VI.

“I will not deceive you. ‘Reality’ got me so entrapped in its meshes now and again during the past six months, that I forgot my ‘sentence’ (or perhaps I did not wish to think of it), and actually busied myself with affairs.

“A word as to my circumstances. When, eight months since, I became very ill, I threw up all my old connections and dropped all my old companions. As I was always a gloomy, morose sort of individual, my friends easily forgot me; of course, they would have forgotten me all the same, without that excuse. My position at home was solitary enough. Five months ago I separated myself entirely from the family, and no one dared enter my room except at stated times, to clean and tidy it, and so on, and to bring me my meals. My mother dared not disobey me; she kept the children quiet, for my sake, and beat them if they dared to make any noise and disturb me. I so often complained of them that I should think they must be very fond, indeed, of me by this time. I think I must have tormented ‘my faithful Colia’ (as I called him) a good deal too. He tormented me of late; I could see that he always bore my tempers as though he had determined to ‘spare the poor invalid.’ This annoyed me, naturally. He seemed to have taken it into his head to imitate the prince in Christian meekness! Surikoff, who lived above us, annoyed me, too. He was so miserably poor, and I used to prove to him that he had no one to blame but himself for his poverty. I used to be so angry that I think I frightened him eventually, for he stopped coming to see me. He was a most meek and humble fellow, was Surikoff. (N.B.—They say that meekness is a great power. I must ask the prince about this, for the expression is his.) But I remember one day in March, when I went up to his lodgings to see whether it was true that one of his children had been starved and frozen to death, I began to hold forth to him about his poverty being his own fault, and, in the course of my remarks, I accidentally smiled at the corpse of his child. Well, the poor wretch’s lips began to tremble, and he caught me by the shoulder, and pushed me to the door. ‘Go out,’ he said, in a whisper. I went out, of course, and I declare I *liked* it. I liked it at the very moment when I was turned out. But his words filled me with a strange sort of feeling of disdainful pity for him whenever I thought of them—a feeling which I did not in the least desire to entertain. At the very moment of the insult (for I admit that I did insult him, though I did not mean to), this man could not lose his temper. His lips had trembled, but I swear it was not with rage. He had taken me by the arm, and said, ‘Go out,’ without the least anger. There was dignity, a great deal of dignity, about him, and it was so inconsistent with the look of him that, I assure you, it was quite comical. But there was no anger. Perhaps he merely began to despise me at that moment.

“Since that time he has always taken off his hat to me on the stairs, whenever I met him, which is a thing he never did before; but he always gets away from me as quickly as he can, as though he felt confused. If he did despise me, he despised me ‘meekly,’ after his own fashion.

“I dare say he only took his hat off out of fear, as it were, to the son of his creditor; for he always owed my mother money. I thought of having an explanation with him, but I knew that if I did, he would begin to apologize in a minute or two, so I decided to let him alone.

“Just about that time, that is, the middle of March, I suddenly felt very much better; this continued for a couple of weeks. I used to go out at dusk. I like the dusk, especially in March, when the night frost begins to harden the day’s puddles, and the gas is burning.

“Well, one night in the Shestilavochnaya, a man passed me with a paper parcel under his arm. I did not take stock of him very carefully, but he seemed to be dressed in some shabby summer dust-coat, much too light for the season. When he was opposite the lamp-post, some ten yards away, I observed something fall out of his pocket. I hurried forward to pick it up, just in time, for an old wretch in a long kaftan rushed up too. He did not dispute the matter, but glanced at what was in my hand and disappeared.

“It was a large old-fashioned pocket-book, stuffed full; but I guessed, at a glance, that it had anything in the world inside it, except money.

“The owner was now some forty yards ahead of me, and was very soon lost in the crowd. I ran after him, and began calling out; but as I knew nothing to say excepting ‘hey!’ he did not turn round. Suddenly he turned into the gate of a house to the left; and when I darted in after him, the gateway was so dark that I could see nothing whatever. It was one of those large houses built in small tenements, of which there must have been at least a hundred.

“When I entered the yard I thought I saw a man going along on the far side of it; but it was so dark I could not make out his figure.

“I crossed to that corner and found a dirty dark staircase. I heard a man mounting up above me, some way higher than I was, and thinking I should catch him before his door would be opened to him, I rushed after him. I heard a door open and shut on the fifth storey, as I panted along; the stairs were narrow, and the steps innumerable, but at last I reached the door I thought the right one. Some moments passed before I found the bell and got it to ring.

“An old peasant woman opened the door; she was busy lighting the ‘samovar’ in a tiny kitchen. She listened silently to my questions, did not understand a word, of course, and opened another door leading into a little bit of a room, low and scarcely furnished at all, but with a large, wide bed in it, hung with curtains. On this bed lay one Terentich, as the woman called him, drunk, it appeared to me. On the table was an end of candle in an iron candlestick, and a half-bottle of vodka, nearly finished. Terentich muttered something to me, and signed towards the next room. The old woman had disappeared, so there was nothing for me to do but to open the door indicated. I did so, and entered the next room.

“This was still smaller than the other, so cramped that I could scarcely turn round; a narrow single bed at one side took up nearly all the room. Besides the bed there were only three common chairs, and a wretched old kitchen-table standing before a small sofa. One could hardly squeeze through between the table and the bed.

“On the table, as in the other room, burned a tallow candle-end in an iron candlestick; and on the bed there whined a baby of scarcely three weeks old. A pale-looking woman was dressing the child, probably the mother; she looked as though she had not as yet got over the trouble of childbirth, she seemed so weak and was so carelessly dressed. Another child, a little girl of about three years old, lay on the sofa, covered over with what looked like a man’s old dress-coat.

“At the table stood a man in his shirt sleeves; he had thrown off his coat; it lay upon the bed; and he was unfolding a blue paper parcel in which were a couple of pounds of bread, and some little sausages.

“On the table along with these things were a few old bits of black bread, and some tea in a pot. From under the bed there protruded an open portmanteau full of bundles of rags. In a word, the confusion and untidiness of the room were indescribable.

“It appeared to me, at the first glance, that both the man and the woman were respectable people, but brought to that pitch of poverty where untidiness seems to get the better of every effort to cope with it, till at last they take a sort of bitter satisfaction in it. When I entered the room, the man, who had entered but a moment before me, and was still unpacking his parcels, was saying something to his wife in an excited manner. The news was apparently bad, as usual, for the woman began whimpering. The man’s face seemed to me to be refined and even pleasant. He was dark-complexioned, and about twenty-eight years of age; he wore black whiskers, and his lip and chin were shaved. He looked morose, but with a sort of pride of expression. A curious scene followed.

“There are people who find satisfaction in their own touchy feelings, especially when they have just taken the deepest offence; at such moments they feel that they would rather be offended than not. These easily-ignited natures, if they are wise, are always full of remorse afterwards, when they reflect that they have been ten times as angry as they need have been.

“The gentleman before me gazed at me for some seconds in amazement, and his wife in terror; as though there was something alarmingly extraordinary in the fact that anyone could come to see them. But suddenly he fell upon me almost with fury; I had had no time to mutter more than a couple of words; but he had doubtless observed that I was decently dressed and, therefore, took deep offence because I had dared enter his den so unceremoniously, and spy out the squalor and untidiness of it.

“Of course he was delighted to get hold of someone upon whom to vent his rage against things in general.

“For a moment I thought he would assault me; he grew so pale that he looked like a woman about to have hysterics; his wife was dreadfully alarmed.

“‘How dare you come in so? Be off!’ he shouted, trembling all over with rage and scarcely able to articulate the words. Suddenly, however, he observed his pocketbook in my hand.

“‘I think you dropped this,’ I remarked, as quietly and drily as I could. (I thought it best to treat him so.) For some while he stood before me in downright terror, and seemed unable to understand. He then suddenly grabbed at his side-pocket, opened his mouth in alarm, and beat his forehead with his hand.

“‘My God!’ he cried, ‘where did you find it? How?’ I explained in as few words as I could, and as drily as possible, how I had seen it and picked it up; how I had run after him, and called out to him, and how I had followed him upstairs and groped my way to his door.

“‘Gracious Heaven!’ he cried, ‘all our papers are in it! My dear sir, you little know what you have done for us. I should have been lost—lost!’

“I had taken hold of the door-handle meanwhile, intending to leave the room without reply; but I was panting with my run upstairs, and my exhaustion came to a climax in a violent fit of coughing, so bad that I could hardly stand.

“I saw how the man dashed about the room to find me an empty chair, how he kicked the rags off a chair which was covered up by them, brought it to me, and helped me to sit down; but my cough went on for another three minutes or so. When I came to

myself he was sitting by me on another chair, which he had also cleared of the rubbish by throwing it all over the floor, and was watching me intently.

"'I'm afraid you are ill?' he remarked, in the tone which doctors use when they address a patient. 'I am myself a medical man' (he did not say 'doctor'), with which words he waved his hands towards the room and its contents as though in protest at his present condition. 'I see that you—'

"'I'm in consumption,' I said laconically, rising from my seat.

"He jumped up, too.

"'Perhaps you are exaggerating—if you were to take proper measures perhaps—"

"He was terribly confused and did not seem able to collect his scattered senses; the pocket-book was still in his left hand.

"'Oh, don't mind me,' I said. 'Dr. B—— saw me last week' (I lugged him in again), 'and my hash is quite settled; pardon me—' I took hold of the door-handle again. I was on the point of opening the door and leaving my grateful but confused medical friend to himself and his shame, when my damnable cough got hold of me again.

"My doctor insisted on my sitting down again to get my breath. He now said something to his wife who, without leaving her place, addressed a few words of gratitude and courtesy to me. She seemed very shy over it, and her sickly face flushed up with confusion. I remained, but with the air of a man who knows he is intruding and is anxious to get away. The doctor's remorse at last seemed to need a vent, I could see.

"'If I—' he began, breaking off abruptly every other moment, and starting another sentence. 'I—I am so very grateful to you, and I am so much to blame in your eyes, I feel sure, I—you see—' (he pointed to the room again) 'at this moment I am in such a position—'

"'Oh!' I said, 'there's nothing to see; it's quite a clear case—you've lost your post and have come up to make explanations and get another, if you can!'

"'How do you know that?' he asked in amazement.

"'Oh, it was evident at the first glance,' I said ironically, but not intentionally so. 'There are lots of people who come up from the provinces full of hope, and run about town, and have to live as best they can.'

"He began to talk at once excitedly and with trembling lips; he began complaining and telling me his story. He interested me, I confess; I sat there nearly an hour. His story

was a very ordinary one. He had been a provincial doctor; he had a civil appointment, and had no sooner taken it up than intrigues began. Even his wife was dragged into these. He was proud, and flew into a passion; there was a change of local government which acted in favour of his opponents; his position was undermined, complaints were made against him; he lost his post and came up to Petersburg with his last remaining money, in order to appeal to higher authorities. Of course nobody would listen to him for a long time; he would come and tell his story one day and be refused promptly; another day he would be fed on false promises; again he would be treated harshly; then he would be told to sign some documents; then he would sign the paper and hand it in, and they would refuse to receive it, and tell him to file a formal petition. In a word he had been driven about from office to office for five months and had spent every farthing he had; his wife's last rags had just been pawned; and meanwhile a child had been born to them and—and today I have a final refusal to my petition, and I have hardly a crumb of bread left—I have nothing left; my wife has had a baby lately—and I—I—'

"He sprang up from his chair and turned away. His wife was crying in the corner; the child had begun to moan again. I pulled out my note-book and began writing in it. When I had finished and rose from my chair he was standing before me with an expression of alarmed curiosity.

"'I have jotted down your name,' I told him, 'and all the rest of it—the place you served at, the district, the date, and all. I have a friend, Bachmatoff, whose uncle is a councillor of state and has to do with these matters, one Peter Matveyevitch Bachmatoff.'

"'Peter Matveyevitch Bachmatoff!' he cried, trembling all over with excitement. 'Why, nearly everything depends on that very man!'

"It is very curious, this story of the medical man, and my visit, and the happy termination to which I contributed by accident! Everything fitted in, as in a novel. I told the poor people not to put much hope in me, because I was but a poor schoolboy myself—(I am not really, but I humiliated myself as much as possible in order to make them less hopeful)—but that I would go at once to the Vassili Ostroff and see my friend; and that as I knew for certain that his uncle adored him, and was absolutely devoted to him as the last hope and branch of the family, perhaps the old man might do something to oblige his nephew.

"'If only they would allow me to explain all to his excellency! If I could but be permitted to tell my tale to him!" he cried, trembling with feverish agitation, and his eyes flashing with excitement. I repeated once more that I could not hold out much hope—that it

would probably end in smoke, and if I did not turn up next morning they must make up their minds that there was no more to be done in the matter.

“They showed me out with bows and every kind of respect; they seemed quite beside themselves. I shall never forget the expression of their faces!

“I took a droshky and drove over to the Vassili Ostroff at once. For some years I had been at enmity with this young Bachmatoff, at school. We considered him an aristocrat; at all events I called him one. He used to dress smartly, and always drove to school in a private trap. He was a good companion, and was always merry and jolly, sometimes even witty, though he was not very intellectual, in spite of the fact that he was always top of the class; I myself was never top in anything! All his companions were very fond of him, excepting myself. He had several times during those years come up to me and tried to make friends; but I had always turned sulkily away and refused to have anything to do with him. I had not seen him for a whole year now; he was at the university. When, at nine o’clock, or so, this evening, I arrived and was shown up to him with great ceremony, he first received me with astonishment, and not too affably, but he soon cheered up, and suddenly gazed intently at me and burst out laughing.

