VII.

When the prince ceased speaking all were gazing merrily at him—even Aglaya; but Lizabetha Prokofievna looked the jolliest of all.

“Well!” she cried, “we *have* ‘put him through his paces,’ with a vengeance! My dears, you imagined, I believe, that you were about to patronize this young gentleman, like some poor *protégé* picked up somewhere, and taken under your magnificent protection. What fools we were, and what a specially big fool is your father! Well done, prince! I assure you the general actually asked me to put you through your paces, and examine you. As to what you said about my face, you are absolutely correct in your judgment. I am a child, and know it. I knew it long before you said so; you have expressed my own thoughts. I think your nature and mine must be extremely alike, and I am very glad of it. We are like two drops of water, only you are a man and I a woman, and I’ve not been to Switzerland, and that is all the difference between us.”

“Don’t be in a hurry, mother; the prince says that he has some motive behind his simplicity,” cried Aglaya.

“Yes, yes, so he does,” laughed the others.

“Oh, don’t you begin bantering him,” said mamma. “He is probably a good deal cleverer than all three of you girls put together. We shall see. Only you haven’t told us anything about Aglaya yet, prince; and Aglaya and I are both waiting to hear.”

“I cannot say anything at present. I’ll tell you afterwards.”

“Why? Her face is clear enough, isn’t it?”

“Oh yes, of course. You are very beautiful, Aglaya Ivanovna, so beautiful that one is afraid to look at you.”

“Is that all? What about her character?” persisted Mrs. Epanchin.

“It is difficult to judge when such beauty is concerned. I have not prepared my judgment. Beauty is a riddle.”

“That means that you have set Aglaya a riddle!” said Adelaida. “Guess it, Aglaya! But she’s pretty, prince, isn’t she?”

“Most wonderfully so,” said the latter, warmly, gazing at Aglaya with admiration. “Almost as lovely as Nastasia Philipovna, but quite a different type.”

All present exchanged looks of surprise.

“As lovely as *who?*” said Mrs. Epanchin. “As *Nastasia Philipovna?* Where have you seen Nastasia Philipovna? What Nastasia Philipovna?”

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch showed the general her portrait just now.”

“How so? Did he bring the portrait for my husband?”

“Only to show it. Nastasia Philipovna gave it to Gavrila Ardalionovitch today, and the latter brought it here to show to the general.”

“I must see it!” cried Mrs. Epanchin. “Where is the portrait? If she gave it to him, he must have it; and he is still in the study. He never leaves before four o’clock on Wednesdays. Send for Gavrila Ardalionovitch at once. No, I don’t long to see *him* so much. Look here, dear prince, *be* so kind, will you? Just step to the study and fetch this portrait! Say we want to look at it. Please do this for me, will you?”

“He is a nice fellow, but a little too simple,” said Adelaida, as the prince left the room.

“He is, indeed,” said Alexandra; “almost laughably so at times.”

Neither one nor the other seemed to give expression to her full thoughts.

“He got out of it very neatly about our faces, though,” said Aglaya. “He flattered us all round, even mamma.”

“Nonsense!” cried the latter. “He did not flatter me. It was I who found his appreciation flattering. I think you are a great deal more foolish than he is. He is simple, of course, but also very knowing. Just like myself.”

“How stupid of me to speak of the portrait,” thought the prince as he entered the study, with a feeling of guilt at his heart, “and yet, perhaps I was right after all.” He had an idea, unformed as yet, but a strange idea.

Gavrila Ardalionovitch was still sitting in the study, buried in a mass of papers. He looked as though he did not take his salary from the public company, whose servant he was, for a sinecure.

He grew very wroth and confused when the prince asked for the portrait, and explained how it came about that he had spoken of it.

“Oh, curse it all,” he said; “what on earth must you go blabbing for? You know nothing about the thing, and yet—idiot!” he added, muttering the last word to himself in irrepressible rage.

“I am very sorry; I was not thinking at the time. I merely said that Aglaya was almost as beautiful as Nastasia Philipovna.”

Gania asked for further details; and the prince once more repeated the conversation. Gania looked at him with ironical contempt the while.

“Nastasia Philipovna,” he began, and there paused; he was clearly much agitated and annoyed. The prince reminded him of the portrait.

“Listen, prince,” said Gania, as though an idea had just struck him, “I wish to ask you a great favour, and yet I really don’t know—”

He paused again, he was trying to make up his mind to something, and was turning the matter over. The prince waited quietly. Once more Gania fixed him with intent and questioning eyes.

“Prince,” he began again, “they are rather angry with me, in there, owing to a circumstance which I need not explain, so that I do not care to go in at present without an invitation. I particularly wish to speak to Aglaya, but I have written a few words in case I shall not have the chance of seeing her” (here the prince observed a small note in his hand), “and I do not know how to get my communication to her. Don’t you think you could undertake to give it to her at once, but only to her, mind, and so that no one else should see you give it? It isn’t much of a secret, but still—Well, will you do it?”

“I don’t quite like it,” replied the prince.

“Oh, but it is absolutely necessary for me,” Gania entreated. “Believe me, if it were not so, I would not ask you; how else am I to get it to her? It is most important, dreadfully important!”

Gania was evidently much alarmed at the idea that the prince would not consent to take his note, and he looked at him now with an expression of absolute entreaty.

“Well, I will take it then.”

“But mind, nobody is to see!” cried the delighted Gania “And of course I may rely on your word of honour, eh?”

“I won’t show it to anyone,” said the prince.

“The letter is not sealed—” continued Gania, and paused in confusion.

“Oh, I won’t read it,” said the prince, quite simply.

He took up the portrait, and went out of the room.

Gania, left alone, clutched his head with his hands.

“One word from her,” he said, “one word from her, and I may yet be free.”

He could not settle himself to his papers again, for agitation and excitement, but began walking up and down the room from corner to corner.

The prince walked along, musing. He did not like his commission, and disliked the idea of Gania sending a note to Aglaya at all; but when he was two rooms distant from the drawing-room, where they all were, he stopped as though recalling something; went to the window, nearer the light, and began to examine the portrait in his hand.

He longed to solve the mystery of something in the face of Nastasia Philipovna, something which had struck him as he looked at the portrait for the first time; the impression had not left him. It was partly the fact of her marvellous beauty that struck him, and partly something else. There was a suggestion of immense pride and disdain in the face almost of hatred, and at the same time something confiding and very full of simplicity. The contrast aroused a deep sympathy in his heart as he looked at the lovely face. The blinding loveliness of it was almost intolerable, this pale thin face with its flaming eyes; it was a strange beauty.

The prince gazed at it for a minute or two, then glanced around him, and hurriedly raised the portrait to his lips. When, a minute after, he reached the drawing-room door, his face was quite composed. But just as he reached the door he met Aglaya coming out alone.

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch begged me to give you this,” he said, handing her the note.

Aglaya stopped, took the letter, and gazed strangely into the prince’s eyes. There was no confusion in her face; a little surprise, perhaps, but that was all. By her look she seemed merely to challenge the prince to an explanation as to how he and Gania happened to be connected in this matter. But her expression was perfectly cool and quiet, and even condescending.

So they stood for a moment or two, confronting one another. At length a faint smile passed over her face, and she passed by him without a word.

Mrs. Epanchin examined the portrait of Nastasia Philipovna for some little while, holding it critically at arm’s length.

“Yes, she is pretty,” she said at last, “even very pretty. I have seen her twice, but only at a distance. So you admire this kind of beauty, do you?” she asked the prince, suddenly.

“Yes, I do—this kind.”

“Do you mean especially this kind?”

“Yes, especially this kind.”

“Why?”

“There is much suffering in this face,” murmured the prince, more as though talking to himself than answering the question.

“I think you are wandering a little, prince,” Mrs. Epanchin decided, after a lengthened survey of his face; and she tossed the portrait on to the table, haughtily.

Alexandra took it, and Adelaida came up, and both the girls examined the photograph. Just then Aglaya entered the room.

“What a power!” cried Adelaida suddenly, as she earnestly examined the portrait over her sister’s shoulder.

“Whom? What power?” asked her mother, crossly.

“Such beauty is real power,” said Adelaida. “With such beauty as that one might overthrow the world.” She returned to her easel thoughtfully.

Aglaya merely glanced at the portrait—frowned, and put out her underlip; then went and sat down on the sofa with folded hands. Mrs. Epanchin rang the bell.

“Ask Gavrila Ardalionovitch to step this way,” said she to the man who answered.

“Mamma!” cried Alexandra, significantly.

“I shall just say two words to him, that’s all,” said her mother, silencing all objection by her manner; she was evidently seriously put out. “You see, prince, it is all secrets with us, just now—all secrets. It seems to be the etiquette of the house, for some reason or other. Stupid nonsense, and in a matter which ought to be approached with all candour and open-heartedness. There is a marriage being talked of, and I don’t like this marriage—”

“Mamma, what are you saying?” said Alexandra again, hurriedly.

“Well, what, my dear girl? As if you can possibly like it yourself? The heart is the great thing, and the rest is all rubbish—though one must have sense as well. Perhaps sense is really the great thing. Don’t smile like that, Aglaya. I don’t contradict myself. A fool with a heart and no brains is just as unhappy as a fool with brains and no heart. I am one and you are the other, and therefore both of us suffer, both of us are unhappy.”

“Why are you so unhappy, mother?” asked Adelaida, who alone of all the company seemed to have preserved her good temper and spirits up to now.

“In the first place, because of my carefully brought-up daughters,” said Mrs. Epanchin, cuttingly; “and as that is the best reason I can give you we need not bother about any other at present. Enough of words, now! We shall see how both of you (I don’t count Aglaya) will manage your business, and whether you, most revered Alexandra Ivanovna, will be happy with your fine mate.”

“Ah!” she added, as Gania suddenly entered the room, “here’s another marrying subject. How do you do?” she continued, in response to Gania’s bow; but she did not invite him to sit down. “You are going to be married?”

“Married? how—what marriage?” murmured Gania, overwhelmed with confusion.

“Are you about to take a wife? I ask,—if you prefer that expression.”

“No, no I—I—no!” said Gania, bringing out his lie with a tell-tale blush of shame. He glanced keenly at Aglaya, who was sitting some way off, and dropped his eyes immediately.

Aglaya gazed coldly, intently, and composedly at him, without taking her eyes off his face, and watched his confusion.

“No? You say no, do you?” continued the pitiless Mrs. General. “Very well, I shall remember that you told me this Wednesday morning, in answer to my question, that you are not going to be married. What day is it, Wednesday, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I think so!” said Adelaida.

“You never know the day of the week; what’s the day of the month?”

“Twenty-seventh!” said Gania.

“Twenty-seventh; very well. Good-bye now; you have a good deal to do, I’m sure, and I must dress and go out. Take your portrait. Give my respects to your unfortunate mother, Nina Alexandrovna. *Au revoir*, dear prince, come in and see us often, do; and I shall tell old Princess Bielokonski about you. I shall go and see her on purpose. And listen, my dear boy, I feel sure that God has sent you to Petersburg from Switzerland on purpose for me. Maybe you will have other things to do, besides, but you are sent chiefly for my sake, I feel sure of it. God sent you to me! *Au revoir!* Alexandra, come with me, my dear.”

Mrs. Epanchin left the room.

Gania—confused, annoyed, furious—took up his portrait, and turned to the prince with a nasty smile on his face.

“Prince,” he said, “I am just going home. If you have not changed your mind as to living with us, perhaps you would like to come with me. You don’t know the address, I believe?”

“Wait a minute, prince,” said Aglaya, suddenly rising from her seat, “do write something in my album first, will you? Father says you are a most talented caligraphist; I’ll bring you my book in a minute.” She left the room.

“Well, *au revoir*, prince,” said Adelaida, “I must be going too.” She pressed the prince’s hand warmly, and gave him a friendly smile as she left the room. She did not so much as look at Gania.

“This is your doing, prince,” said Gania, turning on the latter so soon as the others were all out of the room. “This is your doing, sir! *You* have been telling them that I am going to be married!” He said this in a hurried whisper, his eyes flashing with rage and his face ablaze. “You shameless tattler!”

“I assure you, you are under a delusion,” said the prince, calmly and politely. “I did not even know that you were to be married.”

“You heard me talking about it, the general and me. You heard me say that everything was to be settled today at Nastasia Philipovna’s, and you went and blurted it out here. You lie if you deny it. Who else could have told them? Devil take it, sir, who could have told them except yourself? Didn’t the old woman as good as hint as much to me?”

“If she hinted to you who told her you must know best, of course; but I never said a word about it.”

“Did you give my note? Is there an answer?” interrupted Gania, impatiently.

But at this moment Aglaya came back, and the prince had no time to reply.

“There, prince,” said she, “there’s my album. Now choose a page and write me something, will you? There’s a pen, a new one; do you mind a steel one? I have heard that you caligraphists don’t like steel pens.”

Conversing with the prince, Aglaya did not even seem to notice that Gania was in the room. But while the prince was getting his pen ready, finding a page, and making his preparations to write, Gania came up to the fireplace where Aglaya was standing, to the right of the prince, and in trembling, broken accents said, almost in her ear:

“One word, just one word from you, and I’m saved.”

The prince turned sharply round and looked at both of them. Gania’s face was full of real despair; he seemed to have said the words almost unconsciously and on the impulse of the moment.

Aglaya gazed at him for some seconds with precisely the same composure and calm astonishment as she had shown a little while before, when the prince handed her the note, and it appeared that this calm surprise and seemingly absolute incomprehension of what was said to her, were more terribly overwhelming to Gania than even the most plainly expressed disdain would have been.

“What shall I write?” asked the prince.

“I’ll dictate to you,” said Aglaya, coming up to the table. “Now then, are you ready? Write, ‘I never condescend to bargain!’ Now put your name and the date. Let me see it.”

The prince handed her the album.

“Capital! How beautifully you have written it! Thanks so much. *Au revoir*, prince. Wait a minute,” she added, “I want to give you something for a keepsake. Come with me this way, will you?”

The prince followed her. Arrived at the dining-room, she stopped.

“Read this,” she said, handing him Gania’s note.

The prince took it from her hand, but gazed at her in bewilderment.

“Oh! I *know* you haven’t read it, and that you could never be that man’s accomplice. Read it, I wish you to read it.”

The letter had evidently been written in a hurry:

“My fate is to be decided today” (it ran), “you know how. This day I must give my word irrevocably. I have no right to ask your help, and I dare not allow myself to indulge in any hopes; but once you said just one word, and that word lighted up the night of my life, and became the beacon of my days. Say one more such word, and save me from utter ruin. Only tell me, ‘break off the whole thing!’ and I will do so this very day. Oh! what can it cost you to say just this one word? In doing so you will but be giving me a sign of your sympathy for me, and of your pity; only this, only this; nothing more, *nothing*. I dare not indulge in any hope, because I am unworthy of it. But if you say but this word, I will take up my cross again with joy, and return once more to my

battle with poverty. I shall meet the storm and be glad of it; I shall rise up with renewed strength.

"Send me back then this one word of sympathy, only sympathy, I swear to you; and oh! do not be angry with the audacity of despair, with the drowning man who has dared to make this last effort to save himself from perishing beneath the waters.

"G.L."

"This man assures me," said Aglaya, scornfully, when the prince had finished reading the letter, "that the words 'break off everything' do not commit me to anything whatever; and himself gives me a written guarantee to that effect, in this letter. Observe how ingenuously he underlines certain words, and how crudely he glosses over his hidden thoughts. He must know that if he 'broke off everything,' *first*, by himself, and without telling me a word about it or having the slightest hope on my account, that in that case I should perhaps be able to change my opinion of him, and even accept his—friendship. He must know that, but his soul is such a wretched thing. He knows it and cannot make up his mind; he knows it and yet asks for guarantees. He cannot bring himself to *trust*, he wants me to give him hopes of myself before he lets go of his hundred thousand roubles. As to the 'former word' which he declares 'lighted up the night of his life,' he is simply an impudent liar; I merely pitied him once. But he is audacious and shameless. He immediately began to hope, at that very moment. I saw it. He has tried to catch me ever since; he is still fishing for me. Well, enough of this. Take the letter and give it back to him, as soon as you have left our house; not before, of course."

"And what shall I tell him by way of answer?"

"Nothing—of course! That's the best answer. Is it the case that you are going to live in his house?"

"Yes, your father kindly recommended me to him."

"Then look out for him, I warn you! He won't forgive you easily, for taking back the letter."

Aglaya pressed the prince's hand and left the room. Her face was serious and frowning; she did not even smile as she nodded good-bye to him at the door.

"I'll just get my parcel and we'll go," said the prince to Gania, as he re-entered the drawing-room. Gania stamped his foot with impatience. His face looked dark and gloomy with rage.

At last they left the house behind them, the prince carrying his bundle.

“The answer—quick—the answer!” said Gania, the instant they were outside. “What did she say? Did you give the letter?” The prince silently held out the note. Gania was struck motionless with amazement.

“How, what? my letter?” he cried. “He never delivered it! I might have guessed it, oh! curse him! Of course she did not understand what I meant, naturally! Why—why—*why* didn’t you give her the note, you—”

“Excuse me; I was able to deliver it almost immediately after receiving your commission, and I gave it, too, just as you asked me to. It has come into my hands now because Aglaya Ivanovna has just returned it to me.”

