actually seem to be *glad* to hear of this millionaire fellow’s arrival—just as though you wished for an excuse to get out of the whole thing. This is an affair in which you ought to act honestly with both sides, and give due warning, to avoid compromising others. But, even now, there is still time. Do you understand me? I wish to know whether you desire this arrangement or whether you do not? If not, say so,—and—and welcome! No one is trying to force you into the snare, Gavril Ardalionovitch, if you see a snare in the matter, at least.”

“I do desire it,” murmured Gania, softly but firmly, lowering his eyes; and he relapsed into gloomy silence.

The general was satisfied. He had excited himself, and was evidently now regretting that he had gone so far. He turned to the prince, and suddenly the disagreeable thought of the latter’s presence struck him, and the certainty that he must have heard every word of the conversation. But he felt at ease in another moment; it only needed one glance at the prince to see that in that quarter there was nothing to fear.

“Oh!” cried the general, catching sight of the prince’s specimen of caligraphy, which the latter had now handed him for inspection. “Why, this is simply beautiful; look at that, Gania, there’s real talent there!”

On a sheet of thick writing-paper the prince had written in medieval characters the legend:

“The gentle Abbot Pafnute signed this.”

“There,” explained the prince, with great delight and animation, “there, that’s the abbot’s real signature—from a manuscript of the fourteenth century. All these old abbots and bishops used to write most beautifully, with such taste and so much care and diligence. Have you no copy of Pogodin, general? If you had one I could show you another type. Stop a bit—here you have the large round writing common in France during the eighteenth century. Some of the letters are shaped quite differently from those now in use. It was the writing current then, and employed by public writers generally. I copied this from one of them, and you can see how good it is. Look at the well-rounded a and d. I have tried to translate the French character into the Russian letters—a difficult thing to do, but I think I have succeeded fairly. Here is a fine sentence, written in a good, original hand—‘Zeal triumphs over all.’ That is the script of the Russian War Office. That is how official documents addressed to important personages should be written. The letters are round, the type black, and the style somewhat remarkable. A stylist would not allow these ornaments, or attempts at flourishes—just look at these unfinished tails!—but it has distinction and really depicts the soul of the writer. He would like to give play to his imagination, and follow the inspiration of his genius, but a soldier is only at ease in the guard-room, and the pen stops half-way, a slave to discipline. How delightful! The first time I met an example of this handwriting, I was positively astonished, and where do you think I chanced to find it? In Switzerland, of all places! Now that is an ordinary English hand. It can hardly be improved, it is so refined and exquisite—almost perfection. This is an example of another kind, a mixture of styles. The copy was given me by a French commercial traveller. It is founded on the English, but the downstrokes are a little

black, and more marked. Notice that the oval has some slight modification—it is more rounded. This writing allows for flourishes; now a flourish is a dangerous thing! Its use requires such taste, but, if successful, what a distinction it gives to the whole! It results in an incomparable type—one to fall in love with!”

“Dear me! How you have gone into all the refinements and details of the question! Why, my dear fellow, you are not a calligraphist, you are an artist! Eh, Gania?”

“Wonderful!” said Gania. “And he knows it too,” he added, with a sarcastic smile.

“You may smile,—but there’s a career in this,” said the general. “You don’t know what a great personage I shall show this to, prince. Why, you can command a situation at thirty-five roubles per month to start with. However, it’s half-past twelve,” he concluded, looking at his watch; “so to business, prince, for I must be setting to work and shall not see you again today. Sit down a minute. I have told you that I cannot receive you myself very often, but I should like to be of some assistance to you, some small assistance, of a kind that would give you satisfaction. I shall find you a place in one of the State departments, an easy place—but you will require to be accurate. Now, as to your plans—in the house, or rather in the family of Gania here—my young friend, whom I hope you will know better—his mother and sister have prepared two or three rooms for lodgers, and let them to highly recommended young fellows, with board and attendance. I am sure Nina Alexandrovna will take you in on my recommendation. There you will be comfortable and well taken care of; for I do not think, prince, that you are the sort of man to be left to the mercy of Fate in a town like Petersburg. Nina Alexandrovna, Gania’s mother, and Varvara Alexandrovna, are ladies for whom I have the highest possible esteem and respect. Nina Alexandrovna is the wife of General Ardalion Alexandrovitch, my old brother in arms, with whom, I regret to say, on account of certain circumstances, I am no longer acquainted. I give you all this information, prince, in order to make it clear to you that I am personally recommending you to this family, and that in so doing, I am more or less taking upon myself to answer for you. The terms are most reasonable, and I trust that your salary will very shortly prove amply sufficient for your expenditure. Of course pocket-money is a necessity, if only a little; do not be angry, prince, if I strongly recommend you to avoid carrying money in your pocket. But as your purse is quite empty at the present moment, you must allow me to press these twenty-five roubles upon your acceptance, as something to begin with. Of course we will settle this little matter another time, and if you are the upright, honest man you look, I anticipate very little trouble between us on that score. Taking so much interest in you as you may perceive I do, I am not without my object, and you shall know it in good time. You see, I am

perfectly candid with you. I hope, Gania, you have nothing to say against the prince's taking up his abode in your house?"

"Oh, on the contrary! my mother will be very glad," said Gania, courteously and kindly.

"I think only one of your rooms is engaged as yet, is it not? That fellow Ferd-Ferd—"

"Ferdishenko."

"Yes—I don't like that Ferdishenko. I can't understand why Nastasia Philipovna encourages him so. Is he really her cousin, as he says?"

"Oh dear no, it's all a joke. No more cousin than I am."

"Well, what do you think of the arrangement, prince?"

"Thank you, general; you have behaved very kindly to me; all the more so since I did not ask you to help me. I don't say that out of pride. I certainly did not know where to lay my head tonight. Rogojin asked me to come to his house, of course, but—"

"Rogojin? No, no, my good fellow. I should strongly recommend you, paternally,—or, if you prefer it, as a friend,—to forget all about Rogojin, and, in fact, to stick to the family into which you are about to enter."

"Thank you," began the prince; "and since you are so very kind there is just one matter which I—"

"You must really excuse me," interrupted the general, "but I positively haven't another moment now. I shall just tell Elizabetha Prokofievna about you, and if she wishes to receive you at once—as I shall advise her—I strongly recommend you to ingratiate yourself with her at the first opportunity, for my wife may be of the greatest service to you in many ways. If she cannot receive you now, you must be content to wait till another time. Meanwhile you, Gania, just look over these accounts, will you? We mustn't forget to finish off that matter—"

The general left the room, and the prince never succeeded in broaching the business which he had on hand, though he had endeavoured to do so four times.

Gania lit a cigarette and offered one to the prince. The latter accepted the offer, but did not talk, being unwilling to disturb Gania's work. He commenced to examine the study and its contents. But Gania hardly so much as glanced at the papers lying before him; he was absent and thoughtful, and his smile and general appearance struck the prince still more disagreeably now that the two were left alone together.

Suddenly Gania approached our hero who was at the moment standing over Nastasia Philipovna's portrait, gazing at it.

"Do you admire that sort of woman, prince?" he asked, looking intently at him. He seemed to have some special object in the question.

"It's a wonderful face," said the prince, "and I feel sure that her destiny is not by any means an ordinary, uneventful one. Her face is smiling enough, but she must have suffered terribly—hasn't she? Her eyes show it—those two bones there, the little points under her eyes, just where the cheek begins. It's a proud face too, terribly proud! And I—I can't say whether she is good and kind, or not. Oh, if she be but good! That would make all well!"

"And would you marry a woman like that, now?" continued Gania, never taking his excited eyes off the prince's face.

"I cannot marry at all," said the latter. "I am an invalid."

"Would Rogojin marry her, do you think?"

"Why not? Certainly he would, I should think. He would marry her tomorrow!—marry her tomorrow and murder her in a week!"

Hardly had the prince uttered the last word when Gania gave such a fearful shudder that the prince almost cried out.

"What's the matter?" said he, seizing Gania's hand.

"Your highness! His excellency begs your presence in her excellency's apartments!" announced the footman, appearing at the door.

The prince immediately followed the man out of the room.

IV.

All three of the Miss Epanchins were fine, healthy girls, well-grown, with good shoulders and busts, and strong—almost masculine—hands; and, of course, with all the above attributes, they enjoyed capital appetites, of which they were not in the least ashamed.

Elizabetha Prokofievna sometimes informed the girls that they were a little too candid in this matter, but in spite of their outward deference to their mother these three young women, in solemn conclave, had long agreed to modify the unquestioning obedience which they had been in the habit of according to her; and Mrs. General

Epanchin had judged it better to say nothing about it, though, of course, she was well aware of the fact.

It is true that her nature sometimes rebelled against these dictates of reason, and that she grew yearly more capricious and impatient; but having a respectful and well-disciplined husband under her thumb at all times, she found it possible, as a rule, to empty any little accumulations of spleen upon his head, and therefore the harmony of the family was kept duly balanced, and things went as smoothly as family matters can.

Mrs. Epanchin had a fair appetite herself, and generally took her share of the capital mid-day lunch which was always served for the girls, and which was nearly as good as a dinner. The young ladies used to have a cup of coffee each before this meal, at ten o'clock, while still in bed. This was a favourite and unalterable arrangement with them. At half-past twelve, the table was laid in the small dining-room, and occasionally the general himself appeared at the family gathering, if he had time.

Besides tea and coffee, cheese, honey, butter, pan-cakes of various kinds (the lady of the house loved these best), cutlets, and so on, there was generally strong beef soup, and other substantial delicacies.

On the particular morning on which our story has opened, the family had assembled in the dining-room, and were waiting the general's appearance, the latter having promised to come this day. If he had been one moment late, he would have been sent for at once; but he turned up punctually.