“‘Why, what on earth can have possessed you to come and see *me*, Terentieff?’ he cried, with his usual pleasant, sometimes audacious, but never offensive familiarity, which I liked in reality, but for which I also detested him. ‘Why what’s the matter?’ he cried in alarm. ‘Are you ill?’

“That confounded cough of mine had come on again; I fell into a chair, and with difficulty recovered my breath. ‘It’s all right, it’s only consumption’ I said. ‘I have come to you with a petition!’

“He sat down in amazement, and I lost no time in telling him the medical man’s history; and explained that he, with the influence which he possessed over his uncle, might do some good to the poor fellow.

“‘I’ll do it—I’ll do it, of course!’ he said. ‘I shall attack my uncle about it tomorrow morning, and I’m very glad you told me the story. But how was it that you thought of coming to me about it, Terentieff?’

“‘So much depends upon your uncle,’ I said. ‘And besides we have always been enemies, Bachmatoff; and as you are a generous sort of fellow, I thought you would not refuse my request because I was your enemy!’ I added with irony.

“‘Like Napoleon going to England, eh?’ cried he, laughing. ‘I’ll do it though—of course, and at once, if I can!’ he added, seeing that I rose seriously from my chair at this point.

“And sure enough the matter ended as satisfactorily as possible. A month or so later my medical friend was appointed to another post. He got his travelling expenses paid, and something to help him to start life with once more. I think Bachmatoff must have persuaded the doctor to accept a loan from himself. I saw Bachmatoff two or three times, about this period, the third time being when he gave a farewell dinner to the doctor and his wife before their departure, a champagne dinner.

“Bachmatoff saw me home after the dinner and we crossed the Nicolai bridge. We were both a little drunk. He told me of his joy, the joyful feeling of having done a good action; he said that it was all thanks to myself that he could feel this satisfaction; and held forth about the foolishness of the theory that individual charity is useless.

“I, too, was burning to have my say!

“‘In Moscow,’ I said, ‘there was an old state counsellor, a civil general, who, all his life, had been in the habit of visiting the prisons and speaking to criminals. Every party of convicts on its way to Siberia knew beforehand that on the Vorobeef Hills the “old general” would pay them a visit. He did all he undertook seriously and devotedly. He would walk down the rows of the unfortunate prisoners, stop before each individual and ask after his needs—he never sermonized them; he spoke kindly to them—he gave them money; he brought them all sorts of necessaries for the journey, and gave them devotional books, choosing those who could read, under the firm conviction that they would read to those who could not, as they went along.

“‘He scarcely ever talked about the particular crimes of any of them, but listened if any volunteered information on that point. All the convicts were equal for him, and he made no distinction. He spoke to all as to brothers, and every one of them looked upon him as a father. When he observed among the exiles some poor woman with a child, he would always come forward and fondle the little one, and make it laugh. He continued these acts of mercy up to his very death; and by that time all the criminals, all over Russia and Siberia, knew him!

“‘A man I knew who had been to Siberia and returned, told me that he himself had been a witness of how the very most hardened criminals remembered the old general, though, in point of fact, he could never, of course, have distributed more than a few pence to each member of a party. Their recollection of him was not sentimental or particularly devoted. Some wretch, for instance, who had been a murderer—cutting the throat of a dozen fellow-creatures, for instance; or stabbing six little children for

his own amusement (there have been such men!)—would perhaps, without rhyme or reason, suddenly give a sigh and say, “I wonder whether that old general is alive still!” Although perhaps he had not thought of mentioning him for a dozen years before! How can one say what seed of good may have been dropped into his soul, never to die?’

“I continued in that strain for a long while, pointing out to Bachmatoff how impossible it is to follow up the effects of any isolated good deed one may do, in all its influences and subtle workings upon the heart and after-actions of others.

“‘And to think that you are to be cut off from life!’ remarked Bachmatoff, in a tone of reproach, as though he would like to find someone to pitch into on my account.

“We were leaning over the balustrade of the bridge, looking into the Neva at this moment.

“‘Do you know what has suddenly come into my head?’ said I, suddenly—leaning further and further over the rail.

“‘Surely not to throw yourself into the river?’ cried Bachmatoff in alarm. Perhaps he read my thought in my face.

“‘No, not yet. At present nothing but the following consideration. You see I have some two or three months left me to live—perhaps four; well, supposing that when I have but a month or two more, I take a fancy for some “good deed” that needs both trouble and time, like this business of our doctor friend, for instance: why, I shall have to give up the idea of it and take to something else—some *little* good deed, *more within my means*, eh? Isn’t that an amusing idea!’

“Poor Bachmatoff was much impressed—painfully so. He took me all the way home; not attempting to console me, but behaving with the greatest delicacy. On taking leave he pressed my hand warmly and asked permission to come and see me. I replied that if he came to me as a ‘comforter,’ so to speak (for he would be in that capacity whether he spoke to me in a soothing manner or only kept silence, as I pointed out to him), he would but remind me each time of my approaching death! He shrugged his shoulders, but quite agreed with me; and we parted better friends than I had expected.

“But that evening and that night were sown the first seeds of my ‘last conviction.’ I seized greedily on my new idea; I thirstily drank in all its different aspects (I did not sleep a wink that night!), and the deeper I went into it the more my being seemed to merge itself in it, and the more alarmed I became. A dreadful terror came over me at last, and did not leave me all next day.

“Sometimes, thinking over this, I became quite numb with the terror of it; and I might well have deduced from this fact, that my ‘last conviction’ was eating into my being too fast and too seriously, and would undoubtedly come to its climax before long. And for the climax I needed greater determination than I yet possessed.

“However, within three weeks my determination was taken, owing to a very strange circumstance.

“Here on my paper, I make a note of all the figures and dates that come into my explanation. Of course, it is all the same to me, but just now—and perhaps only at this moment—I desire that all those who are to judge of my action should see clearly out of how logical a sequence of deductions has at length proceeded my ‘last conviction.’

“I have said above that the determination needed by me for the accomplishment of my final resolve, came to hand not through any sequence of causes, but thanks to a certain strange circumstance which had perhaps no connection whatever with the matter at issue. Ten days ago Rogojin called upon me about certain business of his own with which I have nothing to do at present. I had never seen Rogojin before, but had often heard about him.

“I gave him all the information he needed, and he very soon took his departure; so that, since he only came for the purpose of gaining the information, the matter might have been expected to end there.

“But he interested me too much, and all that day I was under the influence of strange thoughts connected with him, and I determined to return his visit the next day.

“Rogojin was evidently by no means pleased to see me, and hinted, delicately, that he saw no reason why our acquaintance should continue. For all that, however, I spent a very interesting hour, and so, I dare say, did he. There was so great a contrast between us that I am sure we must both have felt it; anyhow, I felt it acutely. Here was I, with my days numbered, and he, a man in the full vigour of life, living in the present, without the slightest thought for ‘final convictions,’ or numbers, or days, or, in fact, for anything but that which-which—well, which he was mad about, if he will excuse me the expression—as a feeble author who cannot express his ideas properly.

“In spite of his lack of amiability, I could not help seeing, in Rogojin a man of intellect and sense; and although, perhaps, there was little in the outside world which was of interest to him, still he was clearly a man with eyes to see.

“I hinted nothing to him about my ‘final conviction,’ but it appeared to me that he had guessed it from my words. He remained silent—he is a terribly silent man. I remarked

to him, as I rose to depart, that, in spite of the contrast and the wide differences between us two, les extremites se touchent ('extremes meet,' as I explained to him in Russian); so that maybe he was not so far from my final conviction as appeared.

"His only reply to this was a sour grimace. He rose and looked for my cap, and placed it in my hand, and led me out of the house—that dreadful gloomy house of his—to all appearances, of course, as though I were leaving of my own accord, and he were simply seeing me to the door out of politeness. His house impressed me much; it is like a burial-ground, he seems to like it, which is, however, quite natural. Such a full life as he leads is so overflowing with absorbing interests that he has little need of assistance from his surroundings.

"The visit to Rogojin exhausted me terribly. Besides, I had felt ill since the morning; and by evening I was so weak that I took to my bed, and was in high fever at intervals, and even delirious. Colia sat with me until eleven o'clock.

"Yet I remember all he talked about, and every word we said, though whenever my eyes closed for a moment I could picture nothing but the image of Surikoff just in the act of finding a million roubles. He could not make up his mind what to do with the money, and tore his hair over it. He trembled with fear that somebody would rob him, and at last he decided to bury it in the ground. I persuaded him that, instead of putting it all away uselessly underground, he had better melt it down and make a golden coffin out of it for his starved child, and then dig up the little one and put her into the golden coffin. Surikoff accepted this suggestion, I thought, with tears of gratitude, and immediately commenced to carry out my design.

"I thought I spat on the ground and left him in disgust. Colia told me, when I quite recovered my senses, that I had not been asleep for a moment, but that I had spoken to him about Surikoff the whole while.

"At moments I was in a state of dreadful weakness and misery, so that Colia was greatly disturbed when he left me.

"When I arose to lock the door after him, I suddenly called to mind a picture I had noticed at Rogojin's in one of his gloomiest rooms, over the door. He had pointed it out to me himself as we walked past it, and I believe I must have stood a good five minutes in front of it. There was nothing artistic about it, but the picture made me feel strangely uncomfortable. It represented Christ just taken down from the cross. It seems to me that painters as a rule represent the Saviour, both on the cross and taken down from it, with great beauty still upon His face. This marvellous beauty they strive to preserve even in His moments of deepest agony and passion. But there was no

such beauty in Rogojin's picture. This was the presentment of a poor mangled body which had evidently suffered unbearable anguish even before its crucifixion, full of wounds and bruises, marks of the violence of soldiers and people, and of the bitterness of the moment when He had fallen with the cross—all this combined with the anguish of the actual crucifixion.

"The face was depicted as though still suffering; as though the body, only just dead, was still almost quivering with agony. The picture was one of pure nature, for the face was not beautified by the artist, but was left as it would naturally be, whosoever the sufferer, after such anguish.

"I know that the earliest Christian faith taught that the Saviour suffered actually and not figuratively, and that nature was allowed her own way even while His body was on the cross.

"It is strange to look on this dreadful picture of the mangled corpse of the Saviour, and to put this question to oneself: 'Supposing that the disciples, the future apostles, the women who had followed Him and stood by the cross, all of whom believed in and worshipped Him—supposing that they saw this tortured body, this face so mangled and bleeding and bruised (and they *must* have so seen it)—how could they have gazed upon the dreadful sight and yet have believed that He would rise again?'

"The thought steps in, whether one likes it or no, that death is so terrible and so powerful, that even He who conquered it in His miracles during life was unable to triumph over it at the last. He who called to Lazarus, 'Lazarus, come forth!' and the dead man lived—He was now Himself a prey to nature and death. Nature appears to one, looking at this picture, as some huge, implacable, dumb monster; or still better—a stranger simile—some enormous mechanical engine of modern days which has seized and crushed and swallowed up a great and invaluable Being, a Being worth nature and all her laws, worth the whole earth, which was perhaps created merely for the sake of the advent of that Being.

"This blind, dumb, implacable, eternal, unreasoning force is well shown in the picture, and the absolute subordination of all men and things to it is so well expressed that the idea unconsciously arises in the mind of anyone who looks at it. All those faithful people who were gazing at the cross and its mutilated occupant must have suffered agony of mind that evening; for they must have felt that all their hopes and almost all their faith had been shattered at a blow. They must have separated in terror and dread that night, though each perhaps carried away with him one great thought which was never eradicated from his mind for ever afterwards. If this great Teacher of theirs could have seen Himself after the Crucifixion, how could He have consented to mount the

Cross and to die as He did? This thought also comes into the mind of the man who gazes at this picture. I thought of all this by snatches probably between my attacks of delirium—for an hour and a half or so before Colia's departure.

"Can there be an appearance of that which has no form? And yet it seemed to me, at certain moments, that I beheld in some strange and impossible form, that dark, dumb, irresistibly powerful, eternal force.

"I thought someone led me by the hand and showed me, by the light of a candle, a huge, loathsome insect, which he assured me was that very force, that very almighty, dumb, irresistible Power, and laughed at the indignation with which I received this information. In my room they always light the little lamp before my icon for the night; it gives a feeble flicker of light, but it is strong enough to see by dimly, and if you sit just under it you can even read by it. I think it was about twelve or a little past that night. I had not slept a wink, and was lying with my eyes wide open, when suddenly the door opened, and in came Rogojin.

"He entered, and shut the door behind him. Then he silently gazed at me and went quickly to the corner of the room where the lamp was burning and sat down underneath it.

"I was much surprised, and looked at him expectantly.

"Rogojin only leaned his elbow on the table and silently stared at me. So passed two or three minutes, and I recollect that his silence hurt and offended me very much. Why did he not speak?