“How? When?”

“As soon as I finished writing in her album for her, and when she asked me to come out of the room with her (you heard?), we went into the dining-room, and she gave me your letter to read, and then told me to return it.”

“To *read?*” cried Gania, almost at the top of his voice; “to *read*, and you read it?”

And again he stood like a log in the middle of the pavement; so amazed that his mouth remained open after the last word had left it.

“Yes, I have just read it.”

“And she gave it you to read herself—*herself?*”

“Yes, herself; and you may believe me when I tell you that I would not have read it for anything without her permission.”

Gania was silent for a minute or two, as though thinking out some problem. Suddenly he cried:

“It’s impossible, she cannot have given it to you to read! You are lying. You read it yourself!”

“I am telling you the truth,” said the prince in his former composed tone of voice; “and believe me, I am extremely sorry that the circumstance should have made such an unpleasant impression upon you!”

“But, you wretched man, at least she must have said something? There must be *some* answer from her!”

“Yes, of course, she did say something!”

“Out with it then, damn it! Out with it at once!” and Gania stamped his foot twice on the pavement.

“As soon as I had finished reading it, she told me that you were fishing for her; that you wished to compromise her so far as to receive some hopes from her, trusting to which hopes you might break with the prospect of receiving a hundred thousand roubles. She said that if you had done this without bargaining with her, if you had broken with the money prospects without trying to force a guarantee out of her first, she might have been your friend. That’s all, I think. Oh no, when I asked her what I was to say, as I took the letter, she replied that ‘no answer is the best answer.’ I think that was it. Forgive me if I do not use her exact expressions. I tell you the sense as I understood it myself.”

Ungovernable rage and madness took entire possession of Gania, and his fury burst out without the least attempt at restraint.

“Oh! that’s it, is it!” he yelled. “She throws my letters out of the window, does she! Oh! and she does not condescend to bargain, while I *do*, eh? We shall see, we shall see! I shall pay her out for this.”

He twisted himself about with rage, and grew paler and paler; he shook his fist. So the pair walked along a few steps. Gania did not stand on ceremony with the prince; he behaved just as though he were alone in his room. He clearly counted the latter as a nonentity. But suddenly he seemed to have an idea, and recollected himself.

“But how was it?” he asked, “how was it that you (idiot that you are),” he added to himself, “were so very confidential a couple of hours after your first meeting with these people? How was that, eh?”

Up to this moment jealousy had not been one of his torments; now it suddenly gnawed at his heart.

“That is a thing I cannot undertake to explain,” replied the prince. Gania looked at him with angry contempt.

“Oh! I suppose the present she wished to make to you, when she took you into the dining-room, was her confidence, eh?”

“I suppose that was it; I cannot explain it otherwise.”

“But why, *why?* Devil take it, what did you do in there? Why did they fancy you? Look here, can’t you remember exactly what you said to them, from the very beginning? Can’t you remember?”

“Oh, we talked of a great many things. When first I went in we began to speak of Switzerland.”

“Oh, the devil take Switzerland!”

“Then about executions.”

“Executions?”

“Yes—at least about one. Then I told the whole three years’ story of my life, and the history of a poor peasant girl—”

“Oh, damn the peasant girl! go on, go on!” said Gania, impatiently.

“Then how Schneider told me about my childish nature, and—”

“Oh, *curse* Schneider and his dirty opinions! Go on.”

“Then I began to talk about faces, at least about the *expressions* of faces, and said that Aglaya Ivanovna was nearly as lovely as Nastasia Philipovna. It was then I blurted out about the portrait—”

“But you didn’t repeat what you heard in the study? You didn’t repeat that—eh?”

“No, I tell you I did *not*.”

“Then how did they—look here! Did Aglaya show my letter to the old lady?”

“Oh, there I can give you my fullest assurance that she did *not*. I was there all the while—she had no time to do it!”

“But perhaps you may not have observed it, oh, you damned idiot, you!” he shouted, quite beside himself with fury. “You can’t even describe what went on.”

Gania having once descended to abuse, and receiving no check, very soon knew no bounds or limit to his licence, as is often the way in such cases. His rage so blinded him that he had not even been able to detect that this “idiot,” whom he was abusing to such an extent, was very far from being slow of comprehension, and had a way of taking in an impression, and afterwards giving it out again, which was very un-idiotic indeed. But something a little unforeseen now occurred.

“I think I ought to tell you, Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” said the prince, suddenly, “that though I once was so ill that I really was little better than an idiot, yet now I am almost recovered, and that, therefore, it is not altogether pleasant to be called an idiot to my face. Of course your anger is excusable, considering the treatment you have just experienced; but I must remind you that you have twice abused me rather rudely. I do

not like this sort of thing, and especially so at the first time of meeting a man, and, therefore, as we happen to be at this moment standing at a crossroad, don't you think we had better part, you to the left, homewards, and I to the right, here? I have twenty-five roubles, and I shall easily find a lodging."

Gania was much confused, and blushed for shame "Do forgive me, prince!" he cried, suddenly changing his abusive tone for one of great courtesy. "For Heaven's sake, forgive me! You see what a miserable plight I am in, but you hardly know anything of the facts of the case as yet. If you did, I am sure you would forgive me, at least partially. Of course it was inexcusable of me, I know, but—"

"Oh, dear me, I really do not require such profuse apologies," replied the prince, hastily. "I quite understand how unpleasant your position is, and that is what made you abuse me. So come along to your house, after all. I shall be delighted—"

"I am not going to let him go like this," thought Gania, glancing angrily at the prince as they walked along. "The fellow has sucked everything out of me, and now he takes off his mask—there's something more than appears, here we shall see. It shall all be as clear as water by tonight, everything!"

But by this time they had reached Gania's house.

VIII.

The flat occupied by Gania and his family was on the third floor of the house. It was reached by a clean light staircase, and consisted of seven rooms, a nice enough lodging, and one would have thought a little too good for a clerk on two thousand roubles a year. But it was designed to accommodate a few lodgers on board terms, and had been taken a few months since, much to the disgust of Gania, at the urgent request of his mother and his sister, Varvara Ardalionovna, who longed to do something to increase the family income a little, and fixed their hopes upon letting lodgings. Gania frowned upon the idea. He thought it *infra dig*, and did not quite like appearing in society afterwards—that society in which he had been accustomed to pose up to now as a young man of rather brilliant prospects. All these concessions and rebuffs of fortune, of late, had wounded his spirit severely, and his temper had become extremely irritable, his wrath being generally quite out of proportion to the cause. But if he had made up his mind to put up with this sort of life for a while, it was only on the plain understanding with his inner self that he would very soon change it all, and have things as he chose again. Yet the very means by which he hoped to make this change threatened to involve him in even greater difficulties than he had had before.

The flat was divided by a passage which led straight out of the entrance-hall. Along one side of this corridor lay the three rooms which were designed for the accommodation of the “highly recommended” lodgers. Besides these three rooms there was another small one at the end of the passage, close to the kitchen, which was allotted to General Ivolgin, the nominal master of the house, who slept on a wide sofa, and was obliged to pass into and out of his room through the kitchen, and up or down the back stairs. Colia, Gania’s young brother, a school-boy of thirteen, shared this room with his father. He, too, had to sleep on an old sofa, a narrow, uncomfortable thing with a torn rug over it; his chief duty being to look after his father, who needed to be watched more and more every day.

The prince was given the middle room of the three, the first being occupied by one Ferdishenko, while the third was empty.

But Gania first conducted the prince to the family apartments. These consisted of a “salon,” which became the dining-room when required; a drawing-room, which was only a drawing-room in the morning, and became Gania’s study in the evening, and his bedroom at night; and lastly Nina Alexandrovna’s and Varvara’s bedroom, a small, close chamber which they shared together.

In a word, the whole place was confined, and a “tight fit” for the party. Gania used to grind his teeth with rage over the state of affairs; though he was anxious to be dutiful and polite to his mother. However, it was very soon apparent to anyone coming into the house, that Gania was the tyrant of the family.

Nina Alexandrovna and her daughter were both seated in the drawing-room, engaged in knitting, and talking to a visitor, Ivan Petrovitch Ptitsin.

The lady of the house appeared to be a woman of about fifty years of age, thin-faced, and with black lines under the eyes. She looked ill and rather sad; but her face was a pleasant one for all that; and from the first word that fell from her lips, any stranger would at once conclude that she was of a serious and particularly sincere nature. In spite of her sorrowful expression, she gave the idea of possessing considerable firmness and decision.

Her dress was modest and simple to a degree, dark and elderly in style; but both her face and appearance gave evidence that she had seen better days.

Varvara was a girl of some twenty-three summers, of middle height, thin, but possessing a face which, without being actually beautiful, had the rare quality of charm, and might fascinate even to the extent of passionate regard.

She was very like her mother: she even dressed like her, which proved that she had no taste for smart clothes. The expression of her grey eyes was merry and gentle, when it was not, as lately, too full of thought and anxiety. The same decision and firmness was to be observed in her face as in her mother's, but her strength seemed to be more vigorous than that of Nina Alexandrovna. She was subject to outbursts of temper, of which even her brother was a little afraid.

The present visitor, Ptitsin, was also afraid of her. This was a young fellow of something under thirty, dressed plainly, but neatly. His manners were good, but rather ponderously so. His dark beard bore evidence to the fact that he was not in any government employ. He could speak well, but preferred silence. On the whole he made a decidedly agreeable impression. He was clearly attracted by Varvara, and made no secret of his feelings. She trusted him in a friendly way, but had not shown him any decided encouragement as yet, which fact did not quell his ardour in the least.

Nina Alexandrovna was very fond of him, and had grown quite confidential with him of late. Ptitsin, as was well known, was engaged in the business of lending out money on good security, and at a good rate of interest. He was a great friend of Gania's.

After a formal introduction by Gania (who greeted his mother very shortly, took no notice of his sister, and immediately marched Ptitsin out of the room), Nina Alexandrovna addressed a few kind words to the prince and forthwith requested Colia, who had just appeared at the door, to show him to the "middle room."

Colia was a nice-looking boy. His expression was simple and confiding, and his manners were very polite and engaging.

"Where's your luggage?" he asked, as he led the prince away to his room.

"I had a bundle; it's in the entrance hall."

"I'll bring it you directly. We only have a cook and one maid, so I have to help as much as I can. Varia looks after things, generally, and loses her temper over it. Gania says you have only just arrived from Switzerland?"

"Yes."

"Is it jolly there?"

"Very."

"Mountains?"

“Yes.”

“I’ll go and get your bundle.”

Here Varvara joined them.

“The maid shall bring your bed-linen directly. Have you a portmanteau?”

“No; a bundle—your brother has just gone to the hall for it.”

“There’s nothing there except this,” said Colia, returning at this moment. “Where did you put it?”

“Oh! but that’s all I have,” said the prince, taking it.

“Ah! I thought perhaps Ferdishenko had taken it.”

“Don’t talk nonsense,” said Varia, severely. She seemed put out, and was only just polite with the prince.

“Oho!” laughed the boy, “you can be nicer than that to *me*, you know—I’m not Ptitsin!”

“You ought to be whipped, Colia, you silly boy. If you want anything” (to the prince) “please apply to the servant. We dine at half-past four. You can take your dinner with us, or have it in your room, just as you please. Come along, Colia, don’t disturb the prince.”

At the door they met Gania coming in.

“Is father in?” he asked. Colia whispered something in his ear and went out.

“Just a couple of words, prince, if you’ll excuse me. Don’t blab over *there* about what you may see here, or in this house as to all that about Aglaya and me, you know. Things are not altogether pleasant in this establishment—devil take it all! You’ll see. At all events keep your tongue to yourself for *today*.”

“I assure you I ‘blabbed’ a great deal less than you seem to suppose,” said the prince, with some annoyance. Clearly the relations between Gania and himself were by no means improving.

“Oh well; I caught it quite hot enough today, thanks to you. However, I forgive you.”

“I think you might fairly remember that I was not in any way bound, I had no reason to be silent about that portrait. You never asked me not to mention it.”

“Pfu! what a wretched room this is—dark, and the window looking into the yard. Your coming to our house is, in no respect, opportune. However, it’s not *my* affair. I don’t keep the lodgings.”

Ptitsin here looked in and beckoned to Gania, who hastily left the room, in spite of the fact that he had evidently wished to say something more and had only made the remark about the room to gain time. The prince had hardly had time to wash and tidy himself a little when the door opened once more, and another figure appeared.

This was a gentleman of about thirty, tall, broad-shouldered, and red-haired; his face was red, too, and he possessed a pair of thick lips, a wide nose, small eyes, rather bloodshot, and with an ironical expression in them; as though he were perpetually winking at someone. His whole appearance gave one the idea of impudence; his dress was shabby.

He opened the door just enough to let his head in. His head remained so placed for a few seconds while he quietly scrutinized the room; the door then opened enough to admit his body; but still he did not enter. He stood on the threshold and examined the prince carefully. At last he gave the door a final shove, entered, approached the prince, took his hand and seated himself and the owner of the room on two chairs side by side.

“Ferdishenko,” he said, gazing intently and inquiringly into the prince’s eyes.

“Very well, what next?” said the latter, almost laughing in his face.

“A lodger here,” continued the other, staring as before.

“Do you wish to make acquaintance?” asked the prince.

“Ah!” said the visitor, passing his fingers through his hair and sighing. He then looked over to the other side of the room and around it. “Got any money?” he asked, suddenly.

“Not much.”

“How much?”

“Twenty-five roubles.”

“Let’s see it.”

The prince took his banknote out and showed it to Ferdishenko. The latter unfolded it and looked at it; then he turned it round and examined the other side; then he held it up to the light.

“How strange that it should have browned so,” he said, reflectively. “These twenty-five rouble notes brown in a most extraordinary way, while other notes often grow paler. Take it.”

The prince took his note. Ferdishenko rose.

“I came here to warn you,” he said. “In the first place, don’t lend me any money, for I shall certainly ask you to.”

“Very well.”

“Shall you pay here?”

“Yes, I intend to.”

“Oh! I *don’t* intend to. Thanks. I live here, next door to you; you noticed a room, did you? Don’t come to me very often; I shall see you here quite often enough. Have you seen the general?”

“No.”

“Nor heard him?”

“No; of course not.”

“Well, you’ll both hear and see him soon; he even tries to borrow money from me. *Avis au lecteur.* Good-bye; do you think a man can possibly live with a name like Ferdishenko?”

“Why not?”

“Good-bye.”

And so he departed. The prince found out afterwards that this gentleman made it his business to amaze people with his originality and wit, but that it did not as a rule “come off.” He even produced a bad impression on some people, which grieved him sorely; but he did not change his ways for all that.

As he went out of the prince’s room, he collided with yet another visitor coming in. Ferdishenko took the opportunity of making several warning gestures to the prince from behind the new arrival’s back, and left the room in conscious pride.

This next arrival was a tall red-faced man of about fifty-five, with greyish hair and whiskers, and large eyes which stood out of their sockets. His appearance would have been distinguished had it not been that he gave the idea of being rather dirty. He was dressed in an old coat, and he smelled of vodka when he came near. His walk was

effective, and he clearly did his best to appear dignified, and to impress people by his manner.

This gentleman now approached the prince slowly, and with a most courteous smile; silently took his hand and held it in his own, as he examined the prince's features as though searching for familiar traits therein.

"'Tis he, 'tis he!" he said at last, quietly, but with much solemnity. "As though he were alive once more. I heard the familiar name—the dear familiar name—and, oh! how it reminded me of the irrevocable past—Prince Muishkin, I believe?"

"Exactly so."

"General Ivolgin—retired and unfortunate. May I ask your Christian and generic names?"

"Lef Nicolaievitch."

"So, so—the son of my old, I may say my childhood's friend, Nicolai Petrovitch."

"My father's name was Nicolai Lvovitch."

"Lvovitch," repeated the general without the slightest haste, and with perfect confidence, just as though he had not committed himself the least in the world, but merely made a little slip of the tongue. He sat down, and taking the prince's hand, drew him to a seat next to himself.

"I carried you in my arms as a baby," he observed.

"Really?" asked the prince. "Why, it's twenty years since my father died."

"Yes, yes—twenty years and three months. We were educated together; I went straight into the army, and he—"

"My father went into the army, too. He was a sub-lieutenant in the Vasiliefsky regiment."

"No, sir—in the Bielomirsky; he changed into the latter shortly before his death. I was at his bedside when he died, and gave him my blessing for eternity. Your mother—" The general paused, as though overcome with emotion.

"She died a few months later, from a cold," said the prince.

"Oh, not cold—believe an old man—not from a cold, but from grief for her prince. Oh—your mother, your mother! heigh-ho! Youth—youth! Your father and I—old friends as we were—nearly murdered each other for her sake."

The prince began to be a little incredulous.

“I was passionately in love with her when she was engaged—engaged to my friend. The prince noticed the fact and was furious. He came and woke me at seven o’clock one morning. I rise and dress in amazement; silence on both sides. I understand it all. He takes a couple of pistols out of his pocket—across a handkerchief—without witnesses. Why invite witnesses when both of us would be walking in eternity in a couple of minutes? The pistols are loaded; we stretch the handkerchief and stand opposite one another. We aim the pistols at each other’s hearts. Suddenly tears start to our eyes, our hands shake; we weep, we embrace—the battle is one of self-sacrifice now! The prince shouts, ‘She is yours;’ I cry, ‘She is yours—’ in a word, in a word—You’ve come to live with us, hey?”