As he came forward to wish his wife good-morning and kiss her hands, as his custom was, he observed something in her look which boded ill. He thought he knew the reason, and had expected it, but still, he was not altogether comfortable. His daughters advanced to kiss him, too, and though they did not look exactly angry, there was something strange in their expression as well.

The general was, owing to certain circumstances, a little inclined to be too suspicious at home, and needlessly nervous; but, as an experienced father and husband, he judged it better to take measures at once to protect himself from any dangers there might be in the air.

However, I hope I shall not interfere with the proper sequence of my narrative too much, if I diverge for a moment at this point, in order to explain the mutual relations between General Epanchin's family and others acting a part in this history, at the time when we take up the thread of their destiny. I have already stated that the general, though he was a man of lowly origin, and of poor education, was, for all that, an

experienced and talented husband and father. Among other things, he considered it undesirable to hurry his daughters to the matrimonial altar and to worry them too much with assurances of his paternal wishes for their happiness, as is the custom among parents of many grown-up daughters. He even succeeded in ranging his wife on his side on this question, though he found the feat very difficult to accomplish, because unnatural; but the general's arguments were conclusive, and founded upon obvious facts. The general considered that the girls' taste and good sense should be allowed to develop and mature deliberately, and that the parents' duty should merely be to keep watch, in order that no strange or undesirable choice be made; but that the selection once effected, both father and mother were bound from that moment to enter heart and soul into the cause, and to see that the matter progressed without hindrance until the altar should be happily reached.

Besides this, it was clear that the Epanchins' position gained each year, with geometrical accuracy, both as to financial solidity and social weight; and, therefore, the longer the girls waited, the better was their chance of making a brilliant match.

But again, amidst the incontrovertible facts just recorded, one more, equally significant, rose up to confront the family; and this was, that the eldest daughter, Alexandra, had imperceptibly arrived at her twenty-fifth birthday. Almost at the same moment, Afanasy Ivanovitch Totski, a man of immense wealth, high connections, and good standing, announced his intention of marrying. Afanasy Ivanovitch was a gentleman of fifty-five years of age, artistically gifted, and of most refined tastes. He wished to marry well, and, moreover, he was a keen admirer and judge of beauty.

Now, since Totski had, of late, been upon terms of great cordiality with Epanchin, which excellent relations were intensified by the fact that they were, so to speak, partners in several financial enterprises, it so happened that the former now put in a friendly request to the general for counsel with regard to the important step he meditated. Might he suggest, for instance, such a thing as a marriage between himself and one of the general's daughters?

Evidently the quiet, pleasant current of the family life of the Epanchins was about to undergo a change.

The undoubted beauty of the family, *par excellence*, was the youngest, Aglaya, as aforesaid. But Totski himself, though an egotist of the extremest type, realized that he had no chance there; Aglaya was clearly not for such as he.

Perhaps the sisterly love and friendship of the three girls had more or less exaggerated Aglaya's chances of happiness. In their opinion, the latter's destiny was not merely to

be very happy; she was to live in a heaven on earth. Aglaya's husband was to be a compendium of all the virtues, and of all success, not to speak of fabulous wealth. The two elder sisters had agreed that all was to be sacrificed by them, if need be, for Aglaya's sake; her dowry was to be colossal and unprecedented.

The general and his wife were aware of this agreement, and, therefore, when Totski suggested himself for one of the sisters, the parents made no doubt that one of the two elder girls would probably accept the offer, since Totski would certainly make no difficulty as to dowry. The general valued the proposal very highly. He knew life, and realized what such an offer was worth.

The answer of the sisters to the communication was, if not conclusive, at least consoling and hopeful. It made known that the eldest, Alexandra, would very likely be disposed to listen to a proposal.

Alexandra was a good-natured girl, though she had a will of her own. She was intelligent and kind-hearted, and, if she were to marry Totski, she would make him a good wife. She did not care for a brilliant marriage; she was eminently a woman calculated to soothe and sweeten the life of any man; decidedly pretty, if not absolutely handsome. What better could Totski wish?

So the matter crept slowly forward. The general and Totski had agreed to avoid any hasty and irrevocable step. Alexandra's parents had not even begun to talk to their daughters freely upon the subject, when suddenly, as it were, a dissonant chord was struck amid the harmony of the proceedings. Mrs. Epanchin began to show signs of discontent, and that was a serious matter. A certain circumstance had crept in, a disagreeable and troublesome factor, which threatened to overturn the whole business.

This circumstance had come into existence eighteen years before. Close to an estate of Totski's, in one of the central provinces of Russia, there lived, at that time, a poor gentleman whose estate was of the wretchedest description. This gentleman was noted in the district for his persistent ill-fortune; his name was Barashkoff, and, as regards family and descent, he was vastly superior to Totski, but his estate was mortgaged to the last acre. One day, when he had ridden over to the town to see a creditor, the chief peasant of his village followed him shortly after, with the news that his house had been burnt down, and that his wife had perished with it, but his children were safe.

Even Barashkoff, inured to the storms of evil fortune as he was, could not stand this last stroke. He went mad and died shortly after in the town hospital. His estate was

sold for the creditors; and the little girls—two of them, of seven and eight years of age respectively,—were adopted by Totski, who undertook their maintenance and education in the kindness of his heart. They were brought up together with the children of his German bailiff. Very soon, however, there was only one of them left—Nastasia Philipovna—for the other little one died of whooping-cough. Totski, who was living abroad at this time, very soon forgot all about the child; but five years after, returning to Russia, it struck him that he would like to look over his estate and see how matters were going there, and, arrived at his bailiff's house, he was not long in discovering that among the children of the latter there now dwelt a most lovely little girl of twelve, sweet and intelligent, and bright, and promising to develop beauty of most unusual quality—as to which last Totski was an undoubted authority.

He only stayed at his country seat a few days on this occasion, but he had time to make his arrangements. Great changes took place in the child's education; a good governess was engaged, a Swiss lady of experience and culture. For four years this lady resided in the house with little Nastia, and then the education was considered complete. The governess took her departure, and another lady came down to fetch Nastia, by Totski's instructions. The child was now transported to another of Totski's estates in a distant part of the country. Here she found a delightful little house, just built, and prepared for her reception with great care and taste; and here she took up her abode together with the lady who had accompanied her from her old home. In the house there were two experienced maids, musical instruments of all sorts, a charming "young lady's library," pictures, paint-boxes, a lap-dog, and everything to make life agreeable. Within a fortnight Totski himself arrived, and from that time he appeared to have taken a great fancy to this part of the world and came down each summer, staying two and three months at a time. So passed four years peacefully and happily, in charming surroundings.

At the end of that time, and about four months after Totski's last visit (he had stayed but a fortnight on this occasion), a report reached Nastasia Philipovna that he was about to be married in St. Petersburg, to a rich, eminent, and lovely woman. The report was only partially true, the marriage project being only in an embryo condition; but a great change now came over Nastasia Philipovna. She suddenly displayed unusual decision of character; and without wasting time in thought, she left her country home and came up to St. Petersburg, straight to Totski's house, all alone.

The latter, amazed at her conduct, began to express his displeasure; but he very soon became aware that he must change his voice, style, and everything else, with this young lady; the good old times were gone. An entirely new and different woman sat

before him, between whom and the girl he had left in the country last July there seemed nothing in common.

In the first place, this new woman understood a good deal more than was usual for young people of her age; so much indeed, that Totski could not help wondering where she had picked up her knowledge. Surely not from her “young lady’s library”? It even embraced legal matters, and the “world” in general, to a considerable extent.

Her character was absolutely changed. No more of the girlish alternations of timidity and petulance, the adorable naivete, the reveries, the tears, the playfulness... It was an entirely new and hitherto unknown being who now sat and laughed at him, and informed him to his face that she had never had the faintest feeling for him of any kind, except loathing and contempt—contempt which had followed closely upon her sensations of surprise and bewilderment after her first acquaintance with him.

This new woman gave him further to understand that though it was absolutely the same to her whom he married, yet she had decided to prevent this marriage—for no particular reason, but that she *chose* to do so, and because she wished to amuse herself at his expense for that it was “quite her turn to laugh a little now!”

Such were her words—very likely she did not give her real reason for this eccentric conduct; but, at all events, that was all the explanation she deigned to offer.

Meanwhile, Totski thought the matter over as well as his scattered ideas would permit. His meditations lasted a fortnight, however, and at the end of that time his resolution was taken. The fact was, Totski was at that time a man of fifty years of age; his position was solid and respectable; his place in society had long been firmly fixed upon safe foundations; he loved himself, his personal comforts, and his position better than all the world, as every respectable gentleman should!

At the same time his grasp of things in general soon showed Totski that he now had to deal with a being who was outside the pale of the ordinary rules of traditional behaviour, and who would not only threaten mischief but would undoubtedly carry it out, and stop for no one.

There was evidently, he concluded, something at work here; some storm of the mind, some paroxysm of romantic anger, goodness knows against whom or what, some insatiable contempt—in a word, something altogether absurd and impossible, but at the same time most dangerous to be met with by any respectable person with a position in society to keep up.

For a man of Totski's wealth and standing, it would, of course, have been the simplest possible matter to take steps which would rid him at once from all annoyance; while it was obviously impossible for Nastasia Philipovna to harm him in any way, either legally or by stirring up a scandal, for, in case of the latter danger, he could so easily remove her to a sphere of safety. However, these arguments would only hold good in case of Nastasia acting as others might in such an emergency. She was much more likely to overstep the bounds of reasonable conduct by some extraordinary eccentricity.

Here the sound judgment of Totski stood him in good stead. He realized that Nastasia Philipovna must be well aware that she could do nothing by legal means to injure him, and that her flashing eyes betrayed some entirely different intention.