"That his arrival at this time of night struck me as more or less strange may possibly be the case; but I remember I was by no means amazed at it. On the contrary, though I had not actually told him my thought in the morning, yet I know he understood it; and this thought was of such a character that it would not be anything very remarkable, if one were to come for further talk about it at any hour of night, however late.

"I thought he must have come for this purpose.

"In the morning we had parted not the best of friends; I remember he looked at me with disagreeable sarcasm once or twice; and this same look I observed in his eyes now—which was the cause of the annoyance I felt.

"I did not for a moment suspect that I was delirious and that this Rogojin was but the result of fever and excitement. I had not the slightest idea of such a theory at first.

"Meanwhile he continued to sit and stare jeeringly at me.

“I angrily turned round in bed and made up my mind that I would not say a word unless he did; so I rested silently on my pillow determined to remain dumb, if it were to last till morning. I felt resolved that he should speak first. Probably twenty minutes or so passed in this way. Suddenly the idea struck me—what if this is an apparition and not Rogojin himself?

“Neither during my illness nor at any previous time had I ever seen an apparition;—but I had always thought, both when I was a little boy, and even now, that if I were to see one I should die on the spot—though I don’t believe in ghosts. And yet *now*, when the idea struck me that this was a ghost and not Rogojin at all, I was not in the least alarmed. Nay—the thought actually irritated me. Strangely enough, the decision of the question as to whether this were a ghost or Rogojin did not, for some reason or other, interest me nearly so much as it ought to have done;—I think I began to muse about something altogether different. For instance, I began to wonder why Rogojin, who had been in dressing-gown and slippers when I saw him at home, had now put on a dress-coat and white waistcoat and tie? I also thought to myself, I remember—‘if this is a ghost, and I am not afraid of it, why don’t I approach it and verify my suspicions? Perhaps I am afraid—’ And no sooner did this last idea enter my head than an icy blast blew over me; I felt a chill down my backbone and my knees shook.

“At this very moment, as though divining my thoughts, Rogojin raised his head from his arm and began to part his lips as though he were going to laugh—but he continued to stare at me as persistently as before.

“I felt so furious with him at this moment that I longed to rush at him; but as I had sworn that he should speak first, I continued to lie still—and the more willingly, as I was still by no means satisfied as to whether it really was Rogojin or not.

“I cannot remember how long this lasted; I cannot recollect, either, whether consciousness forsook me at intervals, or not. But at last Rogojin rose, staring at me as intently as ever, but not smiling any longer,—and walking very softly, almost on tip-toes, to the door, he opened it, went out, and shut it behind him.

“I did not rise from my bed, and I don’t know how long I lay with my eyes open, thinking. I don’t know what I thought about, nor how I fell asleep or became insensible; but I awoke next morning after nine o’clock when they knocked at my door. My general orders are that if I don’t open the door and call, by nine o’clock, Matreona is to come and bring my tea. When I now opened the door to her, the thought suddenly struck me—how could he have come in, since the door was locked? I made inquiries and found that Rogojin himself could not possibly have come in, because all our doors were locked for the night.

“Well, this strange circumstance—which I have described with so much detail—was the ultimate cause which led me to taking my final determination. So that no logic, or logical deductions, had anything to do with my resolve;—it was simply a matter of disgust.

“It was impossible for me to go on living when life was full of such detestable, strange, tormenting forms. This ghost had humiliated me;—nor could I bear to be subordinate to that dark, horrible force which was embodied in the form of the loathsome insect. It was only towards evening, when I had quite made up my mind on this point, that I began to feel easier.”

VII.

“I had a small pocket pistol. I had procured it while still a boy, at that droll age when the stories of duels and highwaymen begin to delight one, and when one imagines oneself nobly standing fire at some future day, in a duel.

“There were a couple of old bullets in the bag which contained the pistol, and powder enough in an old flask for two or three charges.

“The pistol was a wretched thing, very crooked and wouldn’t carry farther than fifteen paces at the most. However, it would send your skull flying well enough if you pressed the muzzle of it against your temple.

“I determined to die at Pavlofsk at sunrise, in the park—so as to make no commotion in the house.

“This ‘explanation’ will make the matter clear enough to the police. Students of psychology, and anyone else who likes, may make what they please of it. I should not like this paper, however, to be made public. I request the prince to keep a copy himself, and to give a copy to Aglaya Ivanovna Epanchin. This is my last will and testament. As for my skeleton, I bequeath it to the Medical Academy for the benefit of science.

“I recognize no jurisdiction over myself, and I know that I am now beyond the power of laws and judges.

“A little while ago a very amusing idea struck me. What if I were now to commit some terrible crime—murder ten fellow-creatures, for instance, or anything else that is thought most shocking and dreadful in this world—what a dilemma my judges would be in, with a criminal who only has a fortnight to live in any case, now that the rack and other forms of torture are abolished! Why, I should die comfortably in their own

hospital—in a warm, clean room, with an attentive doctor—probably much more comfortably than I should at home.

“I don’t understand why people in my position do not oftener indulge in such ideas—if only for a joke! Perhaps they do! Who knows! There are plenty of merry souls among us!

“But though I do not recognize any jurisdiction over myself, still I know that I shall be judged, when I am nothing but a voiceless lump of clay; therefore I do not wish to go before I have left a word of reply—the reply of a free man—not one forced to justify himself—oh no! I have no need to ask forgiveness of anyone. I wish to say a word merely because I happen to desire it of my own free will.

“Here, in the first place, comes a strange thought!

“Who, in the name of what Law, would think of disputing my full personal right over the fortnight of life left to me? What jurisdiction can be brought to bear upon the case? Who would wish me, not only to be sentenced, but to endure the sentence to the end? Surely there exists no man who would wish such a thing—why should anyone desire it? For the sake of morality? Well, I can understand that if I were to make an attempt upon my own life while in the enjoyment of full health and vigour—my life which might have been ‘useful,’ etc., etc.—morality might reproach me, according to the old routine, for disposing of my life without permission—or whatever its tenet may be. But now, *now*, when my sentence is out and my days numbered! How can morality have need of my last breaths, and why should I die listening to the consolations offered by the prince, who, without doubt, would not omit to demonstrate that death is actually a benefactor to me? (Christians like him always end up with that—it is their pet theory.) And what do they want with their ridiculous ‘Pavlofsk trees’? To sweeten my last hours? Cannot they understand that the more I forget myself, the more I let myself become attached to these last illusions of life and love, by means of which they try to hide from me Meyer’s wall, and all that is so plainly written on it—the more unhappy they make me? What is the use of all your nature to me—all your parks and trees, your sunsets and sunrises, your blue skies and your self-satisfied faces—when all this wealth of beauty and happiness begins with the fact that it accounts me—only me—one too many! What is the good of all this beauty and glory to me, when every second, every moment, I cannot but be aware that this little fly which buzzes around my head in the sun’s rays—even this little fly is a sharer and participator in all the glory of the universe, and knows its place and is happy in it;—while I—only I, am an outcast, and have been blind to the fact hitherto, thanks to my simplicity! Oh! I know well how the

prince and others would like me, instead of indulging in all these wicked words of my own, to sing, to the glory and triumph of morality, that well-known verse of Gilbert's:

"'O, puissent voir longtemps votre beauté sacrée
Tant d'amis, sourds à mes adieux!
Qu'ils meurent pleins de jours, que leur mort soit pleurée,
Qu'un ami leur ferme les yeux!'

"But believe me, believe me, my simple-hearted friends, that in this highly moral verse, in this academical blessing to the world in general in the French language, is hidden the intensest gall and bitterness; but so well concealed is the venom, that I dare say the poet actually persuaded himself that his words were full of the tears of pardon and peace, instead of the bitterness of disappointment and malice, and so died in the delusion.

"Do you know there is a limit of ignominy, beyond which man's consciousness of shame cannot go, and after which begins satisfaction in shame? Well, of course humility is a great force in that sense, I admit that—though not in the sense in which religion accounts humility to be strength!

"Religion!—I admit eternal life—and perhaps I always did admit it.

"Admitted that consciousness is called into existence by the will of a Higher Power; admitted that this consciousness looks out upon the world and says 'I am;' and admitted that the Higher Power wills that the consciousness so called into existence, be suddenly extinguished (for so—for some unexplained reason—it is and must be)—still there comes the eternal question—why must I be humble through all this? Is it not enough that I am devoured, without my being expected to bless the power that devours me? Surely—surely I need not suppose that Somebody—there—will be offended because I do not wish to live out the fortnight allowed me? I don't believe it.

"It is much simpler, and far more likely, to believe that my death is needed—the death of an insignificant atom—in order to fulfil the general harmony of the universe—in order to make even some plus or minus in the sum of existence. Just as every day the death of numbers of beings is necessary because without their annihilation the rest cannot live on—(although we must admit that the idea is not a particularly grand one in itself!)

"However—admit the fact! Admit that without such perpetual devouring of one another the world cannot continue to exist, or could never have been organized—I am ever ready to confess that I cannot understand why this is so—but I'll tell you what I *do* know, for certain. If I have once been given to understand and realize that I *am*—

what does it matter to me that the world is organized on a system full of errors and that otherwise it cannot be organized at all? Who will or can judge me after this? Say what you like—the thing is impossible and unjust!

“And meanwhile I have never been able, in spite of my great desire to do so, to persuade myself that there is no future existence, and no Providence.

“The fact of the matter is that all this *does* exist, but that we know absolutely nothing about the future life and its laws!

“But it is so difficult, and even impossible to understand, that surely I am not to be blamed because I could not fathom the incomprehensible?

“Of course I know they say that one must be obedient, and of course, too, the prince is one of those who say so: that one must be obedient without questions, out of pure goodness of heart, and that for my worthy conduct in this matter I shall meet with reward in another world. We degrade God when we attribute our own ideas to Him, out of annoyance that we cannot fathom His ways.

“Again, I repeat, I cannot be blamed because I am unable to understand that which it is not given to mankind to fathom. Why am I to be judged because I could not comprehend the Will and Laws of Providence? No, we had better drop religion.

“And enough of this. By the time I have got so far in the reading of my document the sun will be up and the huge force of his rays will be acting upon the living world. So be it. I shall die gazing straight at the great Fountain of life and power; I do not want this life!

“If I had had the power to prevent my own birth I should certainly never have consented to accept existence under such ridiculous conditions. However, I have the power to end my existence, although I do but give back days that are already numbered. It is an insignificant gift, and my revolt is equally insignificant.

“Final explanation: I die, not in the least because I am unable to support these next three weeks. Oh no, I should find strength enough, and if I wished it I could obtain consolation from the thought of the injury that is done me. But I am not a French poet, and I do not desire such consolation. And finally, nature has so limited my capacity for work or activity of any kind, in allotting me but three weeks of time, that suicide is about the only thing left that I can begin and end in the time of my own free will.

“Perhaps then I am anxious to take advantage of my last chance of doing something for myself. A protest is sometimes no small thing.”

The explanation was finished; Hippolyte paused at last.

There is, in extreme cases, a final stage of cynical candour when a nervous man, excited, and beside himself with emotion, will be afraid of nothing and ready for any sort of scandal, nay, glad of it. The extraordinary, almost unnatural, tension of the nerves which upheld Hippolyte up to this point, had now arrived at this final stage. This poor feeble boy of eighteen—exhausted by disease—looked for all the world as weak and frail as a leaflet torn from its parent tree and trembling in the breeze; but no sooner had his eye swept over his audience, for the first time during the whole of the last hour, than the most contemptuous, the most haughty expression of repugnance lighted up his face. He defied them all, as it were. But his hearers were indignant, too; they rose to their feet with annoyance. Fatigue, the wine consumed, the strain of listening so long, all added to the disagreeable impression which the reading had made upon them.

Suddenly Hippolyte jumped up as though he had been shot.

“The sun is rising,” he cried, seeing the gilded tops of the trees, and pointing to them as to a miracle. “See, it is rising now!”

“Well, what then? Did you suppose it wasn’t going to rise?” asked Ferdishenko.

“It’s going to be atrociously hot again all day,” said Gania, with an air of annoyance, taking his hat. “A month of this… Are you coming home, Ptitsin?” Hippolyte listened to this in amazement, almost amounting to stupefaction. Suddenly he became deadly pale and shuddered.

“You manage your composure too awkwardly. I see you wish to insult me,” he cried to Gania. “You—you are a cur!” He looked at Gania with an expression of malice.

“What on earth is the matter with the boy? What phenomenal feeble-mindedness!” exclaimed Ferdishenko.

“Oh, he’s simply a fool,” said Gania.

Hippolyte braced himself up a little.

“I understand, gentlemen,” he began, trembling as before, and stumbling over every word, “that I have deserved your resentment, and—and am sorry that I should have troubled you with this raving nonsense” (pointing to his article), “or rather, I am sorry that I have not troubled you enough.” He smiled feebly. “Have I troubled you, Evgenie Pavlovitch?” He suddenly turned on Evgenie with this question. “Tell me now, have I troubled you or not?”

“Well, it was a little drawn out, perhaps; but—”

“Come, speak out! Don’t lie, for once in your life—speak out!” continued Hippolyte, quivering with agitation.

“Oh, my good sir, I assure you it’s entirely the same to me. Please leave me in peace,” said Evgenie, angrily, turning his back on him.

“Good-night, prince,” said Ptitsin, approaching his host.