“Yes—yes—for a while, I think,” stammered the prince.

“Prince, mother begs you to come to her,” said Colia, appearing at the door.

The prince rose to go, but the general once more laid his hand in a friendly manner on his shoulder, and dragged him down on to the sofa.

“As the true friend of your father, I wish to say a few words to you,” he began. “I have suffered—there was a catastrophe. I suffered without a trial; I had no trial. Nina Alexandrovna my wife, is an excellent woman, so is my daughter Varvara. We have to let lodgings because we are poor—a dreadful, unheard-of come-down for us—for me, who should have been a governor-general; but we are very glad to have *you*, at all events. Meanwhile there is a tragedy in the house.”

The prince looked inquiringly at the other.

“Yes, a marriage is being arranged—a marriage between a questionable woman and a young fellow who might be a flunkey. They wish to bring this woman into the house where my wife and daughter reside, but while I live and breathe she shall never enter my doors. I shall lie at the threshold, and she shall trample me underfoot if she does. I hardly talk to Gania now, and avoid him as much as I can. I warn you of this beforehand, but you cannot fail to observe it. But you are the son of my old friend, and I hope—”

“Prince, be so kind as to come to me for a moment in the drawing-room,” said Nina Alexandrovna herself, appearing at the door.

“Imagine, my dear,” cried the general, “it turns out that I have nursed the prince on my knee in the old days.” His wife looked searchingly at him, and glanced at the prince, but said nothing. The prince rose and followed her; but hardly had they reached the

drawing-room, and Nina Alexandrovna had begun to talk hurriedly, when in came the general. She immediately relapsed into silence. The master of the house may have observed this, but at all events he did not take any notice of it; he was in high good humour.

“A son of my old friend, dear,” he cried; “surely you must remember Prince Nicolai Lvovitch? You saw him at—at Tver.”

“I don’t remember any Nicolai Lvovitch. Was that your father?” she inquired of the prince.

“Yes, but he died at Elizabethgrad, not at Tver,” said the prince, rather timidly. “So Pavlicheff told me.”

“No, Tver,” insisted the general; “he removed just before his death. You were very small and cannot remember; and Pavlicheff, though an excellent fellow, may have made a mistake.”

“You knew Pavlicheff then?”

“Oh, yes—a wonderful fellow; but I was present myself. I gave him my blessing.”

“My father was just about to be tried when he died,” said the prince, “although I never knew of what he was accused. He died in hospital.”

“Oh! it was the Kolpakoff business, and of course he would have been acquitted.”

“Yes? Do you know that for a fact?” asked the prince, whose curiosity was aroused by the general’s words.

“I should think so indeed!” cried the latter. “The court-martial came to no decision. It was a mysterious, an impossible business, one might say! Captain Larionoff, commander of the company, had died; his command was handed over to the prince for the moment. Very well. This soldier, Kolpakoff, stole some leather from one of his comrades, intending to sell it, and spent the money on drink. Well! The prince—you understand that what follows took place in the presence of the sergeant-major, and a corporal—the prince rated Kolpakoff soundly, and threatened to have him flogged. Well, Kolpakoff went back to the barracks, lay down on a camp bedstead, and in a quarter of an hour was dead: you quite understand? It was, as I said, a strange, almost impossible, affair. In due course Kolpakoff was buried; the prince wrote his report, the deceased’s name was removed from the roll. All as it should be, is it not? But exactly three months later at the inspection of the brigade, the man Kolpakoff was found in

the third company of the second battalion of infantry, Novozemlianski division, just as if nothing had happened!"

"What?" said the prince, much astonished.

"It did not occur—it's a mistake!" said Nina Alexandrovna quickly, looking, at the prince rather anxiously. "*Mon mari se trompe*," she added, speaking in French.

"My dear, '*se trompe*' is easily said. Do you remember any case at all like it? Everybody was at their wits' end. I should be the first to say '*qu'on se trompe*,' but unfortunately I was an eye-witness, and was also on the commission of inquiry. Everything proved that it was really he, the very same soldier Kolpakoff who had been given the usual military funeral to the sound of the drum. It is of course a most curious case—nearly an impossible one. I recognize that... but—"

"Father, your dinner is ready," said Varvara at this point, putting her head in at the door.

"Very glad, I'm particularly hungry. Yes, yes, a strange coincidence—almost a psychological—"

"Your soup'll be cold; do come."

"Coming, coming," said the general. "Son of my old friend—" he was heard muttering as he went down the passage.

"You will have to excuse very much in my husband, if you stay with us," said Nina Alexandrovna; "but he will not disturb you often. He dines alone. Everyone has his little peculiarities, you know, and some people perhaps have more than those who are most pointed at and laughed at. One thing I must beg of you—if my husband applies to you for payment for board and lodging, tell him that you have already paid me. Of course anything paid by you to the general would be as fully settled as if paid to me, so far as you are concerned; but I wish it to be so, if you please, for convenience' sake. What is it, Varia?"

Varia had quietly entered the room, and was holding out the portrait of Nastasia Philipovna to her mother.

Nina Alexandrovna started, and examined the photograph intently, gazing at it long and sadly. At last she looked up inquiringly at Varia.

"It's a present from herself to him," said Varia; "the question is to be finally decided this evening."

“This evening!” repeated her mother in a tone of despair, but softly, as though to herself. “Then it’s all settled, of course, and there’s no hope left to us. She has anticipated her answer by the present of her portrait. Did he show it you himself?” she added, in some surprise.

“You know we have hardly spoken to each other for a whole month. Ptitsin told me all about it; and the photo was lying under the table, and I picked it up.”

“Prince,” asked Nina Alexandrovna, “I wanted to inquire whether you have known my son long? I think he said that you had only arrived today from somewhere.”

The prince gave a short narrative of what we have heard before, leaving out the greater part. The two ladies listened intently.

“I did not ask about Gania out of curiosity,” said the elder, at last. “I wish to know how much you know about him, because he said just now that we need not stand on ceremony with you. What, exactly, does that mean?”

At this moment Gania and Ptitsin entered the room together, and Nina Alexandrovna immediately became silent again. The prince remained seated next to her, but Varia moved to the other end of the room; the portrait of Nastasia Philipovna remained lying as before on the work-table. Gania observed it there, and with a frown of annoyance snatched it up and threw it across to his writing-table, which stood at the other end of the room.

“Is it today, Gania?” asked Nina Alexandrovna, at last.

“Is what today?” cried the former. Then suddenly recollecting himself, he turned sharply on the prince. “Oh,” he growled, “I see, you are here, that explains it! Is it a disease, or what, that you can’t hold your tongue? Look here, understand once for all, prince—”

“I am to blame in this, Gania—no one else,” said Ptitsin.

Gania glanced inquiringly at the speaker.

“It’s better so, you know, Gania—especially as, from one point of view, the matter may be considered as settled,” said Ptitsin; and sitting down a little way from the table he began to study a paper covered with pencil writing.

Gania stood and frowned, he expected a family scene. He never thought of apologizing to the prince, however.

“If it’s all settled, Gania, then of course Mr. Ptitsin is right,” said Nina Alexandrovna. “Don’t frown. You need not worry yourself, Gania; I shall ask you no questions. You need not tell me anything you don’t like. I assure you I have quite submitted to your will.” She said all this, knitting away the while as though perfectly calm and composed.

Gania was surprised, but cautiously kept silence and looked at his mother, hoping that she would express herself more clearly. Nina Alexandrovna observed his cautiousness and added, with a bitter smile:

“You are still suspicious, I see, and do not believe me; but you may be quite at your ease. There shall be no more tears, nor questions—not from my side, at all events. All I wish is that you may be happy, you know that. I have submitted to my fate; but my heart will always be with you, whether we remain united, or whether we part. Of course I only answer for myself—you can hardly expect your sister—”

“My sister again,” cried Gania, looking at her with contempt and almost hate. “Look here, mother, I have already given you my word that I shall always respect you fully and absolutely, and so shall everyone else in this house, be it who it may, who shall cross this threshold.”

Gania was so much relieved that he gazed at his mother almost affectionately.

“I was not at all afraid for myself, Gania, as you know well. It was not for my own sake that I have been so anxious and worried all this time! They say it is all to be settled to-day. What is to be settled?”

“She has promised to tell me tonight at her own house whether she consents or not,” replied Gania.

“We have been silent on this subject for three weeks,” said his mother, “and it was better so; and now I will only ask you one question. How can she give her consent and make you a present of her portrait when you do not love her? How can such a—such a—”

“Practised hand—eh?”

“I was not going to express myself so. But how could you so blind her?”

Nina Alexandrovna’s question betrayed intense annoyance. Gania waited a moment and then said, without taking the trouble to conceal the irony of his tone:

“There you are, mother, you are always like that. You begin by promising that there are to be no reproaches or insinuations or questions, and here you are beginning them at

once. We had better drop the subject—we had, really. I shall never leave you, mother; any other man would cut and run from such a sister as this. See how she is looking at me at this moment! Besides, how do you know that I am blinding Nastasia Philipovna? As for Varia, I don't care—she can do just as she pleases. There, that's quite enough!"

Gania's irritation increased with every word he uttered, as he walked up and down the room. These conversations always touched the family sores before long.

"I have said already that the moment she comes in I go out, and I shall keep my word," remarked Varia.

"Out of obstinacy" shouted Gania. "You haven't married, either, thanks to your obstinacy. Oh, you needn't frown at me, Varvara! You can go at once for all I care; I am sick enough of your company. What, you are going to leave us are you, too?" he cried, turning to the prince, who was rising from his chair.

Gania's voice was full of the most uncontrolled and uncontrollable irritation.

The prince turned at the door to say something, but perceiving in Gania's expression that there was but that one drop wanting to make the cup overflow, he changed his mind and left the room without a word. A few minutes later he was aware from the noisy voices in the drawing room, that the conversation had become more quarrelsome than ever after his departure.

He crossed the salon and the entrance-hall, so as to pass down the corridor into his own room. As he came near the front door he heard someone outside vainly endeavouring to ring the bell, which was evidently broken, and only shook a little, without emitting any sound.

The prince took down the chain and opened the door. He started back in amazement—for there stood Nastasia Philipovna. He knew her at once from her photograph. Her eyes blazed with anger as she looked at him. She quickly pushed by him into the hall, shouldering him out of her way, and said, furiously, as she threw off her fur cloak:

"If you are too lazy to mend your bell, you should at least wait in the hall to let people in when they rattle the bell handle. There, now, you've dropped my fur cloak—dummy!"

Sure enough the cloak was lying on the ground. Nastasia had thrown it off her towards the prince, expecting him to catch it, but the prince had missed it.

"Now then—announce me, quick!"

The prince wanted to say something, but was so confused and astonished that he could not. However, he moved off towards the drawing-room with the cloak over his arm.

“Now then, where are you taking my cloak to? Ha, ha, ha! Are you mad?”

The prince turned and came back, more confused than ever. When she burst out laughing, he smiled, but his tongue could not form a word as yet. At first, when he had opened the door and saw her standing before him, he had become as pale as death; but now the red blood had rushed back to his cheeks in a torrent.

“Why, what an idiot it is!” cried Nastasia, stamping her foot with irritation. “Go on, do! Whom are you going to announce?”

“Nastasia Philipovna,” murmured the prince.

“And how do you know that?” she asked him, sharply.

“I have never seen you before!”

“Go on, announce me—what’s that noise?”

“They are quarrelling,” said the prince, and entered the drawing-room, just as matters in there had almost reached a crisis. Nina Alexandrovna had forgotten that she had “submitted to everything!” She was defending Varia. Ptitsin was taking her part, too. Not that Varia was afraid of standing up for herself. She was by no means that sort of a girl; but her brother was becoming ruder and more intolerable every moment. Her usual practice in such cases as the present was to say nothing, but stare at him, without taking her eyes off his face for an instant. This manoeuvre, as she well knew, could drive Gania distracted.

Just at this moment the door opened and the prince entered, announcing:

“Nastasia Philipovna!”

## IX.

Silence immediately fell on the room; all looked at the prince as though they neither understood, nor hoped to understand. Gania was motionless with horror.

Nastasia’s arrival was a most unexpected and overwhelming event to all parties. In the first place, she had never been before. Up to now she had been so haughty that she had never even asked Gania to introduce her to his parents. Of late she had not so much as mentioned them. Gania was partly glad of this; but still he had put it to her debit in the account to be settled after marriage.

He would have borne anything from her rather than this visit. But one thing seemed to him quite clear—her visit now, and the present of her portrait on this particular day, pointed out plainly enough which way she intended to make her decision!

The incredulous amazement with which all regarded the prince did not last long, for Nastasia herself appeared at the door and passed in, pushing by the prince again.

“At last I’ve stormed the citadel! Why do you tie up your bell?” she said, merrily, as she pressed Gania’s hand, the latter having rushed up to her as soon as she made her appearance. “What are you looking so upset about? Introduce me, please!”

The bewildered Gania introduced her first to Varia, and both women, before shaking hands, exchanged looks of strange import. Nastasia, however, smiled amiably; but Varia did not try to look amiable, and kept her gloomy expression. She did not even vouchsafe the usual courteous smile of etiquette. Gania darted a terrible glance of wrath at her for this, but Nina Alexandrovna mended matters a little when Gania introduced her at last. Hardly, however, had the old lady begun about her “highly gratified feelings,” and so on, when Nastasia left her, and flounced into a chair by Gania’s side in the corner by the window, and cried: “Where’s your study? and where are the—the lodgers? You do take in lodgers, don’t you?”

Gania looked dreadfully put out, and tried to say something in reply, but Nastasia interrupted him:

“Why, where are you going to squeeze lodgers in here? Don’t you use a study? Does this sort of thing pay?” she added, turning to Nina Alexandrovna.

“Well, it is troublesome, rather,” said the latter; “but I suppose it will ‘pay’ pretty well. We have only just begun, however—”

Again Nastasia Philipovna did not hear the sentence out. She glanced at Gania, and cried, laughing, “What a face! My goodness, what a face you have on at this moment!”

Indeed, Gania did not look in the least like himself. His bewilderment and his alarmed perplexity passed off, however, and his lips now twitched with rage as he continued to stare evilly at his laughing guest, while his countenance became absolutely livid.

There was another witness, who, though standing at the door motionless and bewildered himself, still managed to remark Gania’s death-like pallor, and the dreadful change that had come over his face. This witness was the prince, who now advanced in alarm and muttered to Gania:

“Drink some water, and don’t look like that!”

It was clear that he came out with these words quite spontaneously, on the spur of the moment. But his speech was productive of much—for it appeared that all Gania's rage now overflowed upon the prince. He seized him by the shoulder and gazed with an intensity of loathing and revenge at him, but said nothing—as though his feelings were too strong to permit of words.

General agitation prevailed. Nina Alexandrovna gave a little cry of anxiety; Ptitsin took a step forward in alarm; Colia and Ferdishenko stood stock still at the door in amazement;—only Varia remained coolly watching the scene from under her eyelashes. She did not sit down, but stood by her mother with folded hands. However, Gania recollected himself almost immediately. He let go of the prince and burst out laughing.

"Why, are you a doctor, prince, or what?" he asked, as naturally as possible. "I declare you quite frightened me! Nastasia Philipovna, let me introduce this interesting character to you—though I have only known him myself since the morning."

Nastasia gazed at the prince in bewilderment. "Prince? He a Prince? Why, I took him for the footman, just now, and sent him in to announce me! Ha, ha, ha, isn't that good!"

"Not bad that, not bad at all!" put in Ferdishenko, "*se non è vero*—"

"I rather think I pitched into you, too, didn't I? Forgive me—do! Who is he, did you say? What prince? Muishkin?" she added, addressing Gania.

"He is a lodger of ours," explained the latter.

"An idiot!"—the prince distinctly heard the word half whispered from behind him. This was Ferdishenko's voluntary information for Nastasia's benefit.

"Tell me, why didn't you put me right when I made such a dreadful mistake just now?" continued the latter, examining the prince from head to foot without the slightest ceremony. She awaited the answer as though convinced that it would be so foolish that she must inevitably fail to restrain her laughter over it.

"I was astonished, seeing you so suddenly—" murmured the prince.

"How did you know who I was? Where had you seen me before? And why were you so struck dumb at the sight of me? What was there so overwhelming about me?"

"Oho! ho, ho, ho!" cried Ferdishenko. "*Now* then, prince! My word, what things I would say if I had such a chance as that! My goodness, prince—go on!"

“So should I, in your place, I’ve no doubt!” laughed the prince to Ferdishenko; then continued, addressing Nastasia: “Your portrait struck me very forcibly this morning; then I was talking about you to the Epanchins; and then, in the train, before I reached Petersburg, Parfen Rogojin told me a good deal about you; and at the very moment that I opened the door to you I happened to be thinking of you, when—there you stood before me!”

“And how did you recognize me?”

“From the portrait!”

“What else?”

“I seemed to imagine you exactly as you are—I seemed to have seen you somewhere.”

“Where—where?”