Nastasia Philipovna was quite capable of ruining herself, and even of perpetrating something which would send her to Siberia, for the mere pleasure of injuring a man for whom she had developed so inhuman a sense of loathing and contempt. He had sufficient insight to understand that she valued nothing in the world—herself least of all—and he made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was a coward in some respects. For instance, if he had been told that he would be stabbed at the altar, or publicly insulted, he would undoubtedly have been frightened; but not so much at the idea of being murdered, or wounded, or insulted, as at the thought that if such things were to happen he would be made to look ridiculous in the eyes of society.

He knew well that Nastasia thoroughly understood him and where to wound him and how, and therefore, as the marriage was still only in embryo, Totski decided to conciliate her by giving it up. His decision was strengthened by the fact that Nastasia Philipovna had curiously altered of late. It would be difficult to conceive how different she was physically, at the present time, to the girl of a few years ago. She was pretty then... but now!... Totski laughed angrily when he thought how short-sighted he had been. In days gone by he remembered how he had looked at her beautiful eyes, how even then he had marvelled at their dark mysterious depths, and at their wondering gaze which seemed to seek an answer to some unknown riddle. Her complexion also had altered. She was now exceedingly pale, but, curiously, this change only made her more beautiful. Like most men of the world, Totski had rather despised such a cheaply-bought conquest, but of late years he had begun to think differently about it. It had struck him as long ago as last spring that he ought to be finding a good match for Nastasia; for instance, some respectable and reasonable young fellow serving in a government office in another part of the country. How maliciously Nastasia laughed at the idea of such a thing, now!

However, it appeared to Totski that he might make use of her in another way; and he determined to establish her in St. Petersburg, surrounding her with all the comforts and luxuries that his wealth could command. In this way he might gain glory in certain circles.

Five years of this Petersburg life went by, and, of course, during that time a great deal happened. Totski's position was very uncomfortable; having "funkt" once, he could not totally regain his ease. He was afraid, he did not know why, but he was simply *afraid* of Nastasia Philipovna. For the first two years or so he had suspected that she wished to marry him herself, and that only her vanity prevented her telling him so. He thought that she wanted him to approach her with a humble proposal from his own side. But to his great, and not entirely pleasurable amazement, he discovered that this was by no means the case, and that were he to offer himself he would be refused. He could not understand such a state of things, and was obliged to conclude that it was pride, the pride of an injured and imaginative woman, which had gone to such lengths that it preferred to sit and nurse its contempt and hatred in solitude rather than mount to heights of hitherto unattainable splendour. To make matters worse, she was quite impervious to mercenary considerations, and could not be bribed in any way.

Finally, Totski took cunning means to try to break his chains and be free. He tried to tempt her in various ways to lose her heart; he invited princes, hussars, secretaries of embassies, poets, novelists, even Socialists, to see her; but not one of them all made the faintest impression upon Nastasia. It was as though she had a pebble in place of a heart, as though her feelings and affections were dried up and withered for ever.

She lived almost entirely alone; she read, she studied, she loved music. Her principal acquaintances were poor women of various grades, a couple of actresses, and the family of a poor schoolteacher. Among these people she was much beloved.

She received four or five friends sometimes, of an evening. Totski often came. Lately, too, General Epanchin had been enabled with great difficulty to introduce himself into her circle. Gania made her acquaintance also, and others were Ferdishenko, an ill-bred, and would-be witty, young clerk, and Ptitsin, a money-lender of modest and polished manners, who had risen from poverty. In fact, Nastasia Philipovna's beauty became a thing known to all the town; but not a single man could boast of anything more than his own admiration for her; and this reputation of hers, and her wit and culture and grace, all confirmed Totski in the plan he had now prepared.

And it was at this moment that General Epanchin began to play so large and important a part in the story.

When Totski had approached the general with his request for friendly counsel as to a marriage with one of his daughters, he had made a full and candid confession. He had said that he intended to stop at no means to obtain his freedom; even if Nastasia were to promise to leave him entirely alone in future, he would not (he said) believe and trust her; words were not enough for him; he must have solid guarantees of some sort. So he and the general determined to try what an attempt to appeal to her heart would effect. Having arrived at Nastasia's house one day, with Epanchin, Totski immediately began to speak of the intolerable torment of his position. He admitted that he was to blame for all, but candidly confessed that he could not bring himself to feel any remorse for his original guilt towards herself, because he was a man of sensual passions which were inborn and ineradicable, and that he had no power over himself in this respect; but that he wished, seriously, to marry at last, and that the whole fate of the most desirable social union which he contemplated, was in her hands; in a word, he confided his all to her generosity of heart.

General Epanchin took up his part and spoke in the character of father of a family; he spoke sensibly, and without wasting words over any attempt at sentimentality, he merely recorded his full admission of her right to be the arbiter of Totski's destiny at this moment. He then pointed out that the fate of his daughter, and very likely of both his other daughters, now hung upon her reply.

To Nastasia's question as to what they wished her to do, Totski confessed that he had been so frightened by her, five years ago, that he could never now be entirely comfortable until she herself married. He immediately added that such a suggestion from him would, of course, be absurd, unless accompanied by remarks of a more pointed nature. He very well knew, he said, that a certain young gentleman of good family, namely, Gavril Ardalionovitch Ivolgin, with whom she was acquainted, and whom she received at her house, had long loved her passionately, and would give his life for some response from her. The young fellow had confessed this love of his to him (Totski) and had also admitted it in the hearing of his benefactor, General Epanchin. Lastly, he could not help being of opinion that Nastasia must be aware of Gania's love for her, and if he (Totski) mistook not, she had looked with some favour upon it, being often lonely, and rather tired of her present life. Having remarked how difficult it was for him, of all people, to speak to her of these matters, Totski concluded by saying that he trusted Nastasia Philipovna would not look with contempt upon him if he now expressed his sincere desire to guarantee her future by a gift of seventy-five thousand roubles. He added that the sum would have been left her all the same in his will, and that therefore she must not consider the gift as in any way an indemnification to her for anything, but that there was no reason, after all, why a man should not be allowed

to entertain a natural desire to lighten his conscience, etc., etc.; in fact, all that would naturally be said under the circumstances. Totski was very eloquent all through, and, in conclusion, just touched on the fact that not a soul in the world, not even General Epanchin, had ever heard a word about the above seventy-five thousand roubles, and that this was the first time he had ever given expression to his intentions in respect to them.

Nastasia Philipovna's reply to this long rigmarole astonished both the friends considerably.

Not only was there no trace of her former irony, of her old hatred and enmity, and of that dreadful laughter, the very recollection of which sent a cold chill down Totski's back to this very day; but she seemed charmed and really glad to have the opportunity of talking seriously with him for once in a way. She confessed that she had long wished to have a frank and free conversation and to ask for friendly advice, but that pride had hitherto prevented her; now, however, that the ice was broken, nothing could be more welcome to her than this opportunity.

First, with a sad smile, and then with a twinkle of merriment in her eyes, she admitted that such a storm as that of five years ago was now quite out of the question. She said that she had long since changed her views of things, and recognized that facts must be taken into consideration in spite of the feelings of the heart. What was done was done and ended, and she could not understand why Totski should still feel alarmed.

She next turned to General Epanchin and observed, most courteously, that she had long since known of his daughters, and that she had heard none but good report; that she had learned to think of them with deep and sincere respect. The idea alone that she could in any way serve them, would be to her both a pride and a source of real happiness.

It was true that she was lonely in her present life; Totski had judged her thoughts aright. She longed to rise, if not to love, at least to family life and new hopes and objects, but as to Gavriila Ardalionovitch, she could not as yet say much. She thought it must be the case that he loved her; she felt that she too might learn to love him, if she could be sure of the firmness of his attachment to herself; but he was very young, and it was a difficult question to decide. What she specially liked about him was that he worked, and supported his family by his toil.

She had heard that he was proud and ambitious; she had heard much that was interesting of his mother and sister, she had heard of them from Mr. Ptitsin, and would much like to make their acquaintance, but—another question!—would they like to

receive her into their house? At all events, though she did not reject the idea of this marriage, she desired not to be hurried. As for the seventy-five thousand roubles, Mr. Totski need not have found any difficulty or awkwardness about the matter; she quite understood the value of money, and would, of course, accept the gift. She thanked him for his delicacy, however, but saw no reason why Gavril Ardalionovitch should not know about it.

She would not marry the latter, she said, until she felt persuaded that neither on his part nor on the part of his family did there exist any sort of concealed suspicions as to herself. She did not intend to ask forgiveness for anything in the past, which fact she desired to be known. She did not consider herself to blame for anything that had happened in former years, and she thought that Gavril Ardalionovitch should be informed as to the relations which had existed between herself and Totski during the last five years. If she accepted this money it was not to be considered as indemnification for her misfortune as a young girl, which had not been in any degree her own fault, but merely as compensation for her ruined life.

She became so excited and agitated during all these explanations and confessions that General Epanchin was highly gratified, and considered the matter satisfactorily arranged once for all. But the once bitten Totski was twice shy, and looked for hidden snakes among the flowers. However, the special point to which the two friends particularly trusted to bring about their object (namely, Gania's attractiveness for Nastasia Philipovna), stood out more and more prominently; the *pourparlers* had commenced, and gradually even Totski began to believe in the possibility of success.

Before long Nastasia and Gania had talked the matter over. Very little was said—her modesty seemed to suffer under the infliction of discussing such a question. But she recognized his love, on the understanding that she bound herself to nothing whatever, and that she reserved the right to say “no” up to the very hour of the marriage ceremony. Gania was to have the same right of refusal at the last moment.

It soon became clear to Gania, after scenes of wrath and quarrellings at the domestic hearth, that his family were seriously opposed to the match, and that Nastasia was aware of this fact was equally evident. She said nothing about it, though he daily expected her to do so.