“What are you thinking of? Don’t go, he’ll blow his brains out in a minute!” cried Vera Lebedeff, rushing up to Hippolyte and catching hold of his hands in a torment of alarm. “What are you thinking of? He said he would blow his brains out at sunrise.”

“Oh, he won’t shoot himself!” cried several voices, sarcastically.

“Gentlemen, you’d better look out,” cried Colia, also seizing Hippolyte by the hand. “Just look at him! Prince, what are you thinking of?” Vera and Colia, and Keller, and Burdovsky were all crowding round Hippolyte now and holding him down.

“He has the right—the right—” murmured Burdovsky. “Excuse me, prince, but what are your arrangements?” asked Lebedeff, tipsy and exasperated, going up to Muishkin.

“What do you mean by ‘arrangements’?”

“No, no, excuse me! I’m master of this house, though I do not wish to lack respect towards you. You are master of the house too, in a way; but I can’t allow this sort of thing—”

“He won’t shoot himself; the boy is only playing the fool,” said General Ivolgin, suddenly and unexpectedly, with indignation.

“I know he won’t, I know he won’t, general; but I—I’m master here!”

“Listen, Mr. Terentieff,” said Ptitsin, who had bidden the prince good-night, and was now holding out his hand to Hippolyte; “I think you remark in that manuscript of yours, that you bequeath your skeleton to the Academy. Are you referring to your own skeleton—I mean, your very bones?”

“Yes, my bones, I—”

“Quite so, I see; because, you know, little mistakes have occurred now and then. There was a case—”

“Why do you tease him?” cried the prince, suddenly.

“You’ve moved him to tears,” added Ferdishenko. But Hippolyte was by no means weeping. He was about to move from his place, when his four guards rushed at him and seized him once more. There was a laugh at this.

“He led up to this on purpose. He took the trouble of writing all that so that people should come and grab him by the arm,” observed Rogojin. “Good-night, prince. What a time we’ve sat here, my very bones ache!”

“If you really intended to shoot yourself, Terentieff,” said Evgenie Pavlovitch, laughing, “if I were you, after all these compliments, I should just not shoot myself in order to vex them all.”

“They are very anxious to see me blow my brains out,” said Hippolyte, bitterly.

“Yes, they’ll be awfully annoyed if they don’t see it.”

“Then you think they won’t see it?”

“I am not trying to egg you on. On the contrary, I think it very likely that you may shoot yourself; but the principal thing is to keep cool,” said Evgenie with a drawl, and with great condescension.

“I only now perceive what a terrible mistake I made in reading this article to them,” said Hippolyte, suddenly, addressing Evgenie, and looking at him with an expression of trust and confidence, as though he were applying to a friend for counsel.

“Yes, it’s a droll situation; I really don’t know what advice to give you,” replied Evgenie, laughing. Hippolyte gazed steadfastly at him, but said nothing. To look at him one might have supposed that he was unconscious at intervals.

“Excuse me,” said Lebedeff, “but did you observe the young gentleman’s style? ‘I’ll go and blow my brains out in the park,’ says he, ‘so as not to disturb anyone.’ He thinks he won’t disturb anybody if he goes three yards away, into the park, and blows his brains out there.”

“Gentlemen—” began the prince.

“No, no, excuse me, most revered prince,” Lebedeff interrupted, excitedly. “Since you must have observed yourself that this is no joke, and since at least half your guests must also have concluded that after all that has been said this youth *must* blow his brains out for honour’s sake—I—as master of this house, and before these witnesses, now call upon you to take steps.”

“Yes, but what am I to do, Lebedeff? What steps am I to take? I am ready.”

“I’ll tell you. In the first place he must immediately deliver up the pistol which he boasted of, with all its appurtenances. If he does this I shall consent to his being allowed to spend the night in this house—considering his feeble state of health, and of course conditionally upon his being under proper supervision. But tomorrow he must go elsewhere. Excuse me, prince! Should he refuse to deliver up his weapon, then I shall instantly seize one of his arms and General Ivolgin the other, and we shall hold him until the police arrive and take the matter into their own hands. Mr. Ferdishenko will kindly fetch them.”

At this there was a dreadful noise; Lebedeff danced about in his excitement; Ferdishenko prepared to go for the police; Gania frantically insisted that it was all nonsense, “for nobody was going to shoot themselves.” Evgenie Pavlovitch said nothing.

“Prince,” whispered Hippolyte, suddenly, his eyes all ablaze, “you don’t suppose that I did not foresee all this hatred?” He looked at the prince as though he expected him to reply, for a moment. “Enough!” he added at length, and addressing the whole company, he cried: “It’s all my fault, gentlemen! Lebedeff, here’s the key,” (he took out a small bunch of keys); “this one, the last but one—Colia will show you—Colia, where’s Colia?” he cried, looking straight at Colia and not seeing him. “Yes, he’ll show you; he packed the bag with me this morning. Take him up, Colia; my bag is upstairs in the prince’s study, under the table. Here’s the key, and in the little case you’ll find my pistol and the powder, and all. Colia packed it himself, Mr. Lebedeff; he’ll show you; but it’s on condition that tomorrow morning, when I leave for Petersburg, you will give me back my pistol, do you hear? I do this for the prince’s sake, not yours.”

“Capital, that’s much better!” cried Lebedeff, and seizing the key he made off in haste.

Colia stopped a moment as though he wished to say something; but Lebedeff dragged him away.

Hippolyte looked around at the laughing guests. The prince observed that his teeth were chattering as though in a violent attack of ague.

“What brutes they all are!” he whispered to the prince. Whenever he addressed him he lowered his voice.

“Let them alone, you’re too weak now—”

“Yes, directly; I’ll go away directly. I’ll—”

Suddenly he embraced Muishkin.

“Perhaps you think I am mad, eh?” he asked him, laughing very strangely.

“No, but you—”

“Directly, directly! Stand still a moment, I wish to look in your eyes; don’t speak—stand so—let me look at you! I am bidding farewell to mankind.”

He stood so for ten seconds, gazing at the prince, motionless, deadly pale, his temples wet with perspiration; he held the prince’s hand in a strange grip, as though afraid to let him go.

“Hippolyte, Hippolyte, what is the matter with you?” cried Muishkin.

“Directly! There, that’s enough. I’ll lie down directly. I must drink to the sun’s health. I wish to—I insist upon it! Let go!”

He seized a glass from the table, broke away from the prince, and in a moment had reached the terrace steps.

The prince made after him, but it so happened that at this moment Evgenie Pavlovitch stretched out his hand to say good-night. The next instant there was a general outcry, and then followed a few moments of indescribable excitement.

Reaching the steps, Hippolyte had paused, holding the glass in his left hand while he put his right hand into his coat pocket.

Keller insisted afterwards that he had held his right hand in his pocket all the while, when he was speaking to the prince, and that he had held the latter’s shoulder with his left hand only. This circumstance, Keller affirmed, had led him to feel some suspicion from the first. However this may be, Keller ran after Hippolyte, but he was too late.

He caught sight of something flashing in Hippolyte’s right hand, and saw that it was a pistol. He rushed at him, but at that very instant Hippolyte raised the pistol to his temple and pulled the trigger. There followed a sharp metallic click, but no report.

When Keller seized the would-be suicide, the latter fell forward into his arms, probably actually believing that he was shot. Keller had hold of the pistol now. Hippolyte was immediately placed in a chair, while the whole company thronged around excitedly, talking and asking each other questions. Every one of them had heard the snap of the trigger, and yet they saw a live and apparently unharmed man before them.

Hippolyte himself sat quite unconscious of what was going on, and gazed around with a senseless expression.

Lebedeff and Colia came rushing up at this moment.

“What is it?” someone asked, breathlessly—“A misfire?”

“Perhaps it wasn’t loaded,” said several voices.

“It’s loaded all right,” said Keller, examining the pistol, “but—”

“What! did it miss fire?”

“There was no cap in it,” Keller announced.

It would be difficult to describe the pitiable scene that now followed. The first sensation of alarm soon gave place to amusement; some burst out laughing loud and heartily, and seemed to find a malicious satisfaction in the joke. Poor Hippolyte sobbed hysterically; he wrung his hands; he approached everyone in turn—even Ferdishenko—and took them by both hands, and swore solemnly that he had forgotten—absolutely forgotten—“accidentally, and not on purpose,”—to put a cap in—that he “had ten of them, at least, in his pocket.” He pulled them out and showed them to everyone; he protested that he had not liked to put one in beforehand for fear of an accidental explosion in his pocket. That he had thought he would have lots of time to put it in afterwards—when required—and, that, in the heat of the moment, he had forgotten all about it. He threw himself upon the prince, then on Evgenie Pavlovitch. He entreated Keller to give him back the pistol, and he’d soon show them all that “his honour—his honour,”—but he was “dishonoured, now, for ever!”

He fell senseless at last—and was carried into the prince’s study.

Lebedeff, now quite sobered down, sent for a doctor; and he and his daughter, with Burdovsky and General Ivolgin, remained by the sick man’s couch.

When he was carried away unconscious, Keller stood in the middle of the room, and made the following declaration to the company in general, in a loud tone of voice, with emphasis upon each word.

“Gentlemen, if any one of you casts any doubt again, before me, upon Hippolyte’s good faith, or hints that the cap was forgotten intentionally, or suggests that this unhappy boy was acting a part before us, I beg to announce that the person so speaking shall account to me for his words.”

No one replied.

The company departed very quickly, in a mass. Ptitsin, Gania, and Rogojin went away together.

The prince was much astonished that Evgenie Pavlovitch changed his mind, and took his departure without the conversation he had requested.

“Why, you wished to have a talk with me when the others left?” he said.

“Quite so,” said Evgenie, sitting down suddenly beside him, “but I have changed my mind for the time being. I confess, I am too disturbed, and so, I think, are you; and the matter as to which I wished to consult you is too serious to tackle with one’s mind even a little disturbed; too serious both for myself and for you. You see, prince, for once in my life I wish to perform an absolutely honest action, that is, an action with no ulterior motive; and I think I am hardly in a condition to talk of it just at this moment, and—and—well, we’ll discuss it another time. Perhaps the matter may gain in clearness if we wait for two or three days—just the two or three days which I must spend in Petersburg.”

Here he rose again from his chair, so that it seemed strange that he should have thought it worth while to sit down at all.

The prince thought, too, that he looked vexed and annoyed, and not nearly so friendly towards himself as he had been earlier in the night.

“I suppose you will go to the sufferer’s bedside now?” he added.

“Yes, I am afraid…” began the prince.

“Oh, you needn’t fear! He’ll live another six weeks all right. Very likely he will recover altogether; but I strongly advise you to pack him off tomorrow.”

“I think I may have offended him by saying nothing just now. I am afraid he may suspect that I doubted his good faith,—about shooting himself, you know. What do you think, Evgenie Pavlovitch?”

“Not a bit of it! You are much too good to him; you shouldn’t care a hang about what he thinks. I have heard of such things before, but never came across, till tonight, a man who would actually shoot himself in order to gain a vulgar notoriety, or blow out his brains for spite, if he finds that people don’t care to pat him on the back for his sanguinary intentions. But what astonishes me more than anything is the fellow’s candid confession of weakness. You’d better get rid of him tomorrow, in any case.”

“Do you think he will make another attempt?”

“Oh no, not he, not now! But you have to be very careful with this sort of gentleman. Crime is too often the last resource of these petty nonentities. This young fellow is

quite capable of cutting the throats of ten people, simply for a lark, as he told us in his 'explanation.' I assure you those confounded words of his will not let me sleep."

"I think you disturb yourself too much."

"What an extraordinary person you are, prince! Do you mean to say that you doubt the fact that he is capable of murdering ten men?"

"I daren't say, one way or the other; all this is very strange—but—"

"Well, as you like, just as you like," said Evgenie Pavlovitch, irritably. "Only you are such a plucky fellow, take care you don't get included among the ten victims!"

"Oh, he is much more likely not to kill anyone at all," said the prince, gazing thoughtfully at Evgenie. The latter laughed disagreeably.

"Well, *au revoir!* Did you observe that he 'willed' a copy of his confession to Aglaya Ivanovna?"

"Yes, I did; I am thinking of it."

"In connection with 'the ten,' eh?" laughed Evgenie, as he left the room.

An hour later, towards four o'clock, the prince went into the park. He had endeavoured to fall asleep, but could not, owing to the painful beating of his heart.

He had left things quiet and peaceful; the invalid was fast asleep, and the doctor, who had been called in, had stated that there was no special danger. Lebedeff, Colia, and Burdovsky were lying down in the sick-room, ready to take it in turns to watch. There was nothing to fear, therefore, at home.

But the prince's mental perturbation increased every moment. He wandered about the park, looking absently around him, and paused in astonishment when he suddenly found himself in the empty space with the rows of chairs round it, near the Vauxhall. The look of the place struck him as dreadful now: so he turned round and went by the path which he had followed with the Epanchins on the way to the band, until he reached the green bench which Aglaya had pointed out for their rendezvous. He sat down on it and suddenly burst into a loud fit of laughter, immediately followed by a feeling of irritation. His disturbance of mind continued; he felt that he must go away somewhere, anywhere.