“I seem to have seen your eyes somewhere; but it cannot be! I have not seen you—I never was here before. I may have dreamed of you, I don’t know.”

The prince said all this with manifest effort—in broken sentences, and with many drawings of breath. He was evidently much agitated. Nastasia Philipovna looked at him inquisitively, but did not laugh.

“Bravo, prince!” cried Ferdishenko, delighted.

At this moment a loud voice from behind the group which hedged in the prince and Nastasia Philipovna, divided the crowd, as it were, and before them stood the head of the family, General Ivolgin. He was dressed in evening clothes; his moustache was dyed.

This apparition was too much for Gania. Vain and ambitious almost to morbidness, he had had much to put up with in the last two months, and was seeking feverishly for some means of enabling himself to lead a more presentable kind of existence. At home, he now adopted an attitude of absolute cynicism, but he could not keep this up before Nastasia Philipovna, although he had sworn to make her pay after marriage for all he suffered now. He was experiencing a last humiliation, the bitterest of all, at this moment—the humiliation of blushing for his own kindred in his own house. A question flashed through his mind as to whether the game was really worth the candle.

For that had happened at this moment, which for two months had been his nightmare; which had filled his soul with dread and shame—the meeting between his father and Nastasia Philipovna. He had often tried to imagine such an event, but had found the picture too mortifying and exasperating, and had quietly dropped it. Very likely he

anticipated far worse things than was at all necessary; it is often so with vain persons. He had long since determined, therefore, to get his father out of the way, anywhere, before his marriage, in order to avoid such a meeting; but when Nastasia entered the room just now, he had been so overwhelmed with astonishment, that he had not thought of his father, and had made no arrangements to keep him out of the way. And now it was too late—there he was, and got up, too, in a dress coat and white tie, and Nastasia in the very humour to heap ridicule on him and his family circle; of this last fact, he felt quite persuaded. What else had she come for? There were his mother and his sister sitting before her, and she seemed to have forgotten their very existence already; and if she behaved like that, he thought, she must have some object in view.

Ferdishenko led the general up to Nastasia Philipovna.

“Ardalion Alexandrovitch Ivolgin,” said the smiling general, with a low bow of great dignity, “an old soldier, unfortunate, and the father of this family; but happy in the hope of including in that family so exquisite—”

He did not finish his sentence, for at this moment Ferdishenko pushed a chair up from behind, and the general, not very firm on his legs, at this post-prandial hour, flopped into it backwards. It was always a difficult thing to put this warrior to confusion, and his sudden descent left him as composed as before. He had sat down just opposite to Nastasia, whose fingers he now took, and raised to his lips with great elegance, and much courtesy. The general had once belonged to a very select circle of society, but he had been turned out of it two or three years since on account of certain weaknesses, in which he now indulged with all the less restraint; but his good manners remained with him to this day, in spite of all.

Nastasia Philipovna seemed delighted at the appearance of this latest arrival, of whom she had of course heard a good deal by report.

“I have heard that my son—” began Ardalion Alexandrovitch.

“Your son, indeed! A nice papa you are! *You* might have come to see me anyhow, without compromising anyone. Do you hide yourself, or does your son hide you?”

“The children of the nineteenth century, and their parents—” began the general, again.

“Nastasia Philipovna, will you excuse the general for a moment? Someone is inquiring for him,” said Nina Alexandrovna in a loud voice, interrupting the conversation.

“Excuse him? Oh no, I have wished to see him too long for that. Why, what business can he have? He has retired, hasn’t he? You won’t leave me, general, will you?”

“I give you my word that he shall come and see you—but he—he needs rest just now.”

“General, they say you require rest,” said Nastasia Philipovna, with the melancholy face of a child whose toy is taken away.

Ardalion Alexandrovitch immediately did his best to make his foolish position a great deal worse.

“My dear, my dear!” he said, solemnly and reproachfully, looking at his wife, with one hand on his heart.

“Won’t you leave the room, mamma?” asked Varia, aloud.

“No, Varia, I shall sit it out to the end.”

Nastasia must have overheard both question and reply, but her vivacity was not in the least damped. On the contrary, it seemed to increase. She immediately overwhelmed the general once more with questions, and within five minutes that gentleman was as happy as a king, and holding forth at the top of his voice, amid the laughter of almost all who heard him.

Colia jogged the prince’s arm.

“Can’t *you* get him out of the room, somehow? *Do*, please,” and tears of annoyance stood in the boy’s eyes. “Curse that Gania!” he muttered, between his teeth.

“Oh yes, I knew General Epanchin well,” General Ivolgin was saying at this moment; “he and Prince Nicolai Ivanovitch Muishkin—whose son I have this day embraced after an absence of twenty years—and I, were three inseparables. Alas one is in the grave, torn to pieces by calumnies and bullets; another is now before you, still battling with calumnies and bullets—”

“Bullets?” cried Nastasia.

“Yes, here in my chest. I received them at the siege of Kars, and I feel them in bad weather now. And as to the third of our trio, Epanchin, of course after that little affair with the poodle in the railway carriage, it was all *up* between us.”

“Poodle? What was that? And in a railway carriage? Dear me,” said Nastasia, thoughtfully, as though trying to recall something to mind.

“Oh, just a silly, little occurrence, really not worth telling, about Princess Bielokonski’s governess, Miss Smith, and—oh, it is really not worth telling!”

“No, no, we must have it!” cried Nastasia merrily.

“Yes, of course,” said Ferdishenko. “C’est du nouveau.”

“Ardalion,” said Nina Alexandrovitch, entreatingly.

“Papa, you are wanted!” cried Colia.

“Well, it is a silly little story, in a few words,” began the delighted general. “A couple of years ago, soon after the new railway was opened, I had to go somewhere or other on business. Well, I took a first-class ticket, sat down, and began to smoke, or rather *continued* to smoke, for I had lighted up before. I was alone in the carriage. Smoking is not allowed, but is not prohibited either; it is half allowed—so to speak, winked at. I had the window open.”

“Suddenly, just before the whistle, in came two ladies with a little poodle, and sat down opposite to me; not bad-looking women; one was in light blue, the other in black silk. The poodle, a beauty with a silver collar, lay on light blue’s knee. They looked haughtily about, and talked English together. I took no notice, just went on smoking. I observed that the ladies were getting angry—over my cigar, doubtless. One looked at me through her tortoise-shell eyeglass.

“I took no notice, because they never said a word. If they didn’t like the cigar, why couldn’t they say so? Not a word, not a hint! Suddenly, and without the very slightest suspicion of warning, ‘light blue’ seizes my cigar from between my fingers, and, wheugh! out of the window with it! Well, on flew the train, and I sat bewildered, and the young woman, tall and fair, and rather red in the face, too red, glared at me with flashing eyes.

“I didn’t say a word, but with extreme courtesy, I may say with most refined courtesy, I reached my finger and thumb over towards the poodle, took it up delicately by the nape of the neck, and chucked it out of the window, after the cigar. The train went flying on, and the poodle’s yells were lost in the distance.”

“Oh, you naughty man!” cried Nastasia, laughing and clapping her hands like a child.

“Bravo!” said Ferdishenko. Ptitsin laughed too, though he had been very sorry to see the general appear. Even Colia laughed and said, “Bravo!”

“And I was right, truly right,” cried the general, with warmth and solemnity, “for if cigars are forbidden in railway carriages, poodles are much more so.”

“Well, and what did the lady do?” asked Nastasia, impatiently.

“She—ah, that’s where all the mischief of it lies!” replied Ivolgin, frowning. “Without a word, as it were, of warning, she slapped me on the cheek! An extraordinary woman!”

“And you?”

The general dropped his eyes, and elevated his brows; shrugged his shoulders, tightened his lips, spread his hands, and remained silent. At last he blurted out:

“I lost my head!”

“Did you hit her?”

“No, oh no!—there was a great flare-up, but I didn’t hit her! I had to struggle a little, purely to defend myself; but the very devil was in the business. It turned out that ‘light blue’ was an Englishwoman, governess or something, at Princess Bielokonski’s, and the other woman was one of the old-maid princesses Bielokonski. Well, everybody knows what great friends the princess and Mrs. Epanchin are, so there was a pretty kettle of fish. All the Bielokonskis went into mourning for the poodle. Six princesses in tears, and the Englishwoman shrieking!

“Of course I wrote an apology, and called, but they would not receive either me or my apology, and the Epanchins cut me, too!”

“But wait,” said Nastasia. “How is it that, five or six days since, I read exactly the same story in the paper, as happening between a Frenchman and an English girl? The cigar was snatched away exactly as you describe, and the poodle was chucked out of the window after it. The slapping came off, too, as in your case; and the girl’s dress was light blue!”

The general blushed dreadfully; Colia blushed too; and Ptitsin turned hastily away. Ferdishenko was the only one who laughed as gaily as before. As to Gania, I need not say that he was miserable; he stood dumb and wretched and took no notice of anybody.

“I assure you,” said the general, “that exactly the same thing happened to myself!”

“I remembered there was some quarrel between father and Miss Smith, the Bielokonski’s governess,” said Colia.

“How very curious, point for point the same anecdote, and happening at different ends of Europe! Even the light blue dress the same,” continued the pitiless Nastasia. “I must really send you the paper.”

“You must observe,” insisted the general, “that my experience was two years earlier.”

“Ah! that’s it, no doubt!”

Nastasia Philipovna laughed hysterically.

“Father, will you hear a word from me outside!” said Gania, his voice shaking with agitation, as he seized his father by the shoulder. His eyes shone with a blaze of hatred.

At this moment there was a terrific bang at the front door, almost enough to break it down. Some most unusual visitor must have arrived. Colia ran to open.

X.

The entrance-hall suddenly became full of noise and people. To judge from the sounds which penetrated to the drawing-room, a number of people had already come in, and the stampede continued. Several voices were talking and shouting at once; others were talking and shouting on the stairs outside; it was evidently a most extraordinary visit that was about to take place.

Everyone exchanged startled glances. Gania rushed out towards the dining-room, but a number of men had already made their way in, and met him.

“Ah! here he is, the Judas!” cried a voice which the prince recognized at once. “How d’ye do, Gania, you old blackguard?”

“Yes, that’s the man!” said another voice.

There was no room for doubt in the prince’s mind: one of the voices was Rogojin’s, and the other Lebedeff’s.

Gania stood at the door like a block and looked on in silence, putting no obstacle in the way of their entrance, and ten or a dozen men marched in behind Parfen Rogojin. They were a decidedly mixed-looking collection, and some of them came in in their furs and caps. None of them were quite drunk, but all appeared to be considerably excited.

They seemed to need each other’s support, morally, before they dared come in; not one of them would have entered alone but with the rest each one was brave enough. Even Rogojin entered rather cautiously at the head of his troop; but he was evidently preoccupied. He appeared to be gloomy and morose, and had clearly come with some end in view. All the rest were merely chorus, brought in to support the chief character. Besides Lebedeff there was the dandy Zalesheff, who came in without his coat and hat, two or three others followed his example; the rest were more uncouth. They included a couple of young merchants, a man in a great-coat, a medical student, a little Pole, a small fat man who laughed continuously, and an enormously tall stout one who apparently put great faith in the strength of his fists. A couple of “ladies” of

some sort put their heads in at the front door, but did not dare come any farther. Colia promptly banged the door in their faces and locked it.

“Hallo, Gania, you blackguard! You didn’t expect Rogojin, eh?” said the latter, entering the drawing-room, and stopping before Gania.

But at this moment he saw, seated before him, Nastasia Philipovna. He had not dreamed of meeting her here, evidently, for her appearance produced a marvellous effect upon him. He grew pale, and his lips became actually blue.

“I suppose it is true, then!” he muttered to himself, and his face took on an expression of despair. “So that’s the end of it! Now you, sir, will you answer me or not?” he went on suddenly, gazing at Gania with ineffable malice. “Now then, you—”

He panted, and could hardly speak for agitation. He advanced into the room mechanically; but perceiving Nina Alexandrovna and Varia he became more or less embarrassed, in spite of his excitement. His followers entered after him, and all paused a moment at sight of the ladies. Of course their modesty was not fated to be long-lived, but for a moment they were abashed. Once let them begin to shout, however, and nothing on earth should disconcert them.

“What, you here too, prince?” said Rogojin, absently, but a little surprised all the same “Still in your gaiters, eh?” He sighed, and forgot the prince next moment, and his wild eyes wandered over to Nastasia again, as though attracted in that direction by some magnetic force.

Nastasia looked at the new arrivals with great curiosity. Gania recollected himself at last.

“Excuse me, sirs,” he said, loudly, “but what does all this mean?” He glared at the advancing crowd generally, but addressed his remarks especially to their captain, Rogojin. “You are not in a stable, gentlemen, though you may think it—my mother and sister are present.”

“Yes, I see your mother and sister,” muttered Rogojin, through his teeth; and Lebedeff seemed to feel himself called upon to second the statement.

“At all events, I must request you to step into the salon,” said Gania, his rage rising quite out of proportion to his words, “and then I shall inquire—”

“What, he doesn’t know me!” said Rogojin, showing his teeth disagreeably. “He doesn’t recognize Rogojin!” He did not move an inch, however.

“I have met you somewhere, I believe, but—”

“Met me somewhere, pfu! Why, it’s only three months since I lost two hundred roubles of my father’s money to you, at cards. The old fellow died before he found out. Ptitsin knows all about it. Why, I’ve only to pull out a three-rouble note and show it to you, and you’d crawl on your hands and knees to the other end of the town for it; that’s the sort of man you are. Why, I’ve come now, at this moment, to buy you up! Oh, you needn’t think that because I wear these boots I have no money. I have lots of money, my beauty,—enough to buy up you and all yours together. So I shall, if I like to! I’ll buy you up! I will!” he yelled, apparently growing more and more intoxicated and excited. “Oh, Nastasia Philipovna! don’t turn me out! Say one word, do! Are you going to marry this man, or not?”

Rogojin asked his question like a lost soul appealing to some divinity, with the reckless daring of one appointed to die, who has nothing to lose.

He awaited the reply in deadly anxiety.

Nastasia Philipovna gazed at him with a haughty, ironical expression of face; but when she glanced at Nina Alexandrovna and Varia, and from them to Gania, she changed her tone, all of a sudden.

“Certainly not; what are you thinking of? What could have induced you to ask such a question?” she replied, quietly and seriously, and even, apparently, with some astonishment.

“No? No?” shouted Rogojin, almost out of his mind with joy. “You are not going to, after all? And they told me—oh, Nastasia Philipovna—they said you had promised to marry him, *him!* As if you *could* do it!—him—pooh! I don’t mind saying it to everyone—I’d buy him off for a hundred roubles, any day pfu! Give him a thousand, or three if he likes, poor devil, and he’d cut and run the day before his wedding, and leave his bride to me! Wouldn’t you, Gania, you blackguard? You’d take three thousand, wouldn’t you? Here’s the money! Look, I’ve come on purpose to pay you off and get your receipt, formally. I said I’d buy you up, and so I will.”

“Get out of this, you drunken beast!” cried Gania, who was red and white by turns.

Rogojin’s troop, who were only waiting for an excuse, set up a howl at this. Lebedeff stepped forward and whispered something in Parfen’s ear.

“You’re right, clerk,” said the latter, “you’re right, tipsy spirit—you’re right!—Nastasia Philipovna,” he added, looking at her like some lunatic, harmless generally, but suddenly wound up to a pitch of audacity, “here are eighteen thousand roubles, and—

and you shall have more—." Here he threw a packet of bank-notes tied up in white paper, on the table before her, not daring to say all he wished to say.

"No—no—no!" muttered Lebedeff, clutching at his arm. He was clearly aghast at the largeness of the sum, and thought a far smaller amount should have been tried first.

"No, you fool—you don't know whom you are dealing with—and it appears I am a fool, too!" said Parfen, trembling beneath the flashing glance of Nastasia. "Oh, curse it all! What a fool I was to listen to you!" he added, with profound melancholy.

Nastasia Philipovna, observing his woe-begone expression, suddenly burst out laughing.

"Eighteen thousand roubles, for me? Why, you declare yourself a fool at once," she said, with impudent familiarity, as she rose from the sofa and prepared to go. Gania watched the whole scene with a sinking of the heart.

"Forty thousand, then—forty thousand roubles instead of eighteen! Ptitsin and another have promised to find me forty thousand roubles by seven o'clock tonight. Forty thousand roubles—paid down on the nail!"

The scene was growing more and more disgraceful; but Nastasia Philipovna continued to laugh and did not go away. Nina Alexandrovna and Varia had both risen from their places and were waiting, in silent horror, to see what would happen. Varia's eyes were all ablaze with anger; but the scene had a different effect on Nina Alexandrovna. She paled and trembled, and looked more and more like fainting every moment.

"Very well then, a *hundred* thousand! a hundred thousand! paid this very day. Ptitsin! find it for me. A good share shall stick to your fingers—come!"

"You are mad!" said Ptitsin, coming up quickly and seizing him by the hand. "You're drunk—the police will be sent for if you don't look out. Think where you are."

"Yes, he's boasting like a drunkard," added Nastasia, as though with the sole intention of goading him.

"I do *not* boast! You shall have a hundred thousand, this very day. Ptitsin, get the money, you gay usurer! Take what you like for it, but get it by the evening! I'll show that I'm in earnest!" cried Rogojin, working himself up into a frenzy of excitement.