There were several rumours afloat, before long, which upset Totski's equanimity a good deal, but we will not now stop to describe them; merely mentioning an instance or two. One was that Nastasia had entered into close and secret relations with the Epanchin girls—a most unlikely rumour; another was that Nastasia had long satisfied herself of the fact that Gania was merely marrying her for money, and that his nature

was gloomy and greedy, impatient and selfish, to an extraordinary degree; and that although he had been keen enough in his desire to achieve a conquest before, yet since the two friends had agreed to exploit his passion for their own purposes, it was clear enough that he had begun to consider the whole thing a nuisance and a nightmare.

In his heart passion and hate seemed to hold divided sway, and although he had at last given his consent to marry the woman (as he said), under the stress of circumstances, yet he promised himself that he would “take it out of her,” after marriage.

Nastasia seemed to Totski to have divined all this, and to be preparing something on her own account, which frightened him to such an extent that he did not dare communicate his views even to the general. But at times he would pluck up his courage and be full of hope and good spirits again, acting, in fact, as weak men do act in such circumstances.

However, both the friends felt that the thing looked rosy indeed when one day Nastasia informed them that she would give her final answer on the evening of her birthday, which anniversary was due in a very short time.

A strange rumour began to circulate, meanwhile; no less than that the respectable and highly respected General Epanchin was himself so fascinated by Nastasia Philipovna that his feeling for her amounted almost to passion. What he thought to gain by Gania's marriage to the girl it was difficult to imagine. Possibly he counted on Gania's complaisance; for Totski had long suspected that there existed some secret understanding between the general and his secretary. At all events the fact was known that he had prepared a magnificent present of pearls for Nastasia's birthday, and that he was looking forward to the occasion when he should present his gift with the greatest excitement and impatience. The day before her birthday he was in a fever of agitation.

Mrs. Epanchin, long accustomed to her husband's infidelities, had heard of the pearls, and the rumour excited her liveliest curiosity and interest. The general remarked her suspicions, and felt that a grand explanation must shortly take place—which fact alarmed him much.

This is the reason why he was so unwilling to take lunch (on the morning upon which we took up this narrative) with the rest of his family. Before the prince's arrival he had made up his mind to plead business, and “cut” the meal; which simply meant running away.

He was particularly anxious that this one day should be passed—especially the evening—without unpleasantness between himself and his family; and just at the right moment the prince turned up—“as though Heaven had sent him on purpose,” said the general to himself, as he left the study to seek out the wife of his bosom.

V.

Mrs. General Epanchin was a proud woman by nature. What must her feelings have been when she heard that Prince Muishkin, the last of his and her line, had arrived in beggar’s guise, a wretched idiot, a recipient of charity—all of which details the general gave out for greater effect! He was anxious to steal her interest at the first swoop, so as to distract her thoughts from other matters nearer home.

Mrs. Epanchin was in the habit of holding herself very straight, and staring before her, without speaking, in moments of excitement.

She was a fine woman of the same age as her husband, with a slightly hooked nose, a high, narrow forehead, thick hair turning a little grey, and a sallow complexion. Her eyes were grey and wore a very curious expression at times. She believed them to be most effective—a belief that nothing could alter.

“What, receive him! Now, at once?” asked Mrs. Epanchin, gazing vaguely at her husband as he stood fidgeting before her.

“Oh, dear me, I assure you there is no need to stand on ceremony with him,” the general explained hastily. “He is quite a child, not to say a pathetic-looking creature. He has fits of some sort, and has just arrived from Switzerland, straight from the station, dressed like a German and without a farthing in his pocket. I gave him twenty-five roubles to go on with, and am going to find him some easy place in one of the government offices. I should like you to ply him well with the victuals, my dears, for I should think he must be very hungry.”

“You astonish me,” said the lady, gazing as before. “Fits, and hungry too! What sort of fits?”

“Oh, they don’t come on frequently, besides, he’s a regular child, though he seems to be fairly educated. I should like you, if possible, my dears,” the general added, making slowly for the door, “to put him through his paces a bit, and see what he is good for. I think you should be kind to him; it is a good deed, you know—however, just as you like, of course—but he is a sort of relation, remember, and I thought it might interest you to see the young fellow, seeing that this is so.”

“Oh, of course, mamma, if we needn’t stand on ceremony with him, we must give the poor fellow something to eat after his journey; especially as he has not the least idea where to go to,” said Alexandra, the eldest of the girls.

“Besides, he’s quite a child; we can entertain him with a little hide-and-seek, in case of need,” said Adelaida.

“Hide-and-seek? What do you mean?” inquired Mrs. Epanchin.

“Oh, do stop pretending, mamma,” cried Aglaya, in vexation. “Send him up, father; mother allows.”

The general rang the bell and gave orders that the prince should be shown in.

“Only on condition that he has a napkin under his chin at lunch, then,” said Mrs. Epanchin, “and let Fedor, or Mavra, stand behind him while he eats. Is he quiet when he has these fits? He doesn’t show violence, does he?”

“On the contrary, he seems to be very well brought up. His manners are excellent—but here he is himself. Here you are, prince—let me introduce you, the last of the Muishkins, a relative of your own, my dear, or at least of the same name. Receive him kindly, please. They’ll bring in lunch directly, prince; you must stop and have some, but you must excuse me. I’m in a hurry, I must be off—”

“We all know where *you* must be off to!” said Mrs. Epanchin, in a meaning voice.

“Yes, yes—I must hurry away, I’m late! Look here, dears, let him write you something in your albums; you’ve no idea what a wonderful calligraphist he is, wonderful talent! He has just written out ‘Abbot Pafnute signed this’ for me. Well, *au revoir!*”

“Stop a minute; where are you off to? Who is this abbot?” cried Mrs. Epanchin to her retreating husband in a tone of excited annoyance.

“Yes, my dear, it was an old abbot of that name—I must be off to see the count, he’s waiting for me, I’m late—Good-bye! *Au revoir*, prince!”—and the general bolted at full speed.

“Oh, yes—I know what count you’re going to see!” remarked his wife in a cutting manner, as she turned her angry eyes on the prince. “Now then, what’s all this about?—What abbot—Who’s Pafnute?” she added, brusquely.

“Mamma!” said Alexandra, shocked at her rudeness.

Aglaya stamped her foot.

“Nonsense! Let me alone!” said the angry mother. “Now then, prince, sit down here, no, nearer, come nearer the light! I want to have a good look at you. So, now then, who is this abbot?”

“Abbot Pafnute,” said our friend, seriously and with deference.

“Pafnute, yes. And who was he?”

Mrs. Epanchin put these questions hastily and brusquely, and when the prince answered she nodded her head sagely at each word he said.

“The Abbot Pafnute lived in the fourteenth century,” began the prince; “he was in charge of one of the monasteries on the Volga, about where our present Kostroma government lies. He went to Oreol and helped in the great matters then going on in the religious world; he signed an edict there, and I have seen a print of his signature; it struck me, so I copied it. When the general asked me, in his study, to write something for him, to show my handwriting, I wrote ‘The Abbot Pafnute signed this,’ in the exact handwriting of the abbot. The general liked it very much, and that’s why he recalled it just now.”

“Aglaya, make a note of ‘Pafnute,’ or we shall forget him. H’m! and where is this signature?”

“I think it was left on the general’s table.”

“Let it be sent for at once!”

“Oh, I’ll write you a new one in half a minute,” said the prince, “if you like!”

“Of course, mamma!” said Alexandra. “But let’s have lunch now, we are all hungry!”

“Yes; come along, prince,” said the mother, “are you very hungry?”

“Yes; I must say that I am pretty hungry, thanks very much.”

“H’m! I like to see that you know your manners; and you are by no means such a person as the general thought fit to describe you. Come along; you sit here, opposite to me,” she continued, “I wish to be able to see your face. Alexandra, Adelaida, look after the prince! He doesn’t seem so very ill, does he? I don’t think he requires a napkin under his chin, after all; are you accustomed to having one on, prince?”

“Formerly, when I was seven years old or so. I believe I wore one; but now I usually hold my napkin on my knee when I eat.”

“Of course, of course! And about your fits?”

“Fits?” asked the prince, slightly surprised. “I very seldom have fits nowadays. I don’t know how it may be here, though; they say the climate may be bad for me.”

“He talks very well, you know!” said Mrs. Epanchin, who still continued to nod at each word the prince spoke. “I really did not expect it at all; in fact, I suppose it was all stuff and nonsense on the general’s part, as usual. Eat away, prince, and tell me where you were born, and where you were brought up. I wish to know all about you, you interest me very much!”

The prince expressed his thanks once more, and eating heartily the while, recommenced the narrative of his life in Switzerland, all of which we have heard before. Mrs. Epanchin became more and more pleased with her guest; the girls, too, listened with considerable attention. In talking over the question of relationship it turned out that the prince was very well up in the matter and knew his pedigree off by heart. It was found that scarcely any connection existed between himself and Mrs. Epanchin, but the talk, and the opportunity of conversing about her family tree, gratified the latter exceedingly, and she rose from the table in great good humour.

“Let’s all go to my boudoir,” she said, “and they shall bring some coffee in there. That’s the room where we all assemble and busy ourselves as we like best,” she explained.

“Alexandra, my eldest, here, plays the piano, or reads or sews; Adelaida paints landscapes and portraits (but never finishes any); and Aglaya sits and does nothing. I don’t work too much, either. Here we are, now; sit down, prince, near the fire and talk to us. I want to hear you relate something. I wish to make sure of you first and then tell my old friend, Princess Bielokonski, about you. I wish you to know all the good people and to interest them. Now then, begin!”