Above his head some little bird sang out, of a sudden; he began to peer about for it among the leaves. Suddenly the bird darted out of the tree and away, and instantly he thought of the "fly buzzing about in the sun's rays" that Hippolyte had talked of; how

that it knew its place and was a participator in the universal life, while he alone was an "outcast." This picture had impressed him at the time, and he meditated upon it now. An old, forgotten memory awoke in his brain, and suddenly burst into clearness and light. It was a recollection of Switzerland, during the first year of his cure, the very first months. At that time he had been pretty nearly an idiot still; he could not speak properly, and had difficulty in understanding when others spoke to him. He climbed the mountain-side, one sunny morning, and wandered long and aimlessly with a certain thought in his brain, which would not become clear. Above him was the blazing sky, below, the lake; all around was the horizon, clear and infinite. He looked out upon this, long and anxiously. He remembered how he had stretched out his arms towards the beautiful, boundless blue of the horizon, and wept, and wept. What had so tormented him was the idea that he was a stranger to all this, that he was outside this glorious festival.

What was this universe? What was this grand, eternal pageant to which he had yearned from his childhood up, and in which he could never take part? Every morning the same magnificent sun; every morning the same rainbow in the waterfall; every evening the same glow on the snow-mountains.

Every little fly that buzzed in the sun's rays was a singer in the universal chorus, "knew its place, and was happy in it." Every blade of grass grew and was happy. Everything knew its path and loved it, went forth with a song and returned with a song; only he knew nothing, understood nothing, neither men nor words, nor any of nature's voices; he was a stranger and an outcast.

Oh, he could not then speak these words, or express all he felt! He had been tormented dumbly; but now it appeared to him that he must have said these very words—even then—and that Hippolyte must have taken his picture of the little fly from his tears and words of that time.

He was sure of it, and his heart beat excitedly at the thought, he knew not why.

He fell asleep on the bench; but his mental disquiet continued through his slumbers.

Just before he dozed off, the idea of Hippolyte murdering ten men flitted through his brain, and he smiled at the absurdity of such a thought.

Around him all was quiet; only the flutter and whisper of the leaves broke the silence, but broke it only to cause it to appear yet more deep and still.

He dreamed many dreams as he sat there, and all were full of disquiet, so that he shuddered every moment.

At length a woman seemed to approach him. He knew her, oh! he knew her only too well. He could always name her and recognize her anywhere; but, strange, she seemed to have quite a different face from hers, as he had known it, and he felt a tormenting desire to be able to say she was not the same woman. In the face before him there was such dreadful remorse and horror that he thought she must be a criminal, that she must have just committed some awful crime.

Tears were trembling on her white cheek. She beckoned him, but placed her finger on her lip as though to warn him that he must follow her very quietly. His heart froze within him. He wouldn't, he *couldn't* confess her to be a criminal, and yet he felt that something dreadful would happen the next moment, something which would blast his whole life.

She seemed to wish to show him something, not far off, in the park.

He rose from his seat in order to follow her, when a bright, clear peal of laughter rang out by his side. He felt somebody's hand suddenly in his own, seized it, pressed it hard, and awoke. Before him stood Aglaya, laughing aloud.

VIII.

She laughed, but she was rather angry too.

"He's asleep! You were asleep," she said, with contemptuous surprise.

"Is it really you?" muttered the prince, not quite himself as yet, and recognizing her with a start of amazement. "Oh yes, of course," he added, "this is our rendezvous. I fell asleep here."

"So I saw."

"Did no one awake me besides yourself? Was there no one else here? I thought there was another woman."

"There was another woman here?"

At last he was wide awake.

"It was a dream, of course," he said, musingly. "Strange that I should have a dream like that at such a moment. Sit down—"

He took her hand and seated her on the bench; then sat down beside her and reflected.

Aglaya did not begin the conversation, but contented herself with watching her companion intently.

He looked back at her, but at times it was clear that he did not see her and was not thinking of her.

Aglaya began to flush up.

“Oh yes!” cried the prince, starting. “Hippolyte’s suicide—”

“What? At your house?” she asked, but without much surprise. “He was alive yesterday evening, wasn’t he? How could you sleep here after that?” she cried, growing suddenly animated.

“Oh, but he didn’t kill himself; the pistol didn’t go off.” Aglaya insisted on hearing the whole story. She hurried the prince along, but interrupted him with all sorts of questions, nearly all of which were irrelevant. Among other things, she seemed greatly interested in every word that Evgenie Pavlovitch had said, and made the prince repeat that part of the story over and over again.

“Well, that’ll do; we must be quick,” she concluded, after hearing all. “We have only an hour here, till eight; I must be home by then without fail, so that they may not find out that I came and sat here with you; but I’ve come on business. I have a great deal to say to you. But you have bowled me over considerably with your news. As to Hippolyte, I think his pistol was bound not to go off; it was more consistent with the whole affair. Are you sure he really wished to blow his brains out, and that there was no humbug about the matter?”

“No humbug at all.”

“Very likely. So he wrote that you were to bring me a copy of his confession, did he? Why didn’t you bring it?”

“Why, he didn’t die! I’ll ask him for it, if you like.”

“Bring it by all means; you needn’t ask him. He will be delighted, you may be sure; for, in all probability, he shot at himself simply in order that I might read his confession. Don’t laugh at what I say, please, Lef Nicolaievitch, because it may very well be the case.”

“I’m not laughing. I am convinced, myself, that that may have been partly the reason.”

“You are convinced? You don’t really mean to say you think that honestly?” asked Aglaya, extremely surprised.

She put her questions very quickly and talked fast, every now and then forgetting what she had begun to say, and not finishing her sentence. She seemed to be impatient to warn the prince about something or other. She was in a state of unusual excitement, and though she put on a brave and even defiant air, she seemed to be rather alarmed. She was dressed very simply, but this suited her well. She continually trembled and blushed, and she sat on the very edge of the seat.

The fact that the prince confirmed her idea, about Hippolyte shooting himself that she might read his confession, surprised her greatly.

“Of course,” added the prince, “he wished us all to applaud his conduct—besides yourself.”

“How do you mean—applaud?”

“Well—how am I to explain? He was very anxious that we should all come around him, and say we were so sorry for him, and that we loved him very much, and all that; and that we hoped he wouldn’t kill himself, but remain alive. Very likely he thought more of you than the rest of us, because he mentioned you at such a moment, though perhaps he did not know himself that he had you in his mind’s eye.”

“I don’t understand you. How could he have me in view, and not be aware of it himself? And yet, I don’t know—perhaps I do. Do you know I have intended to poison myself at least thirty times—ever since I was thirteen or so—and to write to my parents before I did it? I used to think how nice it would be to lie in my coffin, and have them all weeping over me and saying it was all their fault for being so cruel, and all that—what are you smiling at?” she added, knitting her brow. “What do *you* think of when you go mooning about alone? I suppose you imagine yourself a field-marshal, and think you have conquered Napoleon?”

“Well, I really have thought something of the sort now and then, especially when just dozing off,” laughed the prince. “Only it is the Austrians whom I conquer—not Napoleon.”

“I don’t wish to joke with you, Lef Nicolaievitch. I shall see Hippolyte myself. Tell him so. As for you, I think you are behaving very badly, because it is not right to judge a man’s soul as you are judging Hippolyte’s. You have no gentleness, but only justice—so you are unjust.”

The prince reflected.

“I think you are unfair towards me,” he said. “There is nothing wrong in the thoughts I ascribe to Hippolyte; they are only natural. But of course I don’t know for certain what

he thought. Perhaps he thought nothing, but simply longed to see human faces once more, and to hear human praise and feel human affection. Who knows? Only it all came out wrong, somehow. Some people have luck, and everything comes out right with them; others have none, and never a thing turns out fortunately."

"I suppose you have felt that in your own case," said Aglaya.

"Yes, I have," replied the prince, quite unsuspicious of any irony in the remark.

"H'm—well, at all events, I shouldn't have fallen asleep here, in your place. It wasn't nice of you, that. I suppose you fall asleep wherever you sit down?"

"But I didn't sleep a wink all night. I walked and walked about, and went to where the music was—"

"What music?"

"Where they played last night. Then I found this bench and sat down, and thought and thought—and at last I fell fast asleep."

"Oh, is that it? That makes a difference, perhaps. What did you go to the bandstand for?"

"I don't know; I—"

"Very well—afterwards. You are always interrupting me. What woman was it you were dreaming about?"

"It was—about—you saw her—"

"Quite so; I understand. I understand quite well. You are very—Well, how did she appear to you? What did she look like? No, I don't want to know anything about her," said Aglaya, angrily; "don't interrupt me—"

She paused a moment as though getting breath, or trying to master her feeling of annoyance.

"Look here; this is what I called you here for. I wish to make you a—to ask you to be my friend. What do you stare at me like that for?" she added, almost angrily.

The prince certainly had darted a rather piercing look at her, and now observed that she had begun to blush violently. At such moments, the more Aglaya blushed, the angrier she grew with herself; and this was clearly expressed in her eyes, which flashed like fire. As a rule, she vented her wrath on her unfortunate companion, be it who it might. She was very conscious of her own shyness, and was not nearly so

talkative as her sisters for this reason—in fact, at times she was much too quiet. When, therefore, she was bound to talk, especially at such delicate moments as this, she invariably did so with an air of haughty defiance. She always knew beforehand when she was going to blush, long before the blush came.

“Perhaps you do not wish to accept my proposition?” she asked, gazing haughtily at the prince.

“Oh yes, I do; but it is so unnecessary. I mean, I did not think you need make such a proposition,” said the prince, looking confused.

“What did you suppose, then? Why did you think I invited you out here? I suppose you think me a ‘little fool,’ as they all call me at home?”

“I didn’t know they called you a fool. I certainly don’t think you one.”

“You don’t think me one! Oh, dear me!—that’s very clever of you; you put it so neatly, too.”

“In my opinion, you are far from a fool sometimes—in fact, you are very intelligent. You said a very clever thing just now about my being unjust because I had *only* justice. I shall remember that, and think about it.”

Aglaya blushed with pleasure. All these changes in her expression came about so naturally and so rapidly—they delighted the prince; he watched her, and laughed.

“Listen,” she began again; “I have long waited to tell you all this, ever since the time when you sent me that letter—even before that. Half of what I have to say you heard yesterday. I consider you the most honest and upright of men—more honest and upright than any other man; and if anybody says that your mind is—is sometimes affected, you know—it is unfair. I always say so and uphold it, because even if your surface mind be a little affected (of course you will not feel angry with me for talking so—I am speaking from a higher point of view) yet your real mind is far better than all theirs put together. Such a mind as they have never even *dreamed* of; because really, there are *two* minds—the kind that matters, and the kind that doesn’t matter. Isn’t it so?”

“May be! may be so!” said the prince, faintly; his heart was beating painfully.

“I knew you would not misunderstand me,” she said, triumphantly. “Prince S. and Evgenie Pavlovitch and Alexandra don’t understand anything about these two kinds of mind, but, just fancy, mamma does!”

“You are very like Lizabetha Prokofievna.”

“What! surely not?” said Aglaya.

“Yes, you are, indeed.”

“Thank you; I am glad to be like mamma,” she said, thoughtfully. “You respect her very much, don’t you?” she added, quite unconscious of the naiveness of the question.

“*Very* much; and I am so glad that you have realized the fact.”

“I am very glad, too, because she is often laughed at by people. But listen to the chief point. I have long thought over the matter, and at last I have chosen you. I don’t wish people to laugh at me; I don’t wish people to think me a ‘little fool.’ I don’t want to be chaffed. I felt all this of a sudden, and I refused Evgenie Pavlovitch flatly, because I am not going to be forever thrown at people’s heads to be married. I want—I want—well, I’ll tell you, I wish to run away from home, and I have chosen you to help me.”

“Run away from home?” cried the prince.

“Yes—yes—yes! Run away from home!” she repeated, in a transport of rage. “I won’t, I won’t be made to blush every minute by them all! I don’t want to blush before Prince S. or Evgenie Pavlovitch, or anyone, and therefore I have chosen you. I shall tell you everything, *everything*, even the most important things of all, whenever I like, and you are to hide nothing from me on your side. I want to speak to at least one person, as I would to myself. They have suddenly begun to say that I am waiting for you, and in love with you. They began this before you arrived here, and so I didn’t show them the letter, and now they all say it, every one of them. I want to be brave, and be afraid of nobody. I don’t want to go to their balls and things—I want to do good. I have long desired to run away, for I have been kept shut up for twenty years, and they are always trying to marry me off. I wanted to run away when I was fourteen years old—I was a little fool then, I know—but now I have worked it all out, and I have waited for you to tell me about foreign countries. I have never seen a single Gothic cathedral. I must go to Rome; I must see all the museums; I must study in Paris. All this last year I have been preparing and reading forbidden books. Alexandra and Adelaida are allowed to read anything they like, but I mayn’t. I don’t want to quarrel with my sisters, but I told my parents long ago that I wish to change my social position. I have decided to take up teaching, and I count on you because you said you loved children. Can we go in for education together—if not at once, then afterwards? We could do good together. I won’t be a general’s daughter any more! Tell me, are you a very learned man?”

“Oh no; not at all.”

“Oh-h-h! I’m sorry for that. I thought you were. I wonder why I always thought so—but at all events you’ll help me, won’t you? Because I’ve chosen you, you know.”