"Come, come; what's all this?" cried General Ivolgin, suddenly and angrily, coming close up to Rogojin. The unexpectedness of this sally on the part of the hitherto silent old man caused some laughter among the intruders.

“Halloa! what’s this now?” laughed Rogojin. “You come along with me, old fellow! You shall have as much to drink as you like.”

“Oh, it’s too horrible!” cried poor Colia, sobbing with shame and annoyance.

“Surely there must be someone among all of you here who will turn this shameless creature out of the room?” cried Varia, suddenly. She was shaking and trembling with rage.

“That’s me, I suppose. I’m the shameless creature!” cried Nastasia Philipovna, with amused indifference. “Dear me, and I came—like a fool, as I am—to invite them over to my house for the evening! Look how your sister treats me, Gavrila Ardalionovitch.”

For some moments Gania stood as if stunned or struck by lightning, after his sister’s speech. But seeing that Nastasia Philipovna was really about to leave the room this time, he sprang at Varia and seized her by the arm like a madman.

“What have you done?” he hissed, glaring at her as though he would like to annihilate her on the spot. He was quite beside himself, and could hardly articulate his words for rage.

“What have I done? Where are you dragging me to?”

“Do you wish me to beg pardon of this creature because she has come here to insult our mother and disgrace the whole household, you low, base wretch?” cried Varia, looking back at her brother with proud defiance.

A few moments passed as they stood there face to face, Gania still holding her wrist tightly. Varia struggled once—twice—to get free; then could restrain herself no longer, and spat in his face.

“There’s a girl for you!” cried Nastasia Philipovna. “Mr. Ptitsin, I congratulate you on your choice.”

Gania lost his head. Forgetful of everything he aimed a blow at Varia, which would inevitably have laid her low, but suddenly another hand caught his. Between him and Varia stood the prince.

“Enough—enough!” said the latter, with insistence, but all of a tremble with excitement.

“Are you going to cross my path for ever, damn you!” cried Gania; and, loosening his hold on Varia, he slapped the prince’s face with all his force.

Exclamations of horror arose on all sides. The prince grew pale as death; he gazed into Gania's eyes with a strange, wild, reproachful look; his lips trembled and vainly endeavoured to form some words; then his mouth twisted into an incongruous smile.

"Very well—never mind about me; but I shall not allow you to strike her!" he said, at last, quietly. Then, suddenly, he could bear it no longer, and covering his face with his hands, turned to the wall, and murmured in broken accents:

"Oh! how ashamed you will be of this afterwards!"

Gania certainly did look dreadfully abashed. Colia rushed up to comfort the prince, and after him crowded Varia, Rogojin and all, even the general.

"It's nothing, it's nothing!" said the prince, and again he wore the smile which was so inconsistent with the circumstances.

"Yes, he will be ashamed!" cried Rogojin. "You will be properly ashamed of yourself for having injured such a—such a sheep" (he could not find a better word). "Prince, my dear fellow, leave this and come away with me. I'll show you how Rogojin shows his affection for his friends."

Nastasia Philipovna was also much impressed, both with Gania's action and with the prince's reply.

Her usually thoughtful, pale face, which all this while had been so little in harmony with the jests and laughter which she had seemed to put on for the occasion, was now evidently agitated by new feelings, though she tried to conceal the fact and to look as though she were as ready as ever for jesting and irony.

"I really think I must have seen him somewhere!" she murmured seriously enough.

"Oh, aren't you ashamed of yourself—aren't you ashamed? Are you really the sort of woman you are trying to represent yourself to be? Is it possible?" The prince was now addressing Nastasia, in a tone of reproach, which evidently came from his very heart.

Nastasia Philipovna looked surprised, and smiled, but evidently concealed something beneath her smile and with some confusion and a glance at Gania she left the room.

However, she had not reached the outer hall when she turned round, walked quickly up to Nina Alexandrovna, seized her hand and lifted it to her lips.

"He guessed quite right. I am not that sort of woman," she whispered hurriedly, flushing red all over. Then she turned again and left the room so quickly that no one could imagine what she had come back for. All they saw was that she said something

to Nina Alexandrovna in a hurried whisper, and seemed to kiss her hand. Varia, however, both saw and heard all, and watched Nastasia out of the room with an expression of wonder.

Gania recollected himself in time to rush after her in order to show her out, but she had gone. He followed her to the stairs.

"Don't come with me," she cried, "*Au revoir*, till the evening—do you hear? *Au revoir!*"

He returned thoughtful and confused; the riddle lay heavier than ever on his soul. He was troubled about the prince, too, and so bewildered that he did not even observe Rogojin's rowdy band crowd past him and step on his toes, at the door as they went out. They were all talking at once. Rogojin went ahead of the others, talking to Ptitsin, and apparently insisting vehemently upon something very important.

"You've lost the game, Gania" he cried, as he passed the latter.

Gania gazed after him uneasily, but said nothing.

XI.

The prince now left the room and shut himself up in his own chamber. Colia followed him almost at once, anxious to do what he could to console him. The poor boy seemed to be already so attached to him that he could hardly leave him.

"You were quite right to go away!" he said. "The row will rage there worse than ever now; and it's like this every day with us—and all through that Nastasia Philipovna."

"You have so many sources of trouble here, Colia," said the prince.

"Yes, indeed, and it is all our own fault. But I have a great friend who is much worse off even than we are. Would you like to know him?"

"Yes, very much. Is he one of your school-fellows?"

"Well, not exactly. I will tell you all about him some day.... What do you think of Nastasia Philipovna? She is beautiful, isn't she? I had never seen her before, though I had a great wish to do so. She fascinated me. I could forgive Gania if he were to marry her for love, but for money! Oh dear! that is horrible!"

"Yes, your brother does not attract me much."

"I am not surprised at that. After what you... But I do hate that way of looking at things! Because some fool, or a rogue pretending to be a fool, strikes a man, that man is to be dishonoured for his whole life, unless he wipes out the disgrace with blood, or makes

his assailant beg forgiveness on his knees! I think that so very absurd and tyrannical. Lermontoff's Bal Masque is based on that idea—a stupid and unnatural one, in my opinion; but he was hardly more than a child when he wrote it."

"I like your sister very much."

"Did you see how she spat in Gania's face! Varia is afraid of no one. But you did not follow her example, and yet I am sure it was not through cowardice. Here she comes! Speak of a wolf and you see his tail! I felt sure that she would come. She is very generous, though of course she has her faults."

Varia pounced upon her brother.

"This is not the place for you," said she. "Go to father. Is he plaguing you, prince?"

"Not in the least; on the contrary, he interests me."

"Scolding as usual, Varia! It is the worst thing about her. After all, I believe father may have started off with Rogojin. No doubt he is sorry now. Perhaps I had better go and see what he is doing," added Colia, running off.

"Thank God, I have got mother away, and put her to bed without another scene! Gania is worried—and ashamed—not without reason! What a spectacle! I have come to thank you once more, prince, and to ask you if you knew Nastasia Philipovna before?"

"No, I have never known her."

"Then what did you mean, when you said straight out to her that she was not really 'like that'? You guessed right, I fancy. It is quite possible she was not herself at the moment, though I cannot fathom her meaning. Evidently she meant to hurt and insult us. I have heard curious tales about her before now, but if she came to invite us to her house, why did she behave so to my mother? Ptitsin knows her very well; he says he could not understand her today. With Rogojin, too! No one with a spark of self-respect could have talked like that in the house of her... Mother is extremely vexed on your account, too...

"That is nothing!" said the prince, waving his hand.

"But how meek she was when you spoke to her!"

"Meek! What do you mean?"

"You told her it was a shame for her to behave so, and her manner changed at once; she was like another person. You have some influence over her, prince," added Varia, smiling a little.

The door opened at this point, and in came Gania most unexpectedly.

He was not in the least disconcerted to see Varia there, but he stood a moment at the door, and then approached the prince quietly.

“Prince,” he said, with feeling, “I was a blackguard. Forgive me!” His face gave evidence of suffering. The prince was considerably amazed, and did not reply at once. “Oh, come, forgive me, forgive me!” Gania insisted, rather impatiently. “If you like, I’ll kiss your hand. There!”

The prince was touched; he took Gania’s hands, and embraced him heartily, while each kissed the other.

“I never, never thought you were like that,” said Muishkin, drawing a deep breath. “I thought you—you weren’t capable of—”

“Of what? Apologizing, eh? And where on earth did I get the idea that you were an idiot? You always observe what other people pass by unnoticed; one could talk sense to you, but—”

“Here is another to whom you should apologize,” said the prince, pointing to Varia.

“No, no! they are all enemies! I’ve tried them often enough, believe me,” and Gania turned his back on Varia with these words.

“But if I beg you to make it up?” said Varia.

“And you’ll go to Nastasia Philipovna’s this evening—”

“If you insist: but, judge for yourself, can I go, ought I to go?”

“But she is not that sort of woman, I tell you!” said Gania, angrily. “She was only acting.”

“I know that—I know that; but what a part to play! And think what she must take *you* for, Gania! I know she kissed mother’s hand, and all that, but she laughed at you, all the same. All this is not good enough for seventy-five thousand roubles, my dear boy. You are capable of honourable feelings still, and that’s why I am talking to you so. Oh! *do* take care what you are doing! Don’t you know yourself that it will end badly, Gania?”

So saying, and in a state of violent agitation, Varia left the room.

“There, they are all like that,” said Gania, laughing, “just as if I do not know all about it much better than they do.”

He sat down with these words, evidently intending to prolong his visit.

“If you know it so well,” said the prince a little timidly, “why do you choose all this worry for the sake of the seventy-five thousand, which, you confess, does not cover it?”

“I didn’t mean that,” said Gania; “but while we are upon the subject, let me hear your opinion. Is all this worry worth seventy-five thousand or not?”

“Certainly not.”

“Of course! And it would be a disgrace to marry so, eh?”

“A great disgrace.”

“Oh, well, then you may know that I shall certainly do it, now. I shall certainly marry her. I was not quite sure of myself before, but now I am. Don’t say a word: I know what you want to tell me—”

“No. I was only going to say that what surprises me most of all is your extraordinary confidence.”

“How so? What in?”

“That Nastasia Philipovna will accept you, and that the question is as good as settled; and secondly, that even if she did, you would be able to pocket the money. Of course, I know very little about it, but that’s my view. When a man marries for money it often happens that the wife keeps the money in her own hands.”

“Of course, you don’t know all; but, I assure you, you needn’t be afraid, it won’t be like that in our case. There are circumstances,” said Gania, rather excitedly. “And as to her answer to me, there’s no doubt about that. Why should you suppose she will refuse me?”

“Oh, I only judge by what I see. Varvara Ardalionovna said just now—”

“Oh she—they don’t know anything about it! Nastasia was only chaffing Rogojin. I was alarmed at first, but I have thought better of it now; she was simply laughing at him. She looks on me as a fool because I show that I meant her money, and doesn’t realize that there are other men who would deceive her in far worse fashion. I’m not going to pretend anything, and you’ll see she’ll marry me, all right. If she likes to live quietly, so she shall; but if she gives me any of her nonsense, I shall leave her at once, but I shall keep the money. I’m not going to look a fool; that’s the first thing, not to look a fool.”

“But Nastasia Philipovna seems to me to be such a *sensible* woman, and, as such, why should she run blindly into this business? That’s what puzzles me so,” said the prince.

“You don’t know all, you see; I tell you there are things—and besides, I’m sure that she is persuaded that I love her to distraction, and I give you my word I have a strong suspicion that she loves me, too—in her own way, of course. She thinks she will be able to make a sort of slave of me all my life; but I shall prepare a little surprise for her. I don’t know whether I ought to be confidential with you, prince; but, I assure you, you are the only decent fellow I have come across. I have not spoken so sincerely as I am doing at this moment for years. There are uncommonly few honest people about, prince; there isn’t one honester than Ptitsin, he’s the best of the lot. Are you laughing? You don’t know, perhaps, that blackguards like honest people, and being one myself I like you. *Why* am I a blackguard? Tell me honestly, now. They all call me a blackguard because of her, and I have got into the way of thinking myself one. That’s what is so bad about the business.”

“*I* for one shall never think you a blackguard again,” said the prince. “I confess I had a poor opinion of you at first, but I have been so joyfully surprised about you just now; it’s a good lesson for me. I shall never judge again without a thorough trial. I see now that you are not only not a blackguard, but are not even quite spoiled. I see that you are quite an ordinary man, not original in the least degree, but rather weak.”

Gania laughed sarcastically, but said nothing. The prince, seeing that he did not quite like the last remark, blushed, and was silent too.

“Has my father asked you for money?” asked Gania, suddenly.

“No.”

“Don’t give it to him if he does. Fancy, he was a decent, respectable man once! He was received in the best society; he was not always the liar he is now. Of course, wine is at the bottom of it all; but he is a good deal worse than an innocent liar now. Do you know that he keeps a mistress? I can’t understand how mother is so long-suffering. Did he tell you the story of the siege of Kars? Or perhaps the one about his grey horse that talked? He loves to enlarge on these absurd histories.” And Gania burst into a fit of laughter. Suddenly he turned to the prince and asked: “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I am surprised to see you laugh in that way, like a child. You came to make friends with me again just now, and you said, ‘I will kiss your hand, if you like,’ just as a child

would have said it. And then, all at once you are talking of this mad project—of these seventy-five thousand roubles! It all seems so absurd and impossible."

"Well, what conclusion have you reached?"

"That you are rushing madly into the undertaking, and that you would do well to think it over again. It is more than possible that Varvara Ardalionovna is right."

"Ah! now you begin to moralize! I know that I am only a child, very well," replied Gania impatiently. "That is proved by my having this conversation with you. It is not for money only, prince, that I am rushing into this affair," he continued, hardly master of his words, so closely had his vanity been touched. "If I reckoned on that I should certainly be deceived, for I am still too weak in mind and character. I am obeying a passion, an impulse perhaps, because I have but one aim, one that overmasters all else. You imagine that once I am in possession of these seventy-five thousand roubles, I shall rush to buy a carriage... No, I shall go on wearing the old overcoat I have worn for three years, and I shall give up my club. I shall follow the example of men who have made their fortunes. When Ptitsin was seventeen he slept in the street, he sold pen-knives, and began with a copeck; now he has sixty thousand roubles, but to get them, what has he not done? Well, I shall be spared such a hard beginning, and shall start with a little capital. In fifteen years people will say, 'Look, that's Ivolgin, the king of the Jews!' You say that I have no originality. Now mark this, prince—there is nothing so offensive to a man of our time and race than to be told that he is wanting in originality, that he is weak in character, has no particular talent, and is, in short, an ordinary person. You have not even done me the honour of looking upon me as a rogue. Do you know, I could have knocked you down for that just now! You wounded me more cruelly than Epanchin, who thinks me capable of selling him my wife! Observe, it was a perfectly gratuitous idea on his part, seeing there has never been any discussion of it between us! This has exasperated me, and I am determined to make a fortune! I will do it! Once I am rich, I shall be a genius, an extremely original man. One of the vilest and most hateful things connected with money is that it can buy even talent; and will do so as long as the world lasts. You will say that this is childish—or romantic. Well, that will be all the better for me, but the thing shall be done. I will carry it through. He laughs most, who laughs last. Why does Epanchin insult me? Simply because, socially, I am a nobody. However, enough for the present. Colia has put his nose in to tell us dinner is ready, twice. I'm dining out. I shall come and talk to you now and then; you shall be comfortable enough with us. They are sure to make you one of the family. I think you and I will either be great friends or enemies. Look here now, supposing I had kissed your hand just now, as I offered to do in all sincerity, should I have hated you for it afterwards?"

“Certainly, but not always. You would not have been able to keep it up, and would have ended by forgiving me,” said the prince, after a pause for reflection, and with a pleasant smile.

“Oho, how careful one has to be with you, prince! Haven’t you put a drop of poison in that remark now, eh? By the way—ha, ha, ha!—I forgot to ask, was I right in believing that you were a good deal struck yourself with Nastasia Philipovna.”

“Ye-yes.”

“Are you in love with her?”

“N-no.”

“And yet you flush up as red as a rosebud! Come—it’s all right. I’m not going to laugh at you. Do you know she is a very virtuous woman? Believe it or not, as you like. You think she and Totski—not a bit of it, not a bit of it! Not for ever so long! *Au revoir!*”

Gania left the room in great good humour. The prince stayed behind, and meditated alone for a few minutes. At length, Colia popped his head in once more.

“I don’t want any dinner, thanks, Colia. I had too good a lunch at General Epanchin’s.”

Colia came into the room and gave the prince a note; it was from the general and was carefully sealed up. It was clear from Colia’s face how painful it was to him to deliver the missive. The prince read it, rose, and took his hat.

“It’s only a couple of yards,” said Colia, blushing.

“He’s sitting there over his bottle—and how they can give him credit, I cannot understand. Don’t tell mother I brought you the note, prince; I have sworn not to do it a thousand times, but I’m always so sorry for him. Don’t stand on ceremony, give him some trifle, and let that end it.”

“Come along, Colia, I want to see your father. I have an idea,” said the prince.

XII.