“Mamma, it’s rather a strange order, that!” said Adelaida, who was fussing among her paints and paint-brushes at the easel. Aglaya and Alexandra had settled themselves with folded hands on a sofa, evidently meaning to be listeners. The prince felt that the general attention was concentrated upon himself.

“I should refuse to say a word if I were ordered to tell a story like that!” observed Aglaya.

“Why? what’s there strange about it? He has a tongue. Why shouldn’t he tell us something? I want to judge whether he is a good story-teller; anything you like, prince—how you liked Switzerland, what was your first impression, anything. You’ll see, he’ll begin directly and tell us all about it beautifully.”

“The impression was forcible—” the prince began.

“There, you see, girls,” said the impatient lady, “he *has* begun, you see.”

“Well, then, *let* him talk, mamma,” said Alexandra. “This prince is a great humbug and by no means an idiot,” she whispered to Aglaya.

“Oh, I saw that at once,” replied the latter. “I don’t think it at all nice of him to play a part. What does he wish to gain by it, I wonder?”

“My first impression was a very strong one,” repeated the prince. “When they took me away from Russia, I remember I passed through many German towns and looked out of the windows, but did not trouble so much as to ask questions about them. This was after a long series of fits. I always used to fall into a sort of torpid condition after such a series, and lost my memory almost entirely; and though I was not altogether without reason at such times, yet I had no logical power of thought. This would continue for three or four days, and then I would recover myself again. I remember my melancholy was intolerable; I felt inclined to cry; I sat and wondered and wondered uncomfortably; the consciousness that everything was strange weighed terribly upon me; I could understand that it was all foreign and strange. I recollect I awoke from this state for the first time at Basle, one evening; the bray of a donkey aroused me, a donkey in the town market. I saw the donkey and was extremely pleased with it, and from that moment my head seemed to clear.”

“A donkey? How strange! Yet it is not strange. Anyone of us might fall in love with a donkey! It happened in mythological times,” said Madame Epanchin, looking wrathfully at her daughters, who had begun to laugh. “Go on, prince.”

“Since that evening I have been specially fond of donkeys. I began to ask questions about them, for I had never seen one before; and I at once came to the conclusion that this must be one of the most useful of animals—strong, willing, patient, cheap; and, thanks to this donkey, I began to like the whole country I was travelling through; and my melancholy passed away.”

“All this is very strange and interesting,” said Mrs. Epanchin. “Now let’s leave the donkey and go on to other matters. What are you laughing at, Aglaya? and you too, Adelaida? The prince told us his experiences very cleverly; he saw the donkey himself, and what have you ever seen? *You* have never been abroad.”

“I have seen a donkey though, mamma!” said Aglaya.

“And I’ve heard one!” said Adelaida. All three of the girls laughed out loud, and the prince laughed with them.

“Well, it’s too bad of you,” said mamma. “You must forgive them, prince; they are good girls. I am very fond of them, though I often have to be scolding them; they are all as silly and mad as march hares.”

“Oh, why shouldn’t they laugh?” said the prince. “I shouldn’t have let the chance go by in their place, I know. But I stick up for the donkey, all the same; he’s a patient, good-natured fellow.”

“Are you a patient man, prince? I ask out of curiosity,” said Mrs. Epanchin.

All laughed again.

“Oh, that wretched donkey again, I see!” cried the lady. “I assure you, prince, I was not guilty of the least—”

“Insinuation? Oh! I assure you, I take your word for it.” And the prince continued laughing merrily.

“I must say it’s very nice of you to laugh. I see you really are a kind-hearted fellow,” said Mrs. Epanchin.

“I’m not always kind, though.”

“I am kind myself, and *always* kind too, if you please!” she retorted, unexpectedly; “and that is my chief fault, for one ought not to be always kind. I am often angry with these girls and their father; but the worst of it is, I am always kindest when I am cross. I was very angry just before you came, and Aglaya there read me a lesson—thanks, Aglaya, dear—come and kiss me—there—that’s enough” she added, as Aglaya came forward and kissed her lips and then her hand. “Now then, go on, prince. Perhaps you can think of something more exciting than about the donkey, eh?”

“I must say, again, I can’t understand how you can expect anyone to tell you stories straight away, so,” said Adelaida. “I know I never could!”

“Yes, but the prince can, because he is clever—cleverer than you are by ten or twenty times, if you like. There, that’s so, prince; and seriously, let’s drop the donkey now—what else did you see abroad, besides the donkey?”

“Yes, but the prince told us about the donkey very cleverly, all the same,” said Alexandra. “I have always been most interested to hear how people go mad and get well again, and that sort of thing. Especially when it happens suddenly.”

“Quite so, quite so!” cried Mrs. Epanchin, delighted. “I see you *can* be sensible now and then, Alexandra. You were speaking of Switzerland, prince?”

“Yes. We came to Lucerne, and I was taken out in a boat. I felt how lovely it was, but the loveliness weighed upon me somehow or other, and made me feel melancholy.”

“Why?” asked Alexandra.

“I don’t know; I always feel like that when I look at the beauties of nature for the first time; but then, I was ill at that time, of course!”

“Oh, but I should like to see it!” said Adelaida; “and I don’t know *when* we shall ever go abroad. I’ve been two years looking out for a good subject for a picture. I’ve done all I know. ‘The North and South I know by heart,’ as our poet observes. Do help me to a subject, prince.”

“Oh, but I know nothing about painting. It seems to me one only has to look, and paint what one sees.”

“But I don’t know *how* to see!”

“Nonsense, what rubbish you talk!” the mother struck in. “Not know how to see! Open your eyes and look! If you can’t see here, you won’t see abroad either. Tell us what you saw yourself, prince!”

“Yes, that’s better,” said Adelaida; “the prince *learned to see* abroad.”

“Oh, I hardly know! You see, I only went to restore my health. I don’t know whether I learned to see, exactly. I was very happy, however, nearly all the time.”

“Happy! you can be happy?” cried Aglaya. “Then how can you say you did not learn to see? I should think you could teach *us* to see!”

“Oh! *do* teach us,” laughed Adelaida.

“Oh! I can’t do that,” said the prince, laughing too. “I lived almost all the while in one little Swiss village; what can I teach you? At first I was only just not absolutely dull; then my health began to improve—then every day became dearer and more precious to me, and the longer I stayed, the dearer became the time to me; so much so that I could not help observing it; but why this was so, it would be difficult to say.”

“So that you didn’t care to go away anywhere else?”

“Well, at first I did; I was restless; I didn’t know however I should manage to support life—you know there are such moments, especially in solitude. There was a waterfall near us, such a lovely thin streak of water, like a thread but white and moving. It fell from a great height, but it looked quite low, and it was half a mile away, though it did not seem fifty paces. I loved to listen to it at night, but it was then that I became so

restless. Sometimes I went and climbed the mountain and stood there in the midst of the tall pines, all alone in the terrible silence, with our little village in the distance, and the sky so blue, and the sun so bright, and an old ruined castle on the mountain-side, far away. I used to watch the line where earth and sky met, and longed to go and seek there the key of all mysteries, thinking that I might find there a new life, perhaps some great city where life should be grander and richer—and then it struck me that life may be grand enough even in a prison.”

“I read that last most praiseworthy thought in my manual, when I was twelve years old,” said Aglaya.

“All this is pure philosophy,” said Adelaida. “You are a philosopher, prince, and have come here to instruct us in your views.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the prince, smiling. “I think I am a philosopher, perhaps, and who knows, perhaps I do wish to teach my views of things to those I meet with?”

“Your philosophy is rather like that of an old woman we know, who is rich and yet does nothing but try how little she can spend. She talks of nothing but money all day. Your great philosophical idea of a grand life in a prison and your four happy years in that Swiss village are like this, rather,” said Aglaya.

“As to life in a prison, of course there may be two opinions,” said the prince. “I once heard the story of a man who lived twelve years in a prison—I heard it from the man himself. He was one of the persons under treatment with my professor; he had fits, and attacks of melancholy, then he would weep, and once he tried to commit suicide. *His* life in prison was sad enough; his only acquaintances were spiders and a tree that grew outside his grating—but I think I had better tell you of another man I met last year. There was a very strange feature in this case, strange because of its extremely rare occurrence. This man had once been brought to the scaffold in company with several others, and had had the sentence of death by shooting passed upon him for some political crime. Twenty minutes later he had been reprieved and some other punishment substituted; but the interval between the two sentences, twenty minutes, or at least a quarter of an hour, had been passed in the certainty that within a few minutes he must die. I was very anxious to hear him speak of his impressions during that dreadful time, and I several times inquired of him as to what he thought and felt. He remembered everything with the most accurate and extraordinary distinctness, and declared that he would never forget a single iota of the experience.

“About twenty paces from the scaffold, where he had stood to hear the sentence, were three posts, fixed in the ground, to which to fasten the criminals (of whom there were several). The first three criminals were taken to the posts, dressed in long white tunics, with white caps drawn over their faces, so that they could not see the rifles pointed at them. Then a group of soldiers took their stand opposite to each post. My friend was the eighth on the list, and therefore he would have been among the third lot to go up. A priest went about among them with a cross: and there was about five minutes of time left for him to live.

“He said that those five minutes seemed to him to be a most interminable period, an enormous wealth of time; he seemed to be living, in these minutes, so many lives that there was no need as yet to think of that last moment, so that he made several arrangements, dividing up the time into portions—one for saying farewell to his companions, two minutes for that; then a couple more for thinking over his own life and career and all about himself; and another minute for a last look around. He remembered having divided his time like this quite well. While saying good-bye to his friends he recollected asking one of them some very usual everyday question, and being much interested in the answer. Then having bade farewell, he embarked upon those two minutes which he had allotted to looking into himself; he knew beforehand what he was going to think about. He wished to put it to himself as quickly and clearly as possible, that here was he, a living, thinking man, and that in three minutes he would be nobody; or if somebody or something, then what and where? He thought he would decide this question once for all in these last three minutes. A little way off there stood a church, and its gilded spire glittered in the sun. He remembered staring stubbornly at this spire, and at the rays of light sparkling from it. He could not tear his eyes from these rays of light; he got the idea that these rays were his new nature, and that in three minutes he would become one of them, amalgamated somehow with them.