“Aglaya Ivanovna, it’s absurd.”

“But I will, I *will* run away!” she cried—and her eyes flashed again with anger—“and if you don’t agree I shall go and marry Gavrila Ardalionovitch! I won’t be considered a horrible girl, and accused of goodness knows what.”

“Are you out of your mind?” cried the prince, almost starting from his seat. “What do they accuse you of? Who accuses you?”

“At home, everybody, mother, my sisters, Prince S., even that detestable Colia! If they don’t say it, they think it. I told them all so to their faces. I told mother and father and everybody. Mamma was ill all the day after it, and next day father and Alexandra told me that I didn’t understand what nonsense I was talking. I informed them that they little knew me—I was not a small child—I understood every word in the language—that I had read a couple of Paul de Kok’s novels two years since on purpose, so as to know all about everything. No sooner did mamma hear me say this than she nearly fainted!”

A strange thought passed through the prince’s brain; he gazed intently at Aglaya and smiled.

He could not believe that this was the same haughty young girl who had once so proudly shown him Gania’s letter. He could not understand how that proud and austere beauty could show herself to be such an utter child—a child who probably did not even now understand some words.

“Have you always lived at home, Aglaya Ivanovna?” he asked. “I mean, have you never been to school, or college, or anything?”

“No—never—nowhere! I’ve been at home all my life, corked up in a bottle; and they expect me to be married straight out of it. What are you laughing at again? I observe that you, too, have taken to laughing at me, and range yourself on their side against me,” she added, frowning angrily. “Don’t irritate me—I’m bad enough without that—I don’t know what I am doing sometimes. I am persuaded that you came here today in the full belief that I am in love with you, and that I arranged this meeting because of that,” she cried, with annoyance.

“I admit I was afraid that that was the case, yesterday,” blundered the prince (he was rather confused), “but today I am quite convinced that—”

“How?” cried Aglaya—and her lower lip trembled violently. “You were *afraid* that I—you dared to think that I—good gracious! you suspected, perhaps, that I sent for you to come here in order to catch you in a trap, so that they should find us here together, and make you marry me—”

“Aglaya Ivanovna, aren’t you ashamed of saying such a thing? How could such a horrible idea enter your sweet, innocent heart? I am certain you don’t believe a word of what you say, and probably you don’t even know what you are talking about.”

Aglaya sat with her eyes on the ground; she seemed to have alarmed even herself by what she had said.

“No, I’m not; I’m not a bit ashamed!” she murmured. “And how do you know my heart is innocent? And how dared you send me a love-letter that time?”

“*Love-letter?* My letter a love-letter? That letter was the most respectful of letters; it went straight from my heart, at what was perhaps the most painful moment of my life! I thought of you at the time as a kind of light. I—”

“Well, very well, very well!” she said, but quite in a different tone. She was remorseful now, and bent forward to touch his shoulder, though still trying not to look him in the face, as if the more persuasively to beg him not to be angry with her. “Very well,” she continued, looking thoroughly ashamed of herself, “I feel that I said a very foolish thing. I only did it just to try you. Take it as unsaid, and if I offended you, forgive me. Don’t look straight at me like that, please; turn your head away. You called it a ‘horrible idea’; I only said it to shock you. Very often I am myself afraid of saying what I intend to say, and out it comes all the same. You have just told me that you wrote that letter at the most painful moment of your life. I know what moment that was!” she added softly, looking at the ground again.

“Oh, if you could know all!”

“I *do* know all!” she cried, with another burst of indignation. “You were living in the same house as that horrible woman with whom you ran away.” She did not blush as she said this; on the contrary, she grew pale, and started from her seat, apparently oblivious of what she did, and immediately sat down again. Her lip continued to tremble for a long time.

There was silence for a moment. The prince was taken aback by the suddenness of this last reply, and did not know to what he should attribute it.

“I don’t love you a bit!” she said suddenly, just as though the words had exploded from her mouth.

The prince did not answer, and there was silence again. “I love Gavrila Ardalionovitch,” she said, quickly; but hardly audibly, and with her head bent lower than ever.

“That is *not* true,” said the prince, in an equally low voice.

“What! I tell stories, do I? It is true! I gave him my promise a couple of days ago on this very seat.”

The prince was startled, and reflected for a moment.

“It is not true,” he repeated, decidedly; “you have just invented it!”

“You are wonderfully polite. You know he is greatly improved. He loves me better than his life. He let his hand burn before my very eyes in order to prove to me that he loved me better than his life!”

“He burned his hand!”

“Yes, believe it or not! It’s all the same to me!”

The prince sat silent once more. Aglaya did not seem to be joking; she was too angry for that.

“What! he brought a candle with him to this place? That is, if the episode happened here; otherwise I can’t.”

“Yes, a candle! What’s there improbable about that?”

“A whole one, and in a candlestick?”

“Yes—no—half a candle—an end, you know—no, it was a whole candle; it’s all the same. Be quiet, can’t you! He brought a box of matches too, if you like, and then lighted the candle and held his finger in it for half an hour and more!—There! Can’t that be?”

“I saw him yesterday, and his fingers were all right!”

Aglaya suddenly burst out laughing, as simply as a child.

“Do you know why I have just told you these lies?” She appealed to the prince, of a sudden, with the most childlike candour, and with the laugh still trembling on her lips. “Because when one tells a lie, if one insists on something unusual and eccentric—something too ‘out of the way’ for anything, you know—the more impossible the thing is, the more plausible does the lie sound. I’ve noticed this. But I managed it badly; I didn’t know how to work it.” She suddenly frowned again at this point as though at some sudden unpleasant recollection.

“If”—she began, looking seriously and even sadly at him—“if when I read you all that about the ‘poor knight,’ I wished to-to praise you for one thing—I also wished to show you that I knew all—and did not approve of your conduct.”

“You are very unfair to me, and to that unfortunate woman of whom you spoke just now in such dreadful terms, Aglaya.”

“Because I know all, all—and that is why I speak so. I know very well how you—half a year since—offered her your hand before everybody. Don’t interrupt me. You see, I am merely stating facts without any comment upon them. After that she ran away with Rogojin. Then you lived with her at some village or town, and she ran away from you.” (Aglaya blushed dreadfully.) “Then she returned to Rogojin again, who loves her like a madman. Then you—like a wise man as you are—came back here after her as soon as ever you heard that she had returned to Petersburg. Yesterday evening you sprang forward to protect her, and just now you dreamed about her. You see, I know all. You did come back here for her, for her—now didn’t you?”

“Yes—for her!” said the prince softly and sadly, and bending his head down, quite unconscious of the fact that Aglaya was gazing at him with eyes which burned like live coals. “I came to find out something—I don’t believe in her future happiness as Rogojin’s wife, although—in a word, I did not know how to help her or what to do for her—but I came, on the chance.”

He glanced at Aglaya, who was listening with a look of hatred on her face.

“If you came without knowing why, I suppose you love her very much indeed!” she said at last.

“No,” said the prince, “no, I do not love her. Oh! if you only knew with what horror I recall the time I spent with her!”

A shudder seemed to sweep over his whole body at the recollection.

“Tell me about it,” said Aglaya.

“There is nothing which you might not hear. Why I should wish to tell you, and only you, this experience of mine, I really cannot say; perhaps it really is because I love you very much. This unhappy woman is persuaded that she is the most hopeless, fallen creature in the world. Oh, do not condemn her! Do not cast stones at her! She has suffered too much already in the consciousness of her own undeserved shame.

“And she is not guilty—oh God!—Every moment she bemoans and bewails herself, and cries out that she does not admit any guilt, that she is the victim of circumstances—the victim of a wicked libertine.

“But whatever she may say, remember that she does not believe it herself,—remember that she will believe nothing but that she is a guilty creature.

“When I tried to rid her soul of this gloomy fallacy, she suffered so terribly that my heart will never be quite at peace so long as I can remember that dreadful time!—Do you know why she left me? Simply to prove to me what is not true—that she is base. But the worst of it is, she did not realize herself that that was all she wanted to prove by her departure! She went away in response to some inner prompting to do something disgraceful, in order that she might say to herself—‘There—you’ve done a new act of shame—you degraded creature!’

“Oh, Aglaya—perhaps you cannot understand all this. Try to realize that in the perpetual admission of guilt she probably finds some dreadful unnatural satisfaction—as though she were revenging herself upon someone.

“Now and then I was able to persuade her almost to see light around her again; but she would soon fall, once more, into her old tormenting delusions, and would go so far as to reproach me for placing myself on a pedestal above her (I never had an idea of such a thing!), and informed me, in reply to my proposal of marriage, that she ‘did not want condescending sympathy or help from anybody.’ You saw her last night. You don’t suppose she can be happy among such people as those—you cannot suppose that such society is fit for her? You have no idea how well-educated she is, and what an intellect she has! She astonished me sometimes.”

“And you preached her sermons there, did you?”

“Oh no,” continued the prince thoughtfully, not noticing Aglaya’s mocking tone, “I was almost always silent there. I often wished to speak, but I really did not know what to say. In some cases it is best to say nothing, I think. I loved her, yes, I loved her very much indeed; but afterwards—afterwards she guessed all.”

“What did she guess?”

“That I only *pitied* her—and—and loved her no longer!”

“How do you know that? How do you know that she is not really in love with that—that rich cad—the man she eloped with?”

“Oh no! I know she only laughs at him; she has made a fool of him all along.”

“Has she never laughed at you?”

“No—in anger, perhaps. Oh yes! she reproached me dreadfully in anger; and suffered herself, too! But afterwards—oh! don’t remind me—don’t remind me of that!”

He hid his face in his hands.

“Are you aware that she writes to me almost every day?”

“So that is true, is it?” cried the prince, greatly agitated. “I had heard a report of it, but would not believe it.”

“Whom did you hear it from?” asked Aglaya, alarmed. “Rogojin said something about it yesterday, but nothing definite.”

“Yesterday! Morning or evening? Before the music or after?”

“After—it was about twelve o’clock.”

“Ah! Well, if it was Rogojin—but do you know what she writes to me about?”

“I should not be surprised by anything. She is mad!”

“There are the letters.” (Aglaya took three letters out of her pocket and threw them down before the prince.) “For a whole week she has been entreating and worrying and persuading me to marry you. She—well, she is clever, though she may be mad—much cleverer than I am, as you say. Well, she writes that she is in love with me herself, and tries to see me every day, if only from a distance. She writes that you love me, and that she has long known it and seen it, and that you and she talked about me—there. She wishes to see you happy, and she says that she is certain only I can ensure you the happiness you deserve. She writes such strange, wild letters—I haven’t shown them to anyone. Now, do you know what all this means? Can you guess anything?”

“It is madness—it is merely another proof of her insanity!” said the prince, and his lips trembled.

“You are crying, aren’t you?”

“No, Aglaya. No, I’m not crying.” The prince looked at her.

“Well, what am I to do? What do you advise me? I cannot go on receiving these letters, you know.”

“Oh, let her alone, I entreat you!” cried the prince. “What can you do in this dark, gloomy mystery? Let her alone, and I’ll use all my power to prevent her writing you any more letters.”

“If so, you are a heartless man!” cried Aglaya. “As if you can’t see that it is not myself she loves, but you, you, and only you! Surely you have not remarked everything else in her, and only not *this?* Do you know what these letters mean? They mean jealousy, sir—nothing but pure jealousy! She—do you think she will ever really marry this Rogojin, as she says here she will? She would take her own life the day after you and I were married.”

The prince shuddered; his heart seemed to freeze within him. He gazed at Aglaya in wonderment; it was difficult for him to realize that this child was also a woman.

“God knows, Aglaya, that to restore her peace of mind and make her happy I would willingly give up my life. But I cannot love her, and she knows that.”

“Oh, make a sacrifice of yourself! That sort of thing becomes you well, you know. Why not do it? And don’t call me ‘Aglaya’; you have done it several times lately. You are bound, it is your *duty* to ‘raise’ her; you must go off somewhere again to soothe and pacify her. Why, you love her, you know!”

“I cannot sacrifice myself so, though I admit I did wish to do so once. Who knows, perhaps I still wish to! But I know for *certain*, that if she married me it would be her ruin; I know this and therefore I leave her alone. I ought to go to see her today; now I shall probably not go. She is proud, she would never forgive me the nature of the love I bear her, and we should both be ruined. This may be unnatural, I don’t know; but everything seems unnatural. You say she loves me, as if this were *love!* As if she could love *me*, after what I have been through! No, no, it is not love.”

“How pale you have grown!” cried Aglaya in alarm.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I haven’t slept, that’s all, and I’m rather tired. I—we certainly did talk about you, Aglaya.”

“Oh, indeed, it is true then! *You could actually talk about me with her*; and—and how could you have been fond of me when you had only seen me once?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps it was that I seemed to come upon light in the midst of my gloom. I told you the truth when I said I did not know why I thought of you before all others. Of course it was all a sort of dream, a dream amidst the horrors of reality. Afterwards I began to work. I did not intend to come back here for two or three years—”

“Then you came for her sake?” Aglaya’s voice trembled.

“Yes, I came for her sake.”

There was a moment or two of gloomy silence. Aglaya rose from her seat.