Colia took the prince to a public-house in the Litaynaya, not far off. In one of the side rooms there sat at a table—looking like one of the regular guests of the establishment—Ardalion Alexandrovitch, with a bottle before him, and a newspaper on his knee. He was waiting for the prince, and no sooner did the latter appear than he began a long harangue about something or other; but so far gone was he that the prince could hardly understand a word.

“I have not got a ten-rouble note,” said the prince; “but here is a twenty-five. Change it and give me back the fifteen, or I shall be left without a farthing myself.”

“Oh, of course, of course; and you quite understand that I—”

“Yes; and I have another request to make, general. Have you ever been at Nastasia Philipovna’s?”

“I? I? Do you mean me? Often, my friend, often! I only pretended I had not in order to avoid a painful subject. You saw today, you were a witness, that I did all that a kind, an indulgent father could do. Now a father of altogether another type shall step into the scene. You shall see; the old soldier shall lay bare this intrigue, or a shameless woman will force her way into a respectable and noble family.”

“Yes, quite so. I wished to ask you whether you could show me the way to Nastasia Philipovna’s tonight. I must go; I have business with her; I was not invited but I was introduced. Anyhow I am ready to trespass the laws of propriety if only I can get in somehow or other.”

“My dear young friend, you have hit on my very idea. It was not for this rubbish I asked you to come over here” (he pocketed the money, however, at this point), “it was to invite your alliance in the campaign against Nastasia Philipovna tonight. How well it sounds, ‘General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin.’ That’ll fetch her, I think, eh? Capital! We’ll go at nine; there’s time yet.”

“Where does she live?”

“Oh, a long way off, near the Great Theatre, just in the square there—It won’t be a large party.”

The general sat on and on. He had ordered a fresh bottle when the prince arrived; this took him an hour to drink, and then he had another, and another, during the consumption of which he told pretty nearly the whole story of his life. The prince was in despair. He felt that though he had but applied to this miserable old drunkard because he saw no other way of getting to Nastasia Philipovna’s, yet he had been very wrong to put the slightest confidence in such a man.

At last he rose and declared that he would wait no longer. The general rose too, drank the last drops that he could squeeze out of the bottle, and staggered into the street.

Muishkin began to despair. He could not imagine how he had been so foolish as to trust this man. He only wanted one thing, and that was to get to Nastasia Philipovna’s, even at the cost of a certain amount of impropriety. But now the scandal threatened to

be more than he had bargained for. By this time Ardalion Alexandrovitch was quite intoxicated, and he kept his companion listening while he discoursed eloquently and pathetically on subjects of all kinds, interspersed with torrents of recrimination against the members of his family. He insisted that all his troubles were caused by their bad conduct, and time alone would put an end to them.

At last they reached the Litaynaya. The thaw increased steadily, a warm, unhealthy wind blew through the streets, vehicles splashed through the mud, and the iron shoes of horses and mules rang on the paving stones. Crowds of melancholy people plodded wearily along the footpaths, with here and there a drunken man among them.

"Do you see those brightly-lighted windows?" said the general. "Many of my old comrades-in-arms live about here, and I, who served longer, and suffered more than any of them, am walking on foot to the house of a woman of rather questionable reputation! A man, look you, who has thirteen bullets on his breast!... You don't believe it? Well, I can assure you it was entirely on my account that Pirogoff telegraphed to Paris, and left Sebastopol at the greatest risk during the siege. Nelaton, the Tuileries surgeon, demanded a safe conduct, in the name of science, into the besieged city in order to attend my wounds. The government knows all about it. 'That's the Ivolgin with thirteen bullets in him!' That's how they speak of me.... Do you see that house, prince? One of my old friends lives on the first floor, with his large family. In this and five other houses, three overlooking Nevsky, two in the Morskaya, are all that remain of my personal friends. Nina Alexandrovna gave them up long ago, but I keep in touch with them still... I may say I find refreshment in this little coterie, in thus meeting my old acquaintances and subordinates, who worship me still, in spite of all. General Sokolovitch (by the way, I have not called on him lately, or seen Anna Fedorovna)... You know, my dear prince, when a person does not receive company himself, he gives up going to other people's houses involuntarily. And yet... well... you look as if you didn't believe me.... Well now, why should I not present the son of my old friend and companion to this delightful family—General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin? You will see a lovely girl—what am I saying—a lovely girl? No, indeed, two, three! Ornaments of this city and of society: beauty, education, culture—the woman question—poetry—everything! Added to which is the fact that each one will have a dot of at least eighty thousand roubles. No bad thing, eh?... In a word I absolutely must introduce you to them: it is a duty, an obligation. General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin. Tableau!"

"At once? Now? You must have forgotten..." began the prince.

"No, I have forgotten nothing. Come! This is the house—up this magnificent staircase. I am surprised not to see the porter, but .... it is a holiday... and the man has gone off...

Drunken fool! Why have they not got rid of him? Sokolovitch owes all the happiness he has had in the service and in his private life to me, and me alone, but... here we are."

The prince followed quietly, making no further objection for fear of irritating the old man. At the same time he fervently hoped that General Sokolovitch and his family would fade away like a mirage in the desert, so that the visitors could escape, by merely returning downstairs. But to his horror he saw that General Ivolgin was quite familiar with the house, and really seemed to have friends there. At every step he named some topographical or biographical detail that left nothing to be desired on the score of accuracy. When they arrived at last, on the first floor, and the general turned to ring the bell to the right, the prince decided to run away, but a curious incident stopped him momentarily.

"You have made a mistake, general," said he. "The name on the door is Koulakoff, and you were going to see General Sokolovitch."

"Koulakoff... Koulakoff means nothing. This is Sokolovitch's flat, and I am ringing at his door.... What do I care for Koulakoff?... Here comes someone to open."

In fact, the door opened directly, and the footman informed the visitors that the family were all away.

"What a pity! What a pity! It's just my luck!" repeated Ardalion Alexandrovitch over and over again, in regretful tones. "When your master and mistress return, my man, tell them that General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin desired to present themselves, and that they were extremely sorry, excessively grieved..."

Just then another person belonging to the household was seen at the back of the hall. It was a woman of some forty years, dressed in sombre colours, probably a housekeeper or a governess. Hearing the names she came forward with a look of suspicion on her face.

"Marie Alexandrovna is not at home," said she, staring hard at the general. "She has gone to her mother's, with Alexandra Michailovna."

"Alexandra Michailovna out, too! How disappointing! Would you believe it, I am always so unfortunate! May I most respectfully ask you to present my compliments to Alexandra Michailovna, and remind her... tell her, that with my whole heart I wish for her what she wished for herself on Thursday evening, while she was listening to Chopin's Ballade. She will remember. I wish it with all sincerity. General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin!"

The woman's face changed; she lost her suspicious expression.

“I will not fail to deliver your message,” she replied, and bowed them out.

As they went downstairs the general regretted repeatedly that he had failed to introduce the prince to his friends.

“You know I am a bit of a poet,” said he. “Have you noticed it? The poetic soul, you know.” Then he added suddenly—“But after all… after all I believe we made a mistake this time! I remember that the Sokolovitch’s live in another house, and what is more, they are just now in Moscow. Yes, I certainly was at fault. However, it is of no consequence.”

“Just tell me,” said the prince in reply, “may I count still on your assistance? Or shall I go on alone to see Nastasia Philipovna?”

“Count on my assistance? Go alone? How can you ask me that question, when it is a matter on which the fate of my family so largely depends? You don’t know Ivolgin, my friend. To trust Ivolgin is to trust a rock; that’s how the first squadron I commanded spoke of me. ‘Depend upon Ivolgin,’ said they all, ‘he is as steady as a rock.’ But, excuse me, I must just call at a house on our way, a house where I have found consolation and help in all my trials for years.”

“You are going home?”

“No… I wish… to visit Madame Terentieff, the widow of Captain Terentieff, my old subordinate and friend. She helps me to keep up my courage, and to bear the trials of my domestic life, and as I have an extra burden on my mind today…”

“It seems to me,” interrupted the prince, “that I was foolish to trouble you just now. However, at present you… Good-bye!”

“Indeed, you must not go away like that, young man, you must not!” cried the general. “My friend here is a widow, the mother of a family; her words come straight from her heart, and find an echo in mine. A visit to her is merely an affair of a few minutes; I am quite at home in her house. I will have a wash, and dress, and then we can drive to the Grand Theatre. Make up your mind to spend the evening with me…. We are just there—that’s the house… Why, Colia! you here! Well, is Marfa Borisovna at home or have you only just come?”

“Oh no! I have been here a long while,” replied Colia, who was at the front door when the general met him. “I am keeping Hippolyte company. He is worse, and has been in bed all day. I came down to buy some cards. Marfa Borisovna expects you. But what a state you are in, father!” added the boy, noticing his father’s unsteady gait. “Well, let us go in.”

On meeting Colia the prince determined to accompany the general, though he made up his mind to stay as short a time as possible. He wanted Colia, but firmly resolved to leave the general behind. He could not forgive himself for being so simple as to imagine that Ivolgin would be of any use. The three climbed up the long staircase until they reached the fourth floor where Madame Terentieff lived.

“You intend to introduce the prince?” asked Colia, as they went up.

“Yes, my boy. I wish to present him: General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin! But what’s the matter?... what?... How is Marfa Borisovna?”

“You know, father, you would have done much better not to come at all! She is ready to eat you up! You have not shown yourself since the day before yesterday and she is expecting the money. Why did you promise her any? You are always the same! Well, now you will have to get out of it as best you can.”

They stopped before a somewhat low doorway on the fourth floor. Ardalion Alexandrovitch, evidently much out of countenance, pushed Muishkin in front.

“I will wait here,” he stammered. “I should like to surprise her. ....”

Colia entered first, and as the door stood open, the mistress of the house peeped out. The surprise of the general’s imagination fell very flat, for she at once began to address him in terms of reproach.

Marfa Borisovna was about forty years of age. She wore a dressing-jacket, her feet were in slippers, her face painted, and her hair was in dozens of small plaits. No sooner did she catch sight of Ardalion Alexandrovitch than she screamed:

“There he is, that wicked, mean wretch! I knew it was he! My heart misgave me!”

The old man tried to put a good face on the affair.

“Come, let us go in—it’s all right,” he whispered in the prince’s ear.

But it was more serious than he wished to think. As soon as the visitors had crossed the low dark hall, and entered the narrow reception-room, furnished with half a dozen cane chairs, and two small card-tables, Madame Terentieff, in the shrill tones habitual to her, continued her stream of invectives.

“Are you not ashamed? Are you not ashamed? You barbarian! You tyrant! You have robbed me of all I possessed—you have sucked my bones to the marrow. How long shall I be your victim? Shameless, dishonourable man!”

“Marfa Borisovna! Marfa Borisovna! Here is... the Prince Muishkin! General Ivolgin and Prince Muishkin,” stammered the disconcerted old man.

“Would you believe,” said the mistress of the house, suddenly addressing the prince, “would you believe that that man has not even spared my orphan children? He has stolen everything I possessed, sold everything, pawned everything; he has left me nothing—nothing! What am I to do with your IOU’s, you cunning, unscrupulous rogue? Answer, devourer! answer, heart of stone! How shall I feed my orphans? with what shall I nourish them? And now he has come, he is drunk! He can scarcely stand. How, oh how, have I offended the Almighty, that He should bring this curse upon me! Answer, you worthless villain, answer!”

But this was too much for the general.

“Here are twenty-five roubles, Marfa Borisovna... it is all that I can give... and I owe even these to the prince’s generosity—my noble friend. I have been cruelly deceived. Such is... life... Now... Excuse me, I am very weak,” he continued, standing in the centre of the room, and bowing to all sides. “I am faint; excuse me! Lenotchka... a cushion... my dear!”

Lenotchka, a little girl of eight, ran to fetch the cushion at once, and placed it on the rickety old sofa. The general meant to have said much more, but as soon as he had stretched himself out, he turned his face to the wall, and slept the sleep of the just.

With a grave and ceremonious air, Marfa Borisovna motioned the prince to a chair at one of the card-tables. She seated herself opposite, leaned her right cheek on her hand, and sat in silence, her eyes fixed on Muishkin, now and again sighing deeply. The three children, two little girls and a boy, Lenotchka being the eldest, came and leant on the table and also stared steadily at him. Presently Colia appeared from the adjoining room.

“I am very glad indeed to have met you here, Colia,” said the prince. “Can you do something for me? I must see Nastasia Philipovna, and I asked Ardalion Alexandrovitch just now to take me to her house, but he has gone to sleep, as you see. Will you show me the way, for I do not know the street? I have the address, though; it is close to the Grand Theatre.”

“Nastasia Philipovna? She does not live there, and to tell you the truth my father has never been to her house! It is strange that you should have depended on him! She lives near Wladimir Street, at the Five Corners, and it is quite close by. Will you go directly? It is just half-past nine. I will show you the way with pleasure.”

Colia and the prince went off together. Alas! the latter had no money to pay for a cab, so they were obliged to walk.

“I should have liked to have taken you to see Hippolyte,” said Colia. “He is the eldest son of the lady you met just now, and was in the next room. He is ill, and has been in bed all day. But he is rather strange, and extremely sensitive, and I thought he might be upset considering the circumstances in which you came... Somehow it touches me less, as it concerns my father, while it is *his* mother. That, of course, makes a great difference. What is a terrible disgrace to a woman, does not disgrace a man, at least not in the same way. Perhaps public opinion is wrong in condemning one sex, and excusing the other. Hippolyte is an extremely clever boy, but so prejudiced. He is really a slave to his opinions.”

“Do you say he is consumptive?”

“Yes. It really would be happier for him to die young. If I were in his place I should certainly long for death. He is unhappy about his brother and sisters, the children you saw. If it were possible, if we only had a little money, we should leave our respective families, and live together in a little apartment of our own. It is our dream. But, do you know, when I was talking over your affair with him, he was angry, and said that anyone who did not call out a man who had given him a blow was a coward. He is very irritable to-day, and I left off arguing the matter with him. So Nastasia Philipovna has invited you to go and see her?”

“To tell the truth, she has not.”

“Then how do you come to be going there?” cried Colia, so much astonished that he stopped short in the middle of the pavement. “And... and are you going to her ‘At Home’ in that costume?”

“I don’t know, really, whether I shall be allowed in at all. If she will receive me, so much the better. If not, the matter is ended. As to my clothes—what can I do?”

“Are you going there for some particular reason, or only as a way of getting into her society, and that of her friends?”

“No, I have really an object in going... That is, I am going on business it is difficult to explain, but...”

“Well, whether you go on business or not is your affair, I do not want to know. The only important thing, in my eyes, is that you should not be going there simply for the pleasure of spending your evening in such company—cocottes, generals, usurers! If that were the case I should despise and laugh at you. There are terribly few honest

people here, and hardly any whom one can respect, although people put on airs—Varia especially! Have you noticed, prince, how many adventurers there are nowadays? Especially here, in our dear Russia. How it has happened I never can understand. There used to be a certain amount of solidity in all things, but now what happens? Everything is exposed to the public gaze, veils are thrown back, every wound is probed by careless fingers. We are for ever present at an orgy of scandalous revelations. Parents blush when they remember their old-fashioned morality. At Moscow lately a father was heard urging his son to stop at nothing—at nothing, mind you!—to get money! The press seized upon the story, of course, and now it is public property. Look at my father, the general! See what he is, and yet, I assure you, he is an honest man! Only... he drinks too much, and his morals are not all we could desire. Yes, that's true! I pity him, to tell the truth, but I dare not say so, because everybody would laugh at me—but I do pity him! And who are the really clever men, after all? Money-grubbers, every one of them, from the first to the last. Hippolyte finds excuses for money-lending, and says it is a necessity. He talks about the economic movement, and the ebb and flow of capital; the devil knows what he means. It makes me angry to hear him talk so, but he is soured by his troubles. Just imagine—the general keeps his mother—but she lends him money! She lends it for a week or ten days at very high interest! Isn't it disgusting? And then, you would hardly believe it, but my mother—Nina Alexandrovna—helps Hippolyte in all sorts of ways, sends him money and clothes. She even goes as far as helping the children, through Hippolyte, because their mother cares nothing about them, and Varia does the same."

"Well, just now you said there were no honest nor good people about, that there were only money-grubbers—and here they are quite close at hand, these honest and good people, your mother and Varia! I think there is a good deal of moral strength in helping people in such circumstances."

"Varia does it from pride, and likes showing off, and giving herself airs. As to my mother, I really do admire her—yes, and honour her. Hippolyte, hardened as he is, feels it. He laughed at first, and thought it vulgar of her—but now, he is sometimes quite touched and overcome by her kindness. H'm! You call that being strong and good? I will remember that! Gania knows nothing about it. He would say that it was encouraging vice."

"Ah, Gania knows nothing about it? It seems there are many things that Gania does not know," exclaimed the prince, as he considered Colia's last words.

"Do you know, I like you very much indeed, prince? I shall never forget about this afternoon."

“I like you too, Colia.”

“Listen to me! You are going to live here, are you not?” said Colia. “I mean to get something to do directly, and earn money. Then shall we three live together? You, and I, and Hippolyte? We will hire a flat, and let the general come and visit us. What do you say?”

“It would be very pleasant,” returned the prince. “But we must see. I am really rather worried just now. What! are we there already? Is that the house? What a long flight of steps! And there’s a porter! Well, Colia I don’t know what will come of it all.”