“The repugnance to what must ensue almost immediately, and the uncertainty, were dreadful, he said; but worst of all was the idea, ‘What should I do if I were not to die now? What if I were to return to life again? What an eternity of days, and all mine! How I should grudge and count up every minute of it, so as to waste not a single instant!’ He said that this thought weighed so upon him and became such a terrible burden upon his brain that he could not bear it, and wished they would shoot him quickly and have done with it.”

The prince paused and all waited, expecting him to go on again and finish the story.

“Is that all?” asked Aglaya.

“All? Yes,” said the prince, emerging from a momentary reverie.

“And why did you tell us this?”

“Oh, I happened to recall it, that’s all! It fitted into the conversation—”

“You probably wish to deduce, prince,” said Alexandra, “that moments of time cannot be reckoned by money value, and that sometimes five minutes are worth priceless treasures. All this is very praiseworthy; but may I ask about this friend of yours, who told you the terrible experience of his life? He was reprieved, you say; in other words, they did restore to him that ‘eternity of days.’ What did he do with these riches of time? Did he keep careful account of his minutes?”

“Oh no, he didn’t! I asked him myself. He said that he had not lived a bit as he had intended, and had wasted many, and many a minute.”

“Very well, then there’s an experiment, and the thing is proved; one cannot live and count each moment; say what you like, but one *cannot*.”

“That is true,” said the prince, “I have thought so myself. And yet, why shouldn’t one do it?”

“You think, then, that you could live more wisely than other people?” said Aglaya.

“I have had that idea.”

“And you have it still?”

“Yes—I have it still,” the prince replied.

He had contemplated Aglaya until now, with a pleasant though rather timid smile, but as the last words fell from his lips he began to laugh, and looked at her merrily.

“You are not very modest!” said she.

“But how brave you are!” said he. “You are laughing, and I—that man’s tale impressed me so much, that I dreamt of it afterwards; yes, I dreamt of those five minutes...”

He looked at his listeners again with that same serious, searching expression.

“You are not angry with me?” he asked suddenly, and with a kind of nervous hurry, although he looked them straight in the face.

“Why should we be angry?” they cried.

“Only because I seem to be giving you a lecture, all the time!”

At this they laughed heartily.

“Please don’t be angry with me,” continued the prince. “I know very well that I have seen less of life than other people, and have less knowledge of it. I must appear to speak strangely sometimes...”

He said the last words nervously.

“You say you have been happy, and that proves you have lived, not less, but more than other people. Why make all these excuses?” interrupted Aglaya in a mocking tone of voice. “Besides, you need not mind about lecturing us; you have nothing to boast of. With your quietism, one could live happily for a hundred years at least. One might show you the execution of a felon, or show you one’s little finger. You could draw a moral from either, and be quite satisfied. That sort of existence is easy enough.”

“I can’t understand why you always fly into a temper,” said Mrs. Epanchin, who had been listening to the conversation and examining the faces of the speakers in turn. “I do not understand what you mean. What has your little finger to do with it? The prince talks well, though he is not amusing. He began all right, but now he seems sad.”

“Never mind, mamma! Prince, I wish you had seen an execution,” said Aglaya. “I should like to ask you a question about that, if you had.”

“I have seen an execution,” said the prince.

“You have!” cried Aglaya. “I might have guessed it. That’s a fitting crown to the rest of the story. If you have seen an execution, how can you say you lived happily all the while?”

“But is there capital punishment where you were?” asked Adelaida.

“I saw it at Lyons. Schneider took us there, and as soon as we arrived we came in for that.”

“Well, and did you like it very much? Was it very edifying and instructive?” asked Aglaya.

“No, I didn’t like it at all, and was ill after seeing it; but I confess I stared as though my eyes were fixed to the sight. I could not tear them away.”

“I, too, should have been unable to tear my eyes away,” said Aglaya.

“They do not at all approve of women going to see an execution there. The women who do go are condemned for it afterwards in the newspapers.”

“That is, by contending that it is not a sight for women they admit that it is a sight for men. I congratulate them on the deduction. I suppose you quite agree with them, prince?”

“Tell us about the execution,” put in Adelaida.

“I would much rather not, just now,” said the prince, a little disturbed and frowning slightly.

“You don’t seem to want to tell us,” said Aglaya, with a mocking air.

“No,—the thing is, I was telling all about the execution a little while ago, and—”

“Whom did you tell about it?”

“The man-servant, while I was waiting to see the general.”

“Our man-servant?” exclaimed several voices at once.

“Yes, the one who waits in the entrance hall, a greyish, red-faced man—”

“The prince is clearly a democrat,” remarked Aglaya.

“Well, if you could tell Aleksey about it, surely you can tell us too.”

“I do so want to hear about it,” repeated Adelaida.

“Just now, I confess,” began the prince, with more animation, “when you asked me for a subject for a picture, I confess I had serious thoughts of giving you one. I thought of asking you to draw the face of a criminal, one minute before the fall of the guillotine, while the wretched man is still standing on the scaffold, preparatory to placing his neck on the block.”

“What, his face? only his face?” asked Adelaida. “That would be a strange subject indeed. And what sort of a picture would that make?”

“Oh, why not?” the prince insisted, with some warmth. “When I was in Basle I saw a picture very much in that style—I should like to tell you about it; I will some time or other; it struck me very forcibly.”

“Oh, you shall tell us about the Basle picture another time; now we must have all about the execution,” said Adelaida. “Tell us about that face as it appeared to your imagination—how should it be drawn?—just the face alone, do you mean?”

“It was just a minute before the execution,” began the prince, readily, carried away by the recollection and evidently forgetting everything else in a moment; “just at the

instant when he stepped off the ladder on to the scaffold. He happened to look in my direction: I saw his eyes and understood all, at once—but how am I to describe it? I do so wish you or somebody else could draw it, you, if possible. I thought at the time what a picture it would make. You must imagine all that went before, of course, all—all. He had lived in the prison for some time and had not expected that the execution would take place for at least a week yet—he had counted on all the formalities and so on taking time; but it so happened that his papers had been got ready quickly. At five o'clock in the morning he was asleep—it was October, and at five in the morning it was cold and dark. The governor of the prison comes in on tip-toe and touches the sleeping man's shoulder gently. He starts up. 'What is it?' he says. 'The execution is fixed for ten o'clock.' He was only just awake, and would not believe at first, but began to argue that his papers would not be out for a week, and so on. When he was wide awake and realized the truth, he became very silent and argued no more—so they say; but after a bit he said: 'It comes very hard on one so suddenly' and then he was silent again and said nothing.

"The three or four hours went by, of course, in necessary preparations—the priest, breakfast, (coffee, meat, and some wine they gave him; doesn't it seem ridiculous?) And yet I believe these people give them a good breakfast out of pure kindness of heart, and believe that they are doing a good action. Then he is dressed, and then begins the procession through the town to the scaffold. I think he, too, must feel that he has an age to live still while they cart him along. Probably he thought, on the way, 'Oh, I have a long, long time yet. Three streets of life yet! When we've passed this street there'll be that other one; and then that one where the baker's shop is on the right; and when shall we get there? It's ages, ages!' Around him are crowds shouting, yelling—ten thousand faces, twenty thousand eyes. All this has to be endured, and especially the thought: 'Here are ten thousand men, and not one of them is going to be executed, and yet I am to die.' Well, all that is preparatory.

"At the scaffold there is a ladder, and just there he burst into tears—and this was a strong man, and a terribly wicked one, they say! There was a priest with him the whole time, talking; even in the cart as they drove along, he talked and talked. Probably the other heard nothing; he would begin to listen now and then, and at the third word or so he had forgotten all about it.

"At last he began to mount the steps; his legs were tied, so that he had to take very small steps. The priest, who seemed to be a wise man, had stopped talking now, and only held the cross for the wretched fellow to kiss. At the foot of the ladder he had been pale enough; but when he set foot on the scaffold at the top, his face suddenly became the colour of paper, positively like white notepaper. His legs must have

become suddenly feeble and helpless, and he felt a choking in his throat—you know the sudden feeling one has in moments of terrible fear, when one does not lose one's wits, but is absolutely powerless to move? If some dreadful thing were suddenly to happen; if a house were just about to fall on one;—don't you know how one would long to sit down and shut one's eyes and wait, and wait? Well, when this terrible feeling came over him, the priest quickly pressed the cross to his lips, without a word—a little silver cross it was—and he kept on pressing it to the man's lips every second. And whenever the cross touched his lips, the eyes would open for a moment, and the legs moved once, and he kissed the cross greedily, hurriedly—just as though he were anxious to catch hold of something in case of its being useful to him afterwards, though he could hardly have had any connected religious thoughts at the time. And so up to the very block.

“How strange that criminals seldom swoon at such a moment! On the contrary, the brain is especially active, and works incessantly—probably hard, hard, hard—like an engine at full pressure. I imagine that various thoughts must beat loud and fast through his head—all unfinished ones, and strange, funny thoughts, very likely!—like this, for instance: ‘That man is looking at me, and he has a wart on his forehead! and the executioner has burst one of his buttons, and the lowest one is all rusty!’ And meanwhile he notices and remembers everything. There is one point that cannot be forgotten, round which everything else dances and turns about; and because of this point he cannot faint, and this lasts until the very final quarter of a second, when the wretched neck is on the block and the victim listens and waits and *knows*—that's the point, he *knows* that he is just *now* about to die, and listens for the rasp of the iron over his head. If I lay there, I should certainly listen for that grating sound, and hear it, too! There would probably be but the tenth part of an instant left to hear it in, but one would certainly hear it. And imagine, some people declare that when the head flies off it is *conscious* of having flown off! Just imagine what a thing to realize! Fancy if consciousness were to last for even five seconds!