“If you say,” she began in shaky tones, “if you say that this woman of yours is mad—at all events I have nothing to do with her insane fancies. Kindly take these three letters, Lef Nicolaievitch, and throw them back to her, from me. And if she dares,” cried Aglaya suddenly, much louder than before, “if she dares so much as write me one word again, tell her I shall tell my father, and that she shall be taken to a lunatic asylum.”

The prince jumped up in alarm at Aglaya’s sudden wrath, and a mist seemed to come before his eyes.

“You cannot really feel like that! You don’t mean what you say. It is not true,” he murmured.

“It *is* true, it *is* true,” cried Aglaya, almost beside herself with rage.

“What’s true? What’s all this? What’s true?” said an alarmed voice just beside them.

Before them stood Lizabetha Prokofievna.

“Why, it’s true that I am going to marry Gavrila Ardalionovitch, that I love him and intend to elope with him tomorrow,” cried Aglaya, turning upon her mother. “Do you hear? Is your curiosity satisfied? Are you pleased with what you have heard?”

Aglaya rushed away homewards with these words.

“H’m! well, *you* are not going away just yet, my friend, at all events,” said Lizabetha, stopping the prince. “Kindly step home with me, and let me have a little explanation of the mystery. Nice goings on, these! I haven’t slept a wink all night as it is.”

The prince followed her.

IX.

Arrived at her house, Lizabetha Prokofievna paused in the first room. She could go no farther, and subsided on to a couch quite exhausted; too feeble to remember so much as to ask the prince to take a seat. This was a large reception-room, full of flowers, and with a glass door leading into the garden.

Alexandra and Adelaida came in almost immediately, and looked inquiringly at the prince and their mother.

The girls generally rose at about nine in the morning in the country; Aglaya, of late, had been in the habit of getting up rather earlier and having a walk in the garden, but not at seven o’clock; about eight or a little later was her usual time.

Lizabetha Prokofievna, who really had not slept all night, rose at about eight on purpose to meet Aglaya in the garden and walk with her; but she could not find her either in the garden or in her own room.

This agitated the old lady considerably; and she awoke her other daughters. Next, she learned from the maid that Aglaya had gone into the park before seven o'clock. The sisters made a joke of Aglaya's last freak, and told their mother that if she went into the park to look for her, Aglaya would probably be very angry with her, and that she was pretty sure to be sitting reading on the green bench that she had talked of two or three days since, and about which she had nearly quarrelled with Prince S., who did not see anything particularly lovely in it.

Arrived at the rendezvous of the prince and her daughter, and hearing the strange words of the latter, Lizabetha Prokofievna had been dreadfully alarmed, for many reasons. However, now that she had dragged the prince home with her, she began to feel a little frightened at what she had undertaken. Why should not Aglaya meet the prince in the park and have a talk with him, even if such a meeting should be by appointment?

"Don't suppose, prince," she began, bracing herself up for the effort, "don't suppose that I have brought you here to ask questions. After last night, I assure you, I am not so exceedingly anxious to see you at all; I could have postponed the pleasure for a long while." She paused.

"But at the same time you would be very glad to know how I happened to meet Aglaya Ivanovna this morning?" The prince finished her speech for her with the utmost composure.

"Well, what then? Supposing I should like to know?" cried Lizabetha Prokofievna, blushing. "I'm sure I am not afraid of plain speaking. I'm not offending anyone, and I never wish to, and—"

"Pardon me, it is no offence to wish to know this; you are her mother. We met at the green bench this morning, punctually at seven o'clock,—according to an agreement made by Aglaya Ivanovna with myself yesterday. She said that she wished to see me and speak to me about something important. We met and conversed for an hour about matters concerning Aglaya Ivanovna herself, and that's all."

"Of course it is all, my friend. I don't doubt you for a moment," said Lizabetha Prokofievna with dignity.

“Well done, prince, capital!” cried Aglaya, who entered the room at this moment. “Thank you for assuming that I would not demean myself with lies. Come, is that enough, mamma, or do you intend to put any more questions?”

“You know I have never needed to blush before you, up to this day, though perhaps you would have been glad enough to make me,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna,—with majesty. “Good-bye, prince; forgive me for bothering you. I trust you will rest assured of my unalterable esteem for you.”

The prince made his bows and retired at once. Alexandra and Adelaida smiled and whispered to each other, while Lizabetha Prokofievna glared severely at them. “We are only laughing at the prince’s beautiful bows, mamma,” said Adelaida. “Sometimes he bows just like a meal-sack, but to-day he was like—like Evgenie Pavlovitch!”

“It is the *heart* which is the best teacher of refinement and dignity, not the dancing-master,” said her mother, sententiously, and departed upstairs to her own room, not so much as glancing at Aglaya.

When the prince reached home, about nine o’clock, he found Vera Lebedeff and the maid on the verandah. They were both busy trying to tidy up the place after last night’s disorderly party.

“Thank goodness, we’ve just managed to finish it before you came in!” said Vera, joyfully.

“Good-morning! My head whirls so; I didn’t sleep all night. I should like to have a nap now.”

“Here, on the verandah? Very well, I’ll tell them all not to come and wake you. Papa has gone out somewhere.”

The servant left the room. Vera was about to follow her, but returned and approached the prince with a preoccupied air.

“Prince!” she said, “have pity on that poor boy; don’t turn him out today.”

“Not for the world; he shall do just as he likes.”

“He won’t do any harm now; and—and don’t be too severe with him.”

“Oh dear no! Why—”

“And—and you won’t *laugh* at him? That’s the chief thing.”

“Oh no! Never.”

“How foolish I am to speak of such things to a man like you,” said Vera, blushing. “Though you *do* look tired,” she added, half turning away, “your eyes are so splendid at this moment—so full of happiness.”

“Really?” asked the prince, gleefully, and he laughed in delight.

But Vera, simple-minded little girl that she was (just like a boy, in fact), here became dreadfully confused, of a sudden, and ran hastily out of the room, laughing and blushing.

“What a dear little thing she is,” thought the prince, and immediately forgot all about her.

He walked to the far end of the verandah, where the sofa stood, with a table in front of it. Here he sat down and covered his face with his hands, and so remained for ten minutes. Suddenly he put his hand in his coat-pocket and hurriedly produced three letters.

But the door opened again, and out came Colia.

The prince actually felt glad that he had been interrupted,—and might return the letters to his pocket. He was glad of the respite.

“Well,” said Colia, plunging *in medias res*, as he always did, “here’s a go! What do you think of Hippolyte now? Don’t respect him any longer, eh?”

“Why not? But look here, Colia, I’m tired; besides, the subject is too melancholy to begin upon again. How is he, though?”

“Asleep—he’ll sleep for a couple of hours yet. I quite understand—you haven’t slept—you walked about the park, I know. Agitation—excitement—all that sort of thing—quite natural, too!”

“How do you know I walked in the park and didn’t sleep at home?”

“Vera just told me. She tried to persuade me not to come, but I couldn’t help myself, just for one minute. I have been having my turn at the bedside for the last two hours; Kostia Lebedeff is there now. Burdovsky has gone. Now, lie down, prince, make yourself comfortable, and sleep well! I’m awfully impressed, you know.”

“Naturally, all this—”

“No, no, I mean with the ‘explanation,’ especially that part of it where he talks about Providence and a future life. There is a gigantic thought there.”

The prince gazed affectionately at Colia, who, of course, had come in solely for the purpose of talking about this "gigantic thought."

"But it is not any one particular thought, only; it is the general circumstances of the case. If Voltaire had written this now, or Rousseau, I should have just read it and thought it remarkable, but should not have been so *impressed* by it. But a man who knows for certain that he has but ten minutes to live and can talk like that—why—it's—it's *pride*, that is! It is really a most extraordinary, exalted assertion of personal dignity, it's—it's *defiant!* What a *gigantic* strength of will, eh? And to accuse a fellow like that of not putting in the cap on purpose; it's base and mean! You know he deceived us last night, the cunning rascal. I never packed his bag for him, and I never saw his pistol. He packed it himself. But he put me off my guard like that, you see. Vera says you are going to let him stay on; I swear there's no danger, especially as we are always with him."

"Who was by him at night?"

"I, and Burdovsky, and Kostia Lebedeff. Keller stayed a little while, and then went over to Lebedeff's to sleep. Ferdishenko slept at Lebedeff's, too; but he went away at seven o'clock. My father is always at Lebedeff's; but he has gone out just now. I dare say Lebedeff will be coming in here directly; he has been looking for you; I don't know what he wants. Shall we let him in or not, if you are asleep? I'm going to have a nap, too. By-the-by, such a curious thing happened. Burdovsky woke me at seven, and I met my father just outside the room, so drunk, he didn't even know me. He stood before me like a log, and when he recovered himself, asked hurriedly how Hippolyte was. 'Yes,' he said, when I told him, 'that's all very well, but I *really* came to warn you that you must be very careful what you say before Ferdishenko.' Do you follow me, prince?"

"Yes. Is it really so? However, it's all the same to us, of course."

"Of course it is; we are not a secret society; and that being the case, it is all the more curious that the general should have been on his way to wake me up in order to tell me this."

"Ferdishenko has gone, you say?"

"Yes, he went at seven o'clock. He came into the room on his way out; I was watching just then. He said he was going to spend 'the rest of the night' at Wilkin's; there's a tipsy fellow, a friend of his, of that name. Well, I'm off. Oh, here's Lebedeff himself! The prince wants to go to sleep, Lukian Timofeyovitch, so you may just go away again."

“One moment, my dear prince, just one. I must absolutely speak to you about something which is most grave,” said Lebedeff, mysteriously and solemnly, entering the room with a bow and looking extremely important. He had but just returned, and carried his hat in his hand. He looked preoccupied and most unusually dignified.

The prince begged him to take a chair.

“I hear you have called twice; I suppose you are still worried about yesterday’s affair.”

“What, about that boy, you mean? Oh dear no, yesterday my ideas were a little—well—mixed. Today, I assure you, I shall not oppose in the slightest degree any suggestions it may please you to make.”

“What’s up with you this morning, Lebedeff? You look so important and dignified, and you choose your words so carefully,” said the prince, smiling.

“Nicolai Ardalionovitch!” said Lebedeff, in a most amiable tone of voice, addressing the boy. “As I have a communication to make to the prince which concerns only myself—”

“Of course, of course, not my affair. All right,” said Colia, and away he went.

“I love that boy for his perception,” said Lebedeff, looking after him. “My dear prince,” he continued, “I have had a terrible misfortune, either last night or early this morning. I cannot tell the exact time.”

“What is it?”

“I have lost four hundred roubles out of my side pocket! They’re gone!” said Lebedeff, with a sour smile.

“You’ve lost four hundred roubles? Oh! I’m sorry for that.”

“Yes, it is serious for a poor man who lives by his toil.”

“Of course, of course! How was it?”

“Oh, the wine is to blame, of course. I confess to you, prince, as I would to Providence itself. Yesterday I received four hundred roubles from a debtor at about five in the afternoon, and came down here by train. I had my purse in my pocket. When I changed, I put the money into the pocket of my plain clothes, intending to keep it by me, as I expected to have an applicant for it in the evening.”

“It’s true then, Lebedeff, that you advertise to lend money on gold or silver articles?”

“Yes, through an agent. My own name doesn’t appear. I have a large family, you see, and at a small percentage—”

“Quite so, quite so. I only asked for information—excuse the question. Go on.”

“Well, meanwhile that sick boy was brought here, and those guests came in, and we had tea, and—well, we made merry—to my ruin! Hearing of your birthday afterwards, and excited with the circumstances of the evening, I ran upstairs and changed my plain clothes once more for my uniform [Civil Service clerks in Russia wear uniform.]—you must have noticed I had my uniform on all the evening? Well, I forgot the money in the pocket of my old coat—you know when God will ruin a man he first of all bereaves him of his senses—and it was only this morning at half-past seven that I woke up and grabbed at my coat pocket, first thing. The pocket was empty—the purse gone, and not a trace to be found!”

“Dear me! This is very unpleasant!”

“Unpleasant! Indeed it is. You have found a very appropriate expression,” said Lebedeff, politely, but with sarcasm.

“But what’s to be done? It’s a serious matter,” said the prince, thoughtfully. “Don’t you think you may have dropped it out of your pocket whilst intoxicated?”

“Certainly. Anything is possible when one is intoxicated, as you neatly express it, prince. But consider—if I, intoxicated or not, dropped an object out of my pocket on to the ground, that object ought to remain on the ground. Where is the object, then?”

“Didn’t you put it away in some drawer, perhaps?”

“I’ve looked everywhere, and turned out everything.”

“I confess this disturbs me a good deal. Someone must have picked it up, then.”

“Or taken it out of my pocket—two alternatives.”

“It is very distressing, because *who*—? That’s the question!”

“Most undoubtedly, excellent prince, you have hit it—that is the very question. How wonderfully you express the exact situation in a few words!”

“Come, come, Lebedeff, no sarcasm! It’s a serious—”

“Sarcasm!” cried Lebedeff, wringing his hands. “All right, all right, I’m not angry. I’m only put out about this. Whom do you suspect?”

“That is a very difficult and complicated question. I cannot suspect the servant, for she was in the kitchen the whole evening, nor do I suspect any of my children.”

“I should think not. Go on.”

“Then it must be one of the guests.”

“Is such a thing possible?”