The prince seemed quite distracted for the moment.

“You must tell me all about it tomorrow! Don’t be afraid. I wish you success; we agree so entirely that I can do so, although I do not understand why you are here. Good-bye!” cried Colia excitedly. “Now I will rush back and tell Hippolyte all about our plans and proposals! But as to your getting in—don’t be in the least afraid. You will see her. She is so original about everything. It’s the first floor. The porter will show you.”

XIII.

The prince was very nervous as he reached the outer door; but he did his best to encourage himself with the reflection that the worst thing that could happen to him would be that he would not be received, or, perhaps, received, then laughed at for coming.

But there was another question, which terrified him considerably, and that was: what was he going to do when he *did* get in? And to this question he could fashion no satisfactory reply.

If only he could find an opportunity of coming close up to Nastasia Philipovna and saying to her: “Don’t ruin yourself by marrying this man. He does not love you, he only loves your money. He told me so himself, and so did Aglaya Ivanovna, and I have come on purpose to warn you”—but even that did not seem quite a legitimate or practicable thing to do. Then, again, there was another delicate question, to which he could not find an answer; dared not, in fact, think of it; but at the very idea of which he trembled and blushed. However, in spite of all his fears and heart-quakings he went in, and asked for Nastasia Philipovna.

Nastasia occupied a medium-sized, but distinctly tasteful, flat, beautifully furnished and arranged. At one period of these five years of Petersburg life, Totski had certainly not spared his expenditure upon her. He had calculated upon her eventual love, and tried to tempt her with a lavish outlay upon comforts and luxuries, knowing too well

how easily the heart accustoms itself to comforts, and how difficult it is to tear one's self away from luxuries which have become habitual and, little by little, indispensable.

Nastasia did not reject all this, she even loved her comforts and luxuries, but, strangely enough, never became, in the least degree, dependent upon them, and always gave the impression that she could do just as well without them. In fact, she went so far as to inform Totski on several occasions that such was the case, which the latter gentleman considered a very unpleasant communication indeed.

But, of late, Totski had observed many strange and original features and characteristics in Nastasia, which he had neither known nor reckoned upon in former times, and some of these fascinated him, even now, in spite of the fact that all his old calculations with regard to her were long ago cast to the winds.

A maid opened the door for the prince (Nastasia's servants were all females) and, to his surprise, received his request to announce him to her mistress without any astonishment. Neither his dirty boots, nor his wide-brimmed hat, nor his sleeveless cloak, nor his evident confusion of manner, produced the least impression upon her. She helped him off with his cloak, and begged him to wait a moment in the ante-room while she announced him.

The company assembled at Nastasia Philipovna's consisted of none but her most intimate friends, and formed a very small party in comparison with her usual gatherings on this anniversary.

In the first place there were present Totski, and General Epanchin. They were both highly amiable, but both appeared to be labouring under a half-hidden feeling of anxiety as to the result of Nastasia's deliberations with regard to Gania, which result was to be made public this evening.

Then, of course, there was Gania who was by no means so amiable as his elders, but stood apart, gloomy, and miserable, and silent. He had determined not to bring Varia with him; but Nastasia had not even asked after her, though no sooner had he arrived than she had reminded him of the episode between himself and the prince. The general, who had heard nothing of it before, began to listen with some interest, while Gania, drily, but with perfect candour, went through the whole history, including the fact of his apology to the prince. He finished by declaring that the prince was a most extraordinary man, and goodness knows why he had been considered an idiot hitherto, for he was very far from being one.

Nastasia listened to all this with great interest; but the conversation soon turned to Rogojin and his visit, and this theme proved of the greatest attraction to both Totski and the general.

Ptitsin was able to afford some particulars as to Rogojin's conduct since the afternoon. He declared that he had been busy finding money for the latter ever since, and up to nine o'clock, Rogojin having declared that he must absolutely have a hundred thousand roubles by the evening. He added that Rogojin was drunk, of course; but that he thought the money would be forthcoming, for the excited and intoxicated rapture of the fellow impelled him to give any interest or premium that was asked of him, and there were several others engaged in beating up the money, also.

All this news was received by the company with somewhat gloomy interest. Nastasia was silent, and would not say what she thought about it. Gania was equally uncommunicative. The general seemed the most anxious of all, and decidedly uneasy. The present of pearls which he had prepared with so much joy in the morning had been accepted but coldly, and Nastasia had smiled rather disagreeably as she took it from him. Ferdishenko was the only person present in good spirits.

Totski himself, who had the reputation of being a capital talker, and was usually the life and soul of these entertainments, was as silent as any on this occasion, and sat in a state of, for him, most uncommon perturbation.

The rest of the guests (an old tutor or schoolmaster, goodness knows why invited; a young man, very timid, and shy and silent; a rather loud woman of about forty, apparently an actress; and a very pretty, well-dressed German lady who hardly said a word all the evening) not only had no gift for enlivening the proceedings, but hardly knew what to say for themselves when addressed. Under these circumstances the arrival of the prince came almost as a godsend.

The announcement of his name gave rise to some surprise and to some smiles, especially when it became evident, from Nastasia's astonished look, that she had not thought of inviting him. But her astonishment once over, Nastasia showed such satisfaction that all prepared to greet the prince with cordial smiles of welcome.

"Of course," remarked General Epanchin, "he does this out of pure innocence. It's a little dangerous, perhaps, to encourage this sort of freedom; but it is rather a good thing that he has arrived just at this moment. He may enliven us a little with his originalities."

"Especially as he asked himself," said Ferdishenko.

“What’s that got to do with it?” asked the general, who loathed Ferdishenko.

“Why, he must pay toll for his entrance,” explained the latter.

“H’m! Prince Muishkin is not Ferdishenko,” said the general, impatiently. This worthy gentleman could never quite reconcile himself to the idea of meeting Ferdishenko in society, and on an equal footing.

“Oh general, spare Ferdishenko!” replied the other, smiling. “I have special privileges.”

“What do you mean by special privileges?”

“Once before I had the honour of stating them to the company. I will repeat the explanation to-day for your excellency’s benefit. You see, excellency, all the world is witty and clever except myself. I am neither. As a kind of compensation I am allowed to tell the truth, for it is a well-known fact that only stupid people tell ‘the truth.’ Added to this, I am a spiteful man, just because I am not clever. If I am offended or injured I bear it quite patiently until the man injuring me meets with some misfortune. Then I remember, and take my revenge. I return the injury sevenfold, as Ivan Petrovitch Ptitsin says. (Of course he never does so himself.) Excellency, no doubt you recollect Kryloff’s fable, ‘The Lion and the Ass’? Well now, that’s you and I. That fable was written precisely for us.”

“You seem to be talking nonsense again, Ferdishenko,” growled the general.

“What is the matter, excellency? I know how to keep my place. When I said just now that we, you and I, were the lion and the ass of Kryloff’s fable, of course it is understood that I take the role of the ass. Your excellency is the lion of which the fable remarks:

‘A mighty lion, terror of the woods,
Was shorn of his great prowess by old age.’

And I, your excellency, am the ass.”

“I am of your opinion on that last point,” said Ivan Fedorovitch, with ill-concealed irritation.

All this was no doubt extremely coarse, and moreover it was premeditated, but after all Ferdishenko had persuaded everyone to accept him as a buffoon.

“If I am admitted and tolerated here,” he had said one day, “it is simply because I talk in this way. How can anyone possibly receive such a man as I am? I quite understand. Now, could I, a Ferdishenko, be allowed to sit shoulder to shoulder with a clever man

like Afanasy Ivanovitch? There is one explanation, only one. I am given the position because it is so entirely inconceivable!"

But these vulgarities seemed to please Nastasia Philipovna, although too often they were both rude and offensive. Those who wished to go to her house were forced to put up with Ferdishenko. Possibly the latter was not mistaken in imagining that he was received simply in order to annoy Totski, who disliked him extremely. Gania also was often made the butt of the jester's sarcasms, who used this method of keeping in Nastasia Philipovna's good graces.

"The prince will begin by singing us a fashionable ditty," remarked Ferdishenko, and looked at the mistress of the house, to see what she would say.

"I don't think so, Ferdishenko; please be quiet," answered Nastasia Philipovna dryly.

"A-ah! if he is to be under special patronage, I withdraw my claws."

But Nastasia Philipovna had now risen and advanced to meet the prince.

"I was so sorry to have forgotten to ask you to come, when I saw you," she said, "and I am delighted to be able to thank you personally now, and to express my pleasure at your resolution."

So saying she gazed into his eyes, longing to see whether she could make any guess as to the explanation of his motive in coming to her house. The prince would very likely have made some reply to her kind words, but he was so dazzled by her appearance that he could not speak.

Nastasia noticed this with satisfaction. She was in full dress this evening; and her appearance was certainly calculated to impress all beholders. She took his hand and led him towards her other guests. But just before they reached the drawing-room door, the prince stopped her, and hurriedly and in great agitation whispered to her:

"You are altogether perfection; even your pallor and thinness are perfect; one could not wish you otherwise. I did so wish to come and see you. I—forgive me, please—"

"Don't apologize," said Nastasia, laughing; "you spoil the whole originality of the thing. I think what they say about you must be true, that you are so original.—So you think me perfection, do you?"

"Yes."

"H'm! Well, you may be a good reader of riddles but you are wrong *there*, at all events. I'll remind you of this, tonight."

Nastasia introduced the prince to her guests, to most of whom he was already known.

Totski immediately made some amiable remark. All seemed to brighten up at once, and the conversation became general. Nastasia made the prince sit down next to herself.

“Dear me, there’s nothing so very curious about the prince dropping in, after all,” remarked Ferdishenko.

“It’s quite a clear case,” said the hitherto silent Gania. “I have watched the prince almost all day, ever since the moment when he first saw Nastasia Philipovna’s portrait, at General Epanchin’s. I remember thinking at the time what I am now pretty sure of; and what, I may say in passing, the prince confessed to myself.”

Gania said all this perfectly seriously, and without the slightest appearance of joking; indeed, he seemed strangely gloomy.

“I did not confess anything to you,” said the prince, blushing. “I only answered your question.”

“Bravo! That’s frank, at any rate!” shouted Ferdishenko, and there was general laughter.

“Oh prince, prince! I never should have thought it of you;” said General Epanchin. “And I imagined you a philosopher! Oh, you silent fellows!”

“Judging from the fact that the prince blushed at this innocent joke, like a young girl, I should think that he must, as an honourable man, harbour the noblest intentions,” said the old toothless schoolmaster, most unexpectedly; he had not so much as opened his mouth before. This remark provoked general mirth, and the old fellow himself laughed loudest of the lot, but ended with a stupendous fit of coughing.

Nastasia Philipovna, who loved originality and drollery of all kinds, was apparently very fond of this old man, and rang the bell for more tea to stop his coughing. It was now half-past ten o’clock.

“Gentlemen, wouldn’t you like a little champagne now?” she asked. “I have it all ready; it will cheer us up—do now—no ceremony!”

This invitation to drink, couched, as it was, in such informal terms, came very strangely from Nastasia Philipovna. Her usual entertainments were not quite like this; there was more style about them. However, the wine was not refused; each guest took a glass excepting Gania, who drank nothing.

It was extremely difficult to account for Nastasia's strange condition of mind, which became more evident each moment, and which none could avoid noticing.

She took her glass, and vowed she would empty it three times that evening. She was hysterical, and laughed aloud every other minute with no apparent reason—the next moment relapsing into gloom and thoughtfulness.

Some of her guests suspected that she must be ill; but concluded at last that she was expecting something, for she continued to look at her watch impatiently and unceasingly; she was most absent and strange.

"You seem to be a little feverish tonight," said the actress.

"Yes; I feel quite ill. I have been obliged to put on this shawl—I feel so cold," replied Nastasia. She certainly had grown very pale, and every now and then she tried to suppress a trembling in her limbs.

"Had we not better allow our hostess to retire?" asked Totski of the general.

"Not at all, gentlemen, not at all! Your presence is absolutely necessary to me tonight," said Nastasia, significantly.

As most of those present were aware that this evening a certain very important decision was to be taken, these words of Nastasia Philipovna's appeared to be fraught with much hidden interest. The general and Totski exchanged looks; Gania fidgeted convulsively in his chair.

"Let's play at some game!" suggested the actress.

"I know a new and most delightful game, added Ferdishenko.

"What is it?" asked the actress.

"Well, when we tried it we were a party of people, like this, for instance; and somebody proposed that each of us, without leaving his place at the table, should relate something about himself. It had to be something that he really and honestly considered the very worst action he had ever committed in his life. But he was to be honest—that was the chief point! He wasn't to be allowed to lie."

"What an extraordinary idea!" said the general.

"That's the beauty of it, general!"

"It's a funny notion," said Totski, "and yet quite natural—it's only a new way of boasting."

“Perhaps that is just what was so fascinating about it.”

“Why, it would be a game to cry over—not to laugh at!” said the actress.

“Did it succeed?” asked Nastasia Philipovna. “Come, let’s try it, let’s try it; we really are not quite so jolly as we might be—let’s try it! We may like it; it’s original, at all events!”

“Yes,” said Ferdishenko; “it’s a good idea—come along—the men begin. Of course no one need tell a story if he prefers to be disobliging. We must draw lots! Throw your slips of paper, gentlemen, into this hat, and the prince shall draw for turns. It’s a very simple game; all you have to do is to tell the story of the worst action of your life. It’s as simple as anything. I’ll prompt anyone who forgets the rules!”

No one liked the idea much. Some smiled, some frowned; some objected, but faintly, not wishing to oppose Nastasia’s wishes; for this new idea seemed to be rather well received by her. She was still in an excited, hysterical state, laughing convulsively at nothing and everything. Her eyes were blazing, and her cheeks showed two bright red spots against the white. The melancholy appearance of some of her guests seemed to add to her sarcastic humour, and perhaps the very cynicism and cruelty of the game proposed by Ferdishenko pleased her. At all events she was attracted by the idea, and gradually her guests came round to her side; the thing was original, at least, and might turn out to be amusing. “And supposing it’s something that one—one can’t speak about before ladies?” asked the timid and silent young man.

“Why, then of course, you won’t say anything about it. As if there are not plenty of sins to your score without the need of those!” said Ferdishenko.

“But I really don’t know which of my actions is the worst,” said the lively actress.

“Ladies are exempted if they like.”

“And how are you to know that one isn’t lying? And if one lies the whole point of the game is lost,” said Gania.

“Oh, but think how delightful to hear how one’s friends lie! Besides you needn’t be afraid, Gania; everybody knows what your worst action is without the need of any lying on your part. Only think, gentlemen,”—and Ferdishenko here grew quite enthusiastic, “only think with what eyes we shall observe one another tomorrow, after our tales have been told!”

“But surely this is a joke, Nastasia Philipovna?” asked Totski. “You don’t really mean us to play this game.”

“Whoever is afraid of wolves had better not go into the wood,” said Nastasia, smiling.

“But, pardon me, Mr. Ferdishenko, is it possible to make a game out of this kind of thing?” persisted Totski, growing more and more uneasy. “I assure you it can’t be a success.”

“And why not? Why, the last time I simply told straight off about how I stole three roubles.”

“Perhaps so; but it is hardly possible that you told it so that it seemed like truth, or so that you were believed. And, as Gavrila Ardalionovitch has said, the least suggestion of a falsehood takes all point out of the game. It seems to me that sincerity, on the other hand, is only possible if combined with a kind of bad taste that would be utterly out of place here.”

“How subtle you are, Afanasy Ivanovitch! You astonish me,” cried Ferdishenko. “You will remark, gentlemen, that in saying that I could not recount the story of my theft so as to be believed, Afanasy Ivanovitch has very ingeniously implied that I am not capable of thieving—(it would have been bad taste to say so openly); and all the time he is probably firmly convinced, in his own mind, that I am very well capable of it! But now, gentlemen, to business! Put in your slips, ladies and gentlemen—is yours in, Mr. Totski? So—then we are all ready; now prince, draw, please.” The prince silently put his hand into the hat, and drew the names. Ferdishenko was first, then Ptitsin, then the general, Totski next, his own fifth, then Gania, and so on; the ladies did not draw.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” cried Ferdishenko. “I did so hope the prince would come out first, and then the general. Well, gentlemen, I suppose I must set a good example! What vexes me much is that I am such an insignificant creature that it matters nothing to anybody whether I have done bad actions or not! Besides, which am I to choose? It’s an *embarras de richesse*. Shall I tell how I became a thief on one occasion only, to convince Afanasy Ivanovitch that it is possible to steal without being a thief?”

“Do go on, Ferdishenko, and don’t make unnecessary preface, or you’ll never finish,” said Nastasia Philipovna. All observed how irritable and cross she had become since her last burst of laughter; but none the less obstinately did she stick to her absurd whim about this new game. Totski sat looking miserable enough. The general lingered over his champagne, and seemed to be thinking of some story for the time when his turn should come.

XIV.

“I have no wit, Nastasia Philipovna,” began Ferdishenko, “and therefore I talk too much, perhaps. Were I as witty, now, as Mr. Totski or the general, I should probably have sat silent all the evening, as they have. Now, prince, what do you think?—are there not far more thieves than honest men in this world? Don’t you think we may say there does not exist a single person so honest that he has never stolen anything whatever in his life?”