“Draw the scaffold so that only the top step of the ladder comes in clearly. The criminal must be just stepping on to it, his face as white as note-paper. The priest is holding the cross to his blue lips, and the criminal kisses it, and knows and sees and understands everything. The cross and the head—there's your picture; the priest and the executioner, with his two assistants, and a few heads and eyes below. Those might come in as subordinate accessories—a sort of mist. There's a picture for you.” The prince paused, and looked around.

“Certainly that isn't much like quietism,” murmured Alexandra, half to herself.

“Now tell us about your love affairs,” said Adelaida, after a moment’s pause.

The prince gazed at her in amazement.

“You know,” Adelaida continued, “you owe us a description of the Basle picture; but first I wish to hear how you fell in love. Don’t deny the fact, for you did, of course. Besides, you stop philosophizing when you are telling about anything.”

“Why are you ashamed of your stories the moment after you have told them?” asked Aglaya, suddenly.

“How silly you are!” said Mrs. Epanchin, looking indignantly towards the last speaker.

“Yes, that wasn’t a clever remark,” said Alexandra.

“Don’t listen to her, prince,” said Mrs. Epanchin; “she says that sort of thing out of mischief. Don’t think anything of their nonsense, it means nothing. They love to chaff, but they like you. I can see it in their faces—I know their faces.”

“I know their faces, too,” said the prince, with a peculiar stress on the words.

“How so?” asked Adelaida, with curiosity.

“What do *you* know about our faces?” exclaimed the other two, in chorus.

But the prince was silent and serious. All awaited his reply.

“I’ll tell you afterwards,” he said quietly.

“Ah, you want to arouse our curiosity!” said Aglaya. “And how terribly solemn you are about it!”

“Very well,” interrupted Adelaida, “then if you can read faces so well, you *must* have been in love. Come now; I’ve guessed—let’s have the secret!”

“I have not been in love,” said the prince, as quietly and seriously as before. “I have been happy in another way.”

“How, how?”

“Well, I’ll tell you,” said the prince, apparently in a deep reverie.

VI.

“Here you all are,” began the prince, “settling yourselves down to listen to me with so much curiosity, that if I do not satisfy you you will probably be angry with me. No, no! I’m only joking!” he added, hastily, with a smile.

“Well, then—they were all children there, and I was always among children and only with children. They were the children of the village in which I lived, and they went to the school there—all of them. I did not teach them, oh no; there was a master for that, one Jules Thibaut. I may have taught them some things, but I was among them just as an outsider, and I passed all four years of my life there among them. I wished for nothing better; I used to tell them everything and hid nothing from them. Their fathers and relations were very angry with me, because the children could do nothing without me at last, and used to throng after me at all times. The schoolmaster was my greatest enemy in the end! I had many enemies, and all because of the children. Even Schneider reproached me. What were they afraid of? One can tell a child everything, anything. I have often been struck by the fact that parents know their children so little. They should not conceal so much from them. How well even little children understand that their parents conceal things from them, because they consider them too young to understand! Children are capable of giving advice in the most important matters. How can one deceive these dear little birds, when they look at one so sweetly and confidingly? I call them birds because there is nothing in the world better than birds!

“However, most of the people were angry with me about one and the same thing; but Thibaut simply was jealous of me. At first he had wagged his head and wondered how it was that the children understood what I told them so well, and could not learn from him; and he laughed like anything when I replied that neither he nor I could teach them very much, but that *they* might teach us a good deal.

“How he could hate me and tell scandalous stories about me, living among children as he did, is what I cannot understand. Children soothe and heal the wounded heart. I remember there was one poor fellow at our professor’s who was being treated for madness, and you have no idea what those children did for him, eventually. I don’t think he was mad, but only terribly unhappy. But I’ll tell you all about him another day. Now I must get on with this story.

“The children did not love me at first; I was such a sickly, awkward kind of a fellow then—and I know I am ugly. Besides, I was a foreigner. The children used to laugh at me, at first; and they even went so far as to throw stones at me, when they saw me kiss Marie. I only kissed her once in my life—no, no, don’t laugh!” The prince hastened to suppress the smiles of his audience at this point. “It was not a matter of *love* at all! If only you knew what a miserable creature she was, you would have pitied her, just as I did. She belonged to our village. Her mother was an old, old woman, and they used to sell string and thread, and soap and tobacco, out of the window of their little house, and lived on the pittance they gained by this trade. The old woman was ill and very old, and could hardly move. Marie was her daughter, a girl of twenty, weak and thin and

consumptive; but still she did heavy work at the houses around, day by day. Well, one fine day a commercial traveller betrayed her and carried her off; and a week later he deserted her. She came home dirty, draggled, and shoeless; she had walked for a whole week without shoes; she had slept in the fields, and caught a terrible cold; her feet were swollen and sore, and her hands torn and scratched all over. She never had been pretty even before; but her eyes were quiet, innocent, kind eyes.

“She was very quiet always—and I remember once, when she had suddenly begun singing at her work, everyone said, ‘Marie tried to sing today!’ and she got so chaffed that she was silent for ever after. She had been treated kindly in the place before; but when she came back now—ill and shunned and miserable—not one of them all had the slightest sympathy for her. Cruel people! Oh, what hazy understandings they have on such matters! Her mother was the first to show the way. She received her wrathfully, unkindly, and with contempt. ‘You have disgraced me,’ she said. She was the first to cast her into ignominy; but when they all heard that Marie had returned to the village, they ran out to see her and crowded into the little cottage—old men, children, women, girls—such a hurrying, stamping, greedy crowd. Marie was lying on the floor at the old woman’s feet, hungry, torn, draggled, crying, miserable.

“When everyone crowded into the room she hid her face in her dishevelled hair and lay cowering on the floor. Everyone looked at her as though she were a piece of dirt off the road. The old men scolded and condemned, and the young ones laughed at her. The women condemned her too, and looked at her contemptuously, just as though she were some loathsome insect.

“Her mother allowed all this to go on, and nodded her head and encouraged them. The old woman was very ill at that time, and knew she was dying (she really did die a couple of months later), and though she felt the end approaching she never thought of forgiving her daughter, to the very day of her death. She would not even speak to her. She made her sleep on straw in a shed, and hardly gave her food enough to support life.

“Marie was very gentle to her mother, and nursed her, and did everything for her; but the old woman accepted all her services without a word and never showed her the slightest kindness. Marie bore all this; and I could see when I got to know her that she thought it quite right and fitting, considering herself the lowest and meanest of creatures.

“When the old woman took to her bed finally, the other old women in the village sat with her by turns, as the custom is there; and then Marie was quite driven out of the house. They gave her no food at all, and she could not get any work in the village; none

would employ her. The men seemed to consider her no longer a woman, they said such dreadful things to her. Sometimes on Sundays, if they were drunk enough, they used to throw her a penny or two, into the mud, and Marie would silently pick up the money. She had begun to spit blood at that time.

“At last her rags became so tattered and torn that she was ashamed of appearing in the village any longer. The children used to pelt her with mud; so she begged to be taken on as assistant cowherd, but the cowherd would not have her. Then she took to helping him without leave; and he saw how valuable her assistance was to him, and did not drive her away again; on the contrary, he occasionally gave her the remnants of his dinner, bread and cheese. He considered that he was being very kind. When the mother died, the village parson was not ashamed to hold Marie up to public derision and shame. Marie was standing at the coffin’s head, in all her rags, crying.

“A crowd of people had collected to see how she would cry. The parson, a young fellow ambitious of becoming a great preacher, began his sermon and pointed to Marie. ‘There,’ he said, ‘there is the cause of the death of this venerable woman’—(which was a lie, because she had been ill for at least two years)—‘there she stands before you, and dares not lift her eyes from the ground, because she knows that the finger of God is upon her. Look at her tatters and rags—the badge of those who lose their virtue. Who is she? her daughter!’ and so on to the end.

“And just fancy, this infamy pleased them, all of them, nearly. Only the children had altered—for then they were all on my side and had learned to love Marie.

“This is how it was: I had wished to do something for Marie; I longed to give her some money, but I never had a farthing while I was there. But I had a little diamond pin, and this I sold to a travelling pedlar; he gave me eight francs for it—it was worth at least forty.

“I long sought to meet Marie alone; and at last I did meet her, on the hillside beyond the village. I gave her the eight francs and asked her to take care of the money because I could get no more; and then I kissed her and said that she was not to suppose I kissed her with any evil motives or because I was in love with her, for that I did so solely out of pity for her, and because from the first I had not accounted her as guilty so much as unfortunate. I longed to console and encourage her somehow, and to assure her that she was not the low, base thing which she and others strove to make out; but I don’t think she understood me. She stood before me, dreadfully ashamed of herself, and with downcast eyes; and when I had finished she kissed my hand. I would have kissed hers, but she drew it away. Just at this moment the whole troop of children saw us. (I found out afterwards that they had long kept a watch upon

me.) They all began whistling and clapping their hands, and laughing at us. Marie ran away at once; and when I tried to talk to them, they threw stones at me. All the village heard of it the same day, and Marie's position became worse than ever. The children would not let her pass now in the streets, but annoyed her and threw dirt at her more than before. They used to run after her—she racing away with her poor feeble lungs panting and gasping, and they pelting her and shouting abuse at her.

“Once I had to interfere by force; and after that I took to speaking to them every day and whenever I could. Occasionally they stopped and listened; but they teased Marie all the same.