“Absolutely and utterly impossible—and yet, so it must be. But one thing I am sure of, if it be a theft, it was committed, not in the evening when we were all together, but either at night or early in the morning; therefore, by one of those who slept here. Burdovsky and Colia I except, of course. They did not even come into my room.”

“Yes, or even if they had! But who did sleep with you?”

“Four of us, including myself, in two rooms. The general, myself, Keller, and Ferdishenko. One of us four it must have been. I don’t suspect myself, though such cases have been known.”

“Oh! *do* go on, Lebedeff! Don’t drag it out so.”

“Well, there are three left, then—Keller firstly. He is a drunkard to begin with, and a liberal (in the sense of other people’s pockets), otherwise with more of the ancient knight about him than of the modern liberal. He was with the sick man at first, but came over afterwards because there was no place to lie down in the room and the floor was so hard.”

“You suspect him?”

“I *did* suspect him. When I woke up at half-past seven and tore my hair in despair for my loss and carelessness, I awoke the general, who was sleeping the sleep of innocence near me. Taking into consideration the sudden disappearance of Ferdishenko, which was suspicious in itself, we decided to search Keller, who was lying there sleeping like a top. Well, we searched his clothes thoroughly, and not a farthing did we find; in fact, his pockets all had holes in them. We found a dirty handkerchief, and a love-letter from some scullery-maid. The general decided that he was innocent. We awoke him for further inquiries, and had the greatest difficulty in making him understand what was up. He opened his mouth and stared—he looked so stupid and so absurdly innocent. It wasn’t Keller.”

“Oh, I’m so glad!” said the prince, joyfully. “I was so afraid.”

“Afraid! Then you had some grounds for supposing he might be the culprit?” said Lebedeff, frowning.

“Oh no—not a bit! It was foolish of me to say I was afraid! Don’t repeat it please, Lebedeff, don’t tell anyone I said that!”

“My dear prince! your words lie in the lowest depth of my heart—it is their tomb!” said Lebedeff, solemnly, pressing his hat to the region of his heart.

“Thanks; very well. Then I suppose it’s Ferdishenko; that is, I mean, you suspect Ferdishenko?”

“Whom else?” said Lebedeff, softly, gazing intently into the prince s face.

“Of course—quite so, whom else? But what are the proofs?”

“We have evidence. In the first place, his mysterious disappearance at seven o’clock, or even earlier.”

“I know, Colia told me that he had said he was off to—I forget the name, some friend of his, to finish the night.”

“H’m! then Colia has spoken to you already?”

“Not about the theft.”

“He does not know of it; I have kept it a secret. Very well, Ferdishenko went off to Wilkin’s. That is not so curious in itself, but here the evidence opens out further. He left his address, you see, when he went. Now prince, consider, why did he leave his address? Why do you suppose he went out of his way to tell Colia that he had gone to Wilkin’s? Who cared to know that he was going to Wilkin’s? No, no! prince, this is finesse, thieves’ finesse! This is as good as saying, ‘There, how can I be a thief when I leave my address? I’m not concealing my movements as a thief would.’ Do you understand, prince?”

“Oh yes, but that is not enough.”

“Second proof. The scent turns out to be false, and the address given is a sham. An hour after—that is at about eight, I went to Wilkin’s myself, and there was no trace of Ferdishenko. The maid did tell me, certainly, that an hour or so since someone had been hammering at the door, and had smashed the bell; she said she would not open the door because she didn’t want to wake her master; probably she was too lazy to get up herself. Such phenomena are met with occasionally!”

“But is that all your evidence? It is not enough!”

“Well, prince, whom are we to suspect, then? Consider!” said Lebedeff with almost servile amiability, smiling at the prince. There was a look of cunning in his eyes, however.

“You should search your room and all the cupboards again,” said the prince, after a moment or two of silent reflection.

“But I have done so, my dear prince!” said Lebedeff, more sweetly than ever.

“H’m! why must you needs go up and change your coat like that?” asked the prince, banging the table with his fist, in annoyance.

“Oh, don’t be so worried on my account, prince! I assure you I am not worth it! At least, not I alone. But I see you are suffering on behalf of the criminal too, for wretched Ferdishenko, in fact!”

“Of course you have given me a disagreeable enough thing to think about,” said the prince, irritably, “but what are you going to do, since you are so sure it was Ferdishenko?”

“But who else *could* it be, my very dear prince?” repeated Lebedeff, as sweet as sugar again. “If you don’t wish me to suspect Mr. Burdovsky?”

“Of course not.”

“Nor the general? Ha, ha, ha!”

“Nonsense!” said the prince, angrily, turning round upon him.

“Quite so, nonsense! Ha, ha, ha! dear me! He did amuse me, did the general! We went off on the hot scent to Wilkin’s together, you know; but I must first observe that the general was even more thunderstruck than I myself this morning, when I awoke him after discovering the theft; so much so that his very face changed—he grew red and then pale, and at length flew into a paroxysm of such noble wrath that I assure you I was quite surprised! He is a most generous-hearted man! He tells lies by the thousands, I know, but it is merely a weakness; he is a man of the highest feelings; a simple-minded man too, and a man who carries the conviction of innocence in his very appearance. I love that man, sir; I may have told you so before; it is a weakness of mine. Well—he suddenly stopped in the middle of the road, opened out his coat and bared his breast. ‘Search me,’ he says, ‘you searched Keller; why don’t you search me too? It is only fair!’ says he. And all the while his legs and hands were trembling with anger, and he as white as a sheet all over! So I said to him, ‘Nonsense, general; if anybody but yourself had said that to me, I’d have taken my head, my own head, and

put it on a large dish and carried it round to anyone who suspected you; and I should have said: “There, you see that head? It’s my head, and I’ll go bail with that head for him! Yes, and walk through the fire for him, too.” There,’ says I, ‘that’s how I’d answer for you, general!’ Then he embraced me, in the middle of the street, and hugged me so tight (crying over me all the while) that I coughed fit to choke! ‘You are the one friend left to me amid all my misfortunes,’ says he. Oh, he’s a man of sentiment, that! He went on to tell me a story of how he had been accused, or suspected, of stealing five hundred thousand roubles once, as a young man; and how, the very next day, he had rushed into a burning, blazing house and saved the very count who suspected him, and Nina Alexandrovna (who was then a young girl), from a fiery death. The count embraced him, and that was how he came to marry Nina Alexandrovna, he said. As for the money, it was found among the ruins next day in an English iron box with a secret lock; it had got under the floor somehow, and if it had not been for the fire it would never have been found! The whole thing is, of course, an absolute fabrication, though when he spoke of Nina Alexandrovna he wept! She’s a grand woman, is Nina Alexandrovna, though she is very angry with me!”

“Are you acquainted with her?”

“Well, hardly at all. I wish I were, if only for the sake of justifying myself in her eyes. Nina Alexandrovna has a grudge against me for, as she thinks, encouraging her husband in drinking; whereas in reality I not only do not encourage him, but I actually keep him out of harm’s way, and out of bad company. Besides, he’s my friend, prince, so that I shall not lose sight of him, again. Where he goes, I go. He’s quite given up visiting the captain’s widow, though sometimes he thinks sadly of her, especially in the morning, when he’s putting on his boots. I don’t know why it’s at that time. But he has no money, and it’s no use his going to see her without. Has he borrowed any money from you, prince?”

“No, he has not.”

“Ah, he’s ashamed to! He *meant* to ask you, I know, for he said so. I suppose he thinks that as you gave him some once (you remember), you would probably refuse if he asked you again.”

“Do you ever give him money?”

“Prince! Money! Why I would give that man not only my money, but my very life, if he wanted it. Well, perhaps that’s exaggeration; not life, we’ll say, but some illness, a boil or a bad cough, or anything of that sort, I would stand with pleasure, for his sake; for I consider him a great man fallen—money, indeed!”

“H’m, then you *do* give him money?”

“N-no, I have never given him money, and he knows well that I will never give him any; because I am anxious to keep him out of intemperate ways. He is going to town with me now; for you must know I am off to Petersburg after Ferdishenko, while the scent is hot; I’m certain he is there. I shall let the general go one way, while I go the other; we have so arranged matters in order to pop out upon Ferdishenko, you see, from different sides. But I am going to follow that naughty old general and catch him, I know where, at a certain widow’s house; for I think it will be a good lesson, to put him to shame by catching him with the widow.”

“Oh, Lebedeff, don’t, don’t make any scandal about it!” said the prince, much agitated, and speaking in a low voice.

“Not for the world, not for the world! I merely wish to make him ashamed of himself. Oh, prince, great though this misfortune be to myself, I cannot help thinking of his morals! I have a great favour to ask of you, esteemed prince; I confess that it is the chief object of my visit. You know the Ivolgins, you have even lived in their house; so if you would lend me your help, honoured prince, in the general’s own interest and for his good.”

Lebedeff clasped his hands in supplication.

“What help do you want from me? You may be certain that I am most anxious to understand you, Lebedeff.”

“I felt sure of that, or I should not have come to you. We might manage it with the help of Nina Alexandrovna, so that he might be closely watched in his own house. Unfortunately I am not on terms… otherwise… but Nicolai Ardalionovitch, who adores you with all his youthful soul, might help, too.”

“No, no! Heaven forbid that we should bring Nina Alexandrovna into this business! Or Colia, either. But perhaps I have not yet quite understood you, Lebedeff?”

Lebedeff made an impatient movement.

“But there is nothing to understand! Sympathy and tenderness, that is all—that is all our poor invalid requires! You will permit me to consider him an invalid?”

“Yes, it shows delicacy and intelligence on your part.”

“I will explain my idea by a practical example, to make it clearer. You know the sort of man he is. At present his only failing is that he is crazy about that captain’s widow, and he cannot go to her without money, and I mean to catch him at her house today—for

his own good; but supposing it was not only the widow, but that he had committed a real crime, or at least some very dishonourable action (of which he is, of course, incapable), I repeat that even in that case, if he were treated with what I may call generous tenderness, one could get at the whole truth, for he is very soft-hearted! Believe me, he would betray himself before five days were out; he would burst into tears, and make a clean breast of the matter; especially if managed with tact, and if you and his family watched his every step, so to speak. Oh, my dear prince," Lebedeff added most emphatically, "I do not positively assert that he has... I am ready, as the saying is, to shed my last drop of blood for him this instant; but you will admit that debauchery, drunkenness, and the captain's widow, all these together may lead him very far."

"I am, of course, quite ready to add my efforts to yours in such a case," said the prince, rising; "but I confess, Lebedeff, that I am terribly perplexed. Tell me, do you still think... plainly, you say yourself that you suspect Mr. Ferdishenko?"

Lebedeff clasped his hands once more.

"Why, who else could I possibly suspect? Who else, most outspoken prince?" he replied, with an unctuous smile.

Muishkin frowned, and rose from his seat.

"You see, Lebedeff, a mistake here would be a dreadful thing. This Ferdishenko, I would not say a word against him, of course; but, who knows? Perhaps it really was he? I mean he really does seem to be a more likely man than... than any other."

Lebedeff strained his eyes and ears to take in what the prince was saying. The latter was frowning more and more, and walking excitedly up and down, trying not to look at Lebedeff.

"You see," he said, "I was given to understand that Ferdishenko was that sort of man,—that one can't say everything before him. One has to take care not to say too much, you understand? I say this to prove that he really is, so to speak, more likely to have done this than anyone else, eh? You understand? The important thing is, not to make a mistake."

"And who told you this about Ferdishenko?"

"Oh, I was told. Of course I don't altogether believe it. I am very sorry that I should have had to say this, because I assure you I don't believe it myself; it is all nonsense, of course. It was stupid of me to say anything about it."

“You see, it is very important, it is most important to know where you got this report from,” said Lebedeff, excitedly. He had risen from his seat, and was trying to keep step with the prince, running after him, up and down. “Because look here, prince, I don’t mind telling you now that as we were going along to Wilkin’s this morning, after telling me what you know about the fire, and saving the count and all that, the general was pleased to drop certain hints to the same effect about Ferdishenko, but so vaguely and clumsily that I thought better to put a few questions to him on the matter, with the result that I found the whole thing was an invention of his excellency’s own mind. Of course, he only lies with the best intentions; still, he lies. But, such being the case, where could you have heard the same report? It was the inspiration of the moment with him, you understand, so who could have told *you?* It is an important question, you see!”

“It was Colia told me, and his father told *him* at about six this morning. They met at the threshold, when Colia was leaving the room for something or other.” The prince told Lebedeff all that Colia had made known to himself, in detail.

“There now, that’s what we may call *scent!*” said Lebedeff, rubbing his hands and laughing silently. “I thought it must be so, you see. The general interrupted his innocent slumbers, at six o’clock, in order to go and wake his beloved son, and warn him of the dreadful danger of companionship with Ferdishenko. Dear me! what a dreadfully dangerous man Ferdishenko must be, and what touching paternal solicitude, on the part of his excellency, ha! ha! ha!”

“Listen, Lebedeff,” began the prince, quite overwhelmed; “*do* act quietly—don’t make a scandal, Lebedeff, I ask you—I entreat you! No one must know—*no one*, mind! In that case only, I will help you.”

“Be assured, most honourable, most worthy of princes—be assured that the whole matter shall be buried within my heart!” cried Lebedeff, in a paroxysm of exaltation. “I