“What a silly idea,” said the actress. “Of course it is not the case. I have never stolen anything, for one.”

“H’m! very well, Daria Alexeyevna; you have not stolen anything—agreed. But how about the prince, now—look how he is blushing!”

“I think you are partially right, but you exaggerate,” said the prince, who had certainly blushed up, of a sudden, for some reason or other.

“Ferdishenko—either tell us your story, or be quiet, and mind your own business. You exhaust all patience,” cuttingly and irritably remarked Nastasia Philipovna.

“Immediately, immediately! As for my story, gentlemen, it is too stupid and absurd to tell you.

“I assure you I am not a thief, and yet I have stolen; I cannot explain why. It was at Semeon Ivanovitch Ishenka’s country house, one Sunday. He had a dinner party. After dinner the men stayed at the table over their wine. It struck me to ask the daughter of the house to play something on the piano; so I passed through the corner room to join the ladies. In that room, on Maria Ivanovna’s writing-table, I observed a three-rouble note. She must have taken it out for some purpose, and left it lying there. There was no one about. I took up the note and put it in my pocket; why, I can’t say. I don’t know what possessed me to do it, but it was done, and I went quickly back to the dining-room and reseated myself at the dinner-table. I sat and waited there in a great state of excitement. I talked hard, and told lots of stories, and laughed like mad; then I joined the ladies.

“In half an hour or so the loss was discovered, and the servants were being put under examination. Daria, the housemaid was suspected. I exhibited the greatest interest and sympathy, and I remember that poor Daria quite lost her head, and that I began assuring her, before everyone, that I would guarantee her forgiveness on the part of her mistress, if she would confess her guilt. They all stared at the girl, and I remember a wonderful attraction in the reflection that here was I sermonizing away, with the money in my own pocket all the while. I went and spent the three roubles that very

evening at a restaurant. I went in and asked for a bottle of Lafite, and drank it up; I wanted to be rid of the money.

“I did not feel much remorse either then or afterwards; but I would not repeat the performance—believe it or not as you please. There—that’s all.”

“Only, of course that’s not nearly your worst action,” said the actress, with evident dislike in her face.

“That was a psychological phenomenon, not an action,” remarked Totski.

“And what about the maid?” asked Nastasia Philipovna, with undisguised contempt.

“Oh, she was turned out next day, of course. It’s a very strict household, there!”

“And you allowed it?”

“I should think so, rather! I was not going to return and confess next day,” laughed Ferdishenko, who seemed a little surprised at the disagreeable impression which his story had made on all parties.

“How mean you were!” said Nastasia.

“Bah! you wish to hear a man tell of his worst actions, and you expect the story to come out goody-goody! One’s worst actions always are mean. We shall see what the general has to say for himself now. All is not gold that glitters, you know; and because a man keeps his carriage he need not be specially virtuous, I assure you, all sorts of people keep carriages. And by what means?”

In a word, Ferdishenko was very angry and rapidly forgetting himself; his whole face was drawn with passion. Strange as it may appear, he had expected much better success for his story. These little errors of taste on Ferdishenko’s part occurred very frequently. Nastasia trembled with rage, and looked fixedly at him, whereupon he relapsed into alarmed silence. He realized that he had gone a little too far.

“Had we not better end this game?” asked Totski.

“It’s my turn, but I plead exemption,” said Ptitsin.

“You don’t care to oblige us?” asked Nastasia.

“I cannot, I assure you. I confess I do not understand how anyone can play this game.”

“Then, general, it’s your turn,” continued Nastasia Philipovna, “and if you refuse, the whole game will fall through, which will disappoint me very much, for I was looking forward to relating a certain ‘page of my own life.’ I am only waiting for you and Afanasy

Ivanovitch to have your turns, for I require the support of your example," she added, smiling.

"Oh, if you put it in that way," cried the general, excitedly, "I'm ready to tell the whole story of my life, but I must confess that I prepared a little story in anticipation of my turn."

Nastasia smiled amiably at him; but evidently her depression and irritability were increasing with every moment. Totski was dreadfully alarmed to hear her promise a revelation out of her own life.

"I, like everyone else," began the general, "have committed certain not altogether graceful actions, so to speak, during the course of my life. But the strangest thing of all in my case is, that I should consider the little anecdote which I am now about to give you as a confession of the worst of my 'bad actions.' It is thirty-five years since it all happened, and yet I cannot to this very day recall the circumstances without, as it were, a sudden pang at the heart.

"It was a silly affair—I was an ensign at the time. You know ensigns—their blood is boiling water, their circumstances generally penurious. Well, I had a servant Nikifor who used to do everything for me in my quarters, economized and managed for me, and even laid hands on anything he could find (belonging to other people), in order to augment our household goods; but a faithful, honest fellow all the same.

"I was strict, but just by nature. At that time we were stationed in a small town. I was quartered at an old widow's house, a lieutenant's widow of eighty years of age. She lived in a wretched little wooden house, and had not even a servant, so poor was she.

"Her relations had all died off—her husband was dead and buried forty years since; and a niece, who had lived with her and bullied her up to three years ago, was dead too; so that she was quite alone.

"Well, I was precious dull with her, especially as she was so childish that there was nothing to be got out of her. Eventually, she stole a fowl of mine; the business is a mystery to this day; but it could have been no one but herself. I requested to be quartered somewhere else, and was shifted to the other end of the town, to the house of a merchant with a large family, and a long beard, as I remember him. Nikifor and I were delighted to go; but the old lady was not pleased at our departure.

"Well, a day or two afterwards, when I returned from drill, Nikifor says to me: 'We oughtn't to have left our tureen with the old lady, I've nothing to serve the soup in.'

“I asked how it came about that the tureen had been left. Nikifor explained that the old lady refused to give it up, because, she said, we had broken her bowl, and she must have our tureen in place of it; she had declared that I had so arranged the matter with herself.

“This baseness on her part of course aroused my young blood to fever heat; I jumped up, and away I flew.

“I arrived at the old woman’s house beside myself. She was sitting in a corner all alone, leaning her face on her hand. I fell on her like a clap of thunder. ‘You old wretch!’ I yelled and all that sort of thing, in real Russian style. Well, when I began cursing at her, a strange thing happened. I looked at her, and she stared back with her eyes starting out of her head, but she did not say a word. She seemed to sway about as she sat, and looked and looked at me in the strangest way. Well, I soon stopped swearing and looked closer at her, asked her questions, but not a word could I get out of her. The flies were buzzing about the room and only this sound broke the silence; the sun was setting outside; I didn’t know what to make of it, so I went away.

“Before I reached home I was met and summoned to the major’s, so that it was some while before I actually got there. When I came in, Nikifor met me. ‘Have you heard, sir, that our old lady is dead?’ ‘*dead*, when?’ ‘Oh, an hour and a half ago.’ That meant nothing more nor less than that she was dying at the moment when I pounced on her and began abusing her.

“This produced a great effect upon me. I used to dream of the poor old woman at nights. I really am not superstitious, but two days after, I went to her funeral, and as time went on I thought more and more about her. I said to myself, ‘This woman, this human being, lived to a great age. She had children, a husband and family, friends and relations; her household was busy and cheerful; she was surrounded by smiling faces; and then suddenly they are gone, and she is left alone like a solitary fly… like a fly, cursed with the burden of her age. At last, God calls her to Himself. At sunset, on a lovely summer’s evening, my little old woman passes away—a thought, you will notice, which offers much food for reflection—and behold! instead of tears and prayers to start her on her last journey, she has insults and jeers from a young ensign, who stands before her with his hands in his pockets, making a terrible row about a soup tureen!’ Of course I was to blame, and even now that I have time to look back at it calmly, I pity the poor old thing no less. I repeat that I wonder at myself, for after all I was not really responsible. Why did she take it into her head to die at that moment? But the more I thought of it, the more I felt the weight of it upon my mind; and I never got quite rid of the impression until I put a couple of old women into an almshouse

and kept them there at my own expense. There, that's all. I repeat I dare say I have committed many a grievous sin in my day; but I cannot help always looking back upon this as the worst action I have ever perpetrated."

"H'm! and instead of a bad action, your excellency has detailed one of your noblest deeds," said Ferdishenko. "Ferdishenko is 'done.'"

"Dear me, general," said Nastasia Philipovna, absently, "I really never imagined you had such a good heart."

The general laughed with great satisfaction, and applied himself once more to the champagne.

It was now Totski's turn, and his story was awaited with great curiosity—while all eyes turned on Nastasia Philipovna, as though anticipating that his revelation must be connected somehow with her. Nastasia, during the whole of his story, pulled at the lace trimming of her sleeve, and never once glanced at the speaker. Totski was a handsome man, rather stout, with a very polite and dignified manner. He was always well dressed, and his linen was exquisite. He had plump white hands, and wore a magnificent diamond ring on one finger.

"What simplifies the duty before me considerably, in my opinion," he began, "is that I am bound to recall and relate the very worst action of my life. In such circumstances there can, of course, be no doubt. One's conscience very soon informs one what is the proper narrative to tell. I admit, that among the many silly and thoughtless actions of my life, the memory of one comes prominently forward and reminds me that it lay long like a stone on my heart. Some twenty years since, I paid a visit to Platon Ordintzeff at his country-house. He had just been elected marshal of the nobility, and had come there with his young wife for the winter holidays. Anfisa Alexeyevna's birthday came off just then, too, and there were two balls arranged. At that time Dumas-fils' beautiful work, *La Dame aux Camélias*—a novel which I consider imperishable—had just come into fashion. In the provinces all the ladies were in raptures over it, those who had read it, at least. Camellias were all the fashion. Everyone inquired for them, everybody wanted them; and a grand lot of camellias are to be got in a country town—as you all know—and two balls to provide for!

"Poor Peter Volhofskoi was desperately in love with Anfisa Alexeyevna. I don't know whether there was anything—I mean I don't know whether he could possibly have indulged in any hope. The poor fellow was beside himself to get her a bouquet of camellias. Countess Sotski and Sophia Bespalova, as everyone knew, were coming with white camellia bouquets. Anfisa wished for red ones, for effect. Well, her

husband Platon was driven desperate to find some. And the day before the ball, Anfisa's rival snapped up the only red camellias to be had in the place, from under Platon's nose, and Platon—wretched man—was done for. Now if Peter had only been able to step in at this moment with a red bouquet, his little hopes might have made gigantic strides. A woman's gratitude under such circumstances would have been boundless—but it was practically an impossibility.

"The night before the ball I met Peter, looking radiant. 'What is it?' I ask. 'I've found them, Eureka!' 'No! where, where?' 'At Ekshaisk (a little town fifteen miles off) there's a rich old merchant, who keeps a lot of canaries, has no children, and he and his wife are devoted to flowers. He's got some camellias.' 'And what if he won't let you have them?' 'I'll go on my knees and implore till I get them. I won't go away.' 'When shall you start?' 'Tomorrow morning at five o'clock.' 'Go on,' I said, 'and good luck to you.'

"I was glad for the poor fellow, and went home. But an idea got hold of me somehow. I don't know how. It was nearly two in the morning. I rang the bell and ordered the coachman to be waked up and sent to me. He came. I gave him a tip of fifteen roubles, and told him to get the carriage ready at once. In half an hour it was at the door. I got in and off we went.

"By five I drew up at the Ekshaisky inn. I waited there till dawn, and soon after six I was off, and at the old merchant Trepalaf's.

"'Camellias!' I said, 'father, save me, save me, let me have some camellias!' He was a tall, grey old man—a terrible-looking old gentleman. 'Not a bit of it,' he says. 'I won't.' Down I went on my knees. 'Don't say so, don't—think what you're doing!' I cried; 'it's a matter of life and death!' 'If that's the case, take them,' says he. So up I get, and cut such a bouquet of red camellias! He had a whole greenhouse full of them—lovely ones. The old fellow sighs. I pull out a hundred roubles. 'No, no!' says he, 'don't insult me that way.' 'Oh, if that's the case, give it to the village hospital,' I say. 'Ah,' he says, 'that's quite a different matter; that's good of you and generous. I'll pay it in there for you with pleasure.' I liked that old fellow, Russian to the core, *de la vraie souche*. I went home in raptures, but took another road in order to avoid Peter. Immediately on arriving I sent up the bouquet for Anfisa to see when she awoke.

"You may imagine her ecstasy, her gratitude. The wretched Platon, who had almost died since yesterday of the reproaches showered upon him, wept on my shoulder. Of course poor Peter had no chance after this.

“I thought he would cut my throat at first, and went about armed ready to meet him. But he took it differently; he fainted, and had brain fever and convulsions. A month after, when he had hardly recovered, he went off to the Crimea, and there he was shot.

“I assure you this business left me no peace for many a long year. Why did I do it? I was not in love with her myself; I’m afraid it was simply mischief—pure ‘cussedness’ on my part.

“If I hadn’t seized that bouquet from under his nose he might have been alive now, and a happy man. He might have been successful in life, and never have gone to fight the Turks.”

Totski ended his tale with the same dignity that had characterized its commencement.

Nastasia Philipovna’s eyes were flashing in a most unmistakable way, now; and her lips were all a-quiver by the time Totski finished his story.

All present watched both of them with curiosity.

“You were right, Totski,” said Nastasia, “it is a dull game and a stupid one. I’ll just tell my story, as I promised, and then we’ll play cards.”

“Yes, but let’s have the story first!” cried the general.

“Prince,” said Nastasia Philipovna, unexpectedly turning to Muishkin, “here are my old friends, Totski and General Epanchin, who wish to marry me off. Tell me what you think. Shall I marry or not? As you decide, so shall it be.”

Totski grew white as a sheet. The general was struck dumb. All present started and listened intently. Gania sat rooted to his chair.

“Marry whom?” asked the prince, faintly.

“Gavrila Ardalionovitch Ivolgin,” said Nastasia, firmly and evenly.

There were a few seconds of dead silence.

The prince tried to speak, but could not form his words; a great weight seemed to lie upon his breast and suffocate him.

“N-no! don’t marry him!” he whispered at last, drawing his breath with an effort.

“So be it, then. Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” she spoke solemnly and forcibly, “you hear the prince’s decision? Take it as my decision; and let that be the end of the matter for good and all.”

“Nastasia Philipovna!” cried Totski, in a quaking voice.

“Nastasia Philipovna!” said the general, in persuasive but agitated tones.

Everyone in the room fidgeted in their places, and waited to see what was coming next.

“Well, gentlemen!” she continued, gazing around in apparent astonishment; “what do you all look so alarmed about? Why are you so upset?”

“But—recollect, Nastasia Philipovna,” stammered Totski, “you gave a promise, quite a free one, and—and you might have spared us this. I am confused and bewildered, I know; but, in a word, at such a moment, and before company, and all so-so-irregular, finishing off a game with a serious matter like this, a matter of honour, and of heart, and—”

“I don’t follow you, Afanasy Ivanovitch; you are losing your head. In the first place, what do you mean by ‘before company’? Isn’t the company good enough for you? And what’s all that about ‘a game’? I wished to tell my little story, and I told it! Don’t you like it? You heard what I said to the prince? ‘As you decide, so it shall be!’ If he had said ‘yes,’ I should have given my consent! But he said ‘no,’ so I refused. Here was my whole life hanging on his one word! Surely I was serious enough?”

“The prince! What on earth has the prince got to do with it? Who the deuce is the prince?” cried the general, who could conceal his wrath no longer.

“The prince has this to do with it—that I see in him for the first time in all my life, a man endowed with real truthfulness of spirit, and I trust him. He trusted me at first sight, and I trust him!”

“It only remains for me, then, to thank Nastasia Philipovna for the great delicacy with which she has treated me,” said Gania, as pale as death, and with quivering lips. “That is my plain duty, of course; but the prince—what has he to do in the matter?”

“I see what you are driving at,” said Nastasia Philipovna. “You imply that the prince is after the seventy-five thousand roubles—I quite understand you. Mr. Totski, I forgot to say, ‘Take your seventy-five thousand roubles’—I don’t want them. I let you go free for nothing—take your freedom! You must need it. Nine years and three months’ captivity is enough for anybody. Tomorrow I shall start afresh—today I am a free agent for the first time in my life.

“General, you must take your pearls back, too—give them to your wife—here they are! Tomorrow I shall leave this flat altogether, and then there’ll be no more of these pleasant little social gatherings, ladies and gentlemen.”

So saying, she scornfully rose from her seat as though to depart.

“Nastasia Philipovna! Nastasia Philipovna!”

The words burst involuntarily from every mouth. All present started up in bewildered excitement; all surrounded her; all had listened uneasily to her wild, disconnected sentences. All felt that something had happened, something had gone very far wrong indeed, but no one could make head or tail of the matter.

At this moment there was a furious ring at the bell, and a great knock at the door—exactly similar to the one which had startled the company at Gania’s house in the afternoon.

“Ah, ah! here’s the climax at last, at half-past twelve!” cried Nastasia Philipovna. “Sit down, gentlemen, I beg you. Something is about to happen.”

So saying, she reseated herself; a strange smile played on her lips. She sat quite still, but watched the door in a fever of impatience.

“Rogojin and his hundred thousand roubles, no doubt of it,” muttered Ptitsin to himself.