“I told them how unhappy Marie was, and after a while they stopped their abuse of her, and let her go by silently. Little by little we got into the way of conversing together, the children and I. I concealed nothing from them, I told them all. They listened very attentively and soon began to be sorry for Marie. At last some of them took to saying ‘Good-morning’ to her, kindly, when they met her. It is the custom there to salute anyone you meet with ‘Good-morning’ whether acquainted or not. I can imagine how astonished Marie was at these first greetings from the children.

“Once two little girls got hold of some food and took it to her, and came back and told me. They said she had burst into tears, and that they loved her very much now. Very soon after that they all became fond of Marie, and at the same time they began to develop the greatest affection for myself. They often came to me and begged me to tell them stories. I think I must have told stories well, for they did so love to hear them. At last I took to reading up interesting things on purpose to pass them on to the little ones, and this went on for all the rest of my time there, three years. Later, when everyone—even Schneider—was angry with me for hiding nothing from the children, I pointed out how foolish it was, for they always knew things, only they learnt them in a way that soiled their minds but not so from me. One has only to remember one's own childhood to admit the truth of this. But nobody was convinced... It was two weeks before her mother died that I had kissed Marie; and when the clergyman preached that sermon the children were all on my side.

“When I told them what a shame it was of the parson to talk as he had done, and explained my reason, they were so angry that some of them went and broke his windows with stones. Of course I stopped them, for that was not right, but all the village heard of it, and how I caught it for spoiling the children! Everyone discovered now that the little ones had taken to being fond of Marie, and their parents were terribly alarmed; but Marie was so happy. The children were forbidden to meet her; but they used to run out of the village to the herd and take her food and things; and

sometimes just ran off there and kissed her, and said, '*Je vous aime, Marie!*' and then trotted back again. They imagined that I was in love with Marie, and this was the only point on which I did not undeceive them, for they got such enjoyment out of it. And what delicacy and tenderness they showed!

“In the evening I used to walk to the waterfall. There was a spot there which was quite closed in and hidden from view by large trees; and to this spot the children used to come to me. They could not bear that their dear Leon should love a poor girl without shoes to her feet and dressed all in rags and tatters. So, would you believe it, they actually clubbed together, somehow, and bought her shoes and stockings, and some linen, and even a dress! I can't understand how they managed it, but they did it, all together. When I asked them about it they only laughed and shouted, and the little girls clapped their hands and kissed me. I sometimes went to see Marie secretly, too. She had become very ill, and could hardly walk. She still went with the herd, but could not help the herdsman any longer. She used to sit on a stone near, and wait there almost motionless all day, till the herd went home. Her consumption was so advanced, and she was so weak, that she used to sit with closed eyes, breathing heavily. Her face was as thin as a skeleton's, and sweat used to stand on her white brow in large drops. I always found her sitting just like that. I used to come up quietly to look at her; but Marie would hear me, open her eyes, and tremble violently as she kissed my hands. I did not take my hand away because it made her happy to have it, and so she would sit and cry quietly. Sometimes she tried to speak; but it was very difficult to understand her. She was almost like a madwoman, with excitement and ecstasy, whenever I came. Occasionally the children came with me; when they did so, they would stand some way off and keep guard over us, so as to tell me if anybody came near. This was a great pleasure to them.

“When we left her, Marie used to relapse at once into her old condition, and sit with closed eyes and motionless limbs. One day she could not go out at all, and remained at home all alone in the empty hut; but the children very soon became aware of the fact, and nearly all of them visited her that day as she lay alone and helpless in her miserable bed.

“For two days the children looked after her, and then, when the village people got to know that Marie was really dying, some of the old women came and took it in turns to sit by her and look after her a bit. I think they began to be a little sorry for her in the village at last; at all events they did not interfere with the children any more, on her account.

“Marie lay in a state of uncomfortable delirium the whole while; she coughed dreadfully. The old women would not let the children stay in the room; but they all collected outside the window each morning, if only for a moment, and shouted ‘*Bon jour, notre bonne Marie!*’ and Marie no sooner caught sight of, or heard them, and she became quite animated at once, and, in spite of the old women, would try to sit up and nod her head and smile at them, and thank them. The little ones used to bring her nice things and sweets to eat, but she could hardly touch anything. Thanks to them, I assure you, the girl died almost perfectly happy. She almost forgot her misery, and seemed to accept their love as a sort of symbol of pardon for her offence, though she never ceased to consider herself a dreadful sinner. They used to flutter at her window just like little birds, calling out: ‘*Nous t’aimons, Marie!*’

“She died very soon; I had thought she would live much longer. The day before her death I went to see her for the last time, just before sunset. I think she recognized me, for she pressed my hand.

“Next morning they came and told me that Marie was dead. The children could not be restrained now; they went and covered her coffin with flowers, and put a wreath of lovely blossoms on her head. The pastor did not throw any more shameful words at the poor dead woman; but there were very few people at the funeral. However, when it came to carrying the coffin, all the children rushed up, to carry it themselves. Of course they could not do it alone, but they insisted on helping, and walked alongside and behind, crying.

“They have planted roses all round her grave, and every year they look after the flowers and make Marie’s resting-place as beautiful as they can. I was in ill odour after all this with the parents of the children, and especially with the parson and schoolmaster. Schneider was obliged to promise that I should not meet them and talk to them; but we conversed from a distance by signs, and they used to write me sweet little notes. Afterwards I came closer than ever to those little souls, but even then it was very dear to me, to have them so fond of me.

“Schneider said that I did the children great harm by my pernicious ‘system’; what nonsense that was! And what did he mean by my system? He said afterwards that he believed I was a child myself—just before I came away. ‘You have the form and face of an adult’ he said, ‘but as regards soul, and character, and perhaps even intelligence, you are a child in the completest sense of the word, and always will be, if you live to be sixty.’ I laughed very much, for of course that is nonsense. But it is a fact that I do not care to be among grown-up people and much prefer the society of children. However kind people may be to me, I never feel quite at home with them, and am always glad to

get back to my little companions. Now my companions have always been children, not because I was a child myself once, but because young things attract me. On one of the first days of my stay in Switzerland, I was strolling about alone and miserable, when I came upon the children rushing noisily out of school, with their slates and bags, and books, their games, their laughter and shouts—and my soul went out to them. I stopped and laughed happily as I watched their little feet moving so quickly. Girls and boys, laughing and crying; for as they went home many of them found time to fight and make peace, to weep and play. I forgot my troubles in looking at them. And then, all those three years, I tried to understand why men should be for ever tormenting themselves. I lived the life of a child there, and thought I should never leave the little village; indeed, I was far from thinking that I should ever return to Russia. But at last I recognized the fact that Schneider could not keep me any longer. And then something so important happened, that Schneider himself urged me to depart. I am going to see now if I can get good advice about it. Perhaps my lot in life will be changed; but that is not the principal thing. The principal thing is the entire change that has already come over me. I left many things behind me—too many. They have gone. On the journey I said to myself, ‘I am going into the world of men. I don’t know much, perhaps, but a new life has begun for me.’ I made up my mind to be honest, and steadfast in accomplishing my task. Perhaps I shall meet with troubles and many disappointments, but I have made up my mind to be polite and sincere to everyone; more cannot be asked of me. People may consider me a child if they like. I am often called an idiot, and at one time I certainly was so ill that I was nearly as bad as an idiot; but I am not an idiot now. How can I possibly be so when I know myself that I am considered one?

“When I received a letter from those dear little souls, while passing through Berlin, I only then realized how much I loved them. It was very, very painful, getting that first little letter. How melancholy they had been when they saw me off! For a month before, they had been talking of my departure and sorrowing over it; and at the waterfall, of an evening, when we parted for the night, they would hug me so tight and kiss me so warmly, far more so than before. And every now and then they would turn up one by one when I was alone, just to give me a kiss and a hug, to show their love for me. The whole flock went with me to the station, which was about a mile from the village, and every now and then one of them would stop to throw his arms round me, and all the little girls had tears in their voices, though they tried hard not to cry. As the train steamed out of the station, I saw them all standing on the platform waving to me and crying ‘Hurrah!’ till they were lost in the distance.

“I assure you, when I came in here just now and saw your kind faces (I can read faces well) my heart felt light for the first time since that moment of parting. I think I must be one of those who are born to be in luck, for one does not often meet with people whom one feels he can love from the first sight of their faces; and yet, no sooner do I step out of the railway carriage than I happen upon you!

“I know it is more or less a shamefaced thing to speak of one’s feelings before others; and yet here am I talking like this to you, and am not a bit ashamed or shy. I am an unsociable sort of fellow and shall very likely not come to see you again for some time; but don’t think the worse of me for that. It is not that I do not value your society; and you must never suppose that I have taken offence at anything.

“You asked me about your faces, and what I could read in them; I will tell you with the greatest pleasure. You, Adelaida Ivanovna, have a very happy face; it is the most sympathetic of the three. Not to speak of your natural beauty, one can look at your face and say to one’s self, ‘She has the face of a kind sister.’ You are simple and merry, but you can see into another’s heart very quickly. That’s what I read in your face.

“You too, Alexandra Ivanovna, have a very lovely face; but I think you may have some secret sorrow. Your heart is undoubtedly a kind, good one, but you are not merry. There is a certain suspicion of ‘shadow’ in your face, like in that of Holbein’s Madonna in Dresden. So much for your face. Have I guessed right?

“As for your face, Lizabetha Prokofievna, I not only think, but am perfectly *sure*, that you are an absolute child—in all, in all, mind, both good and bad—and in spite of your years. Don’t be angry with me for saying so; you know what my feelings for children are. And do not suppose that I am so candid out of pure simplicity of soul. Oh dear no, it is by no means the case! Perhaps I have my own very profound object in view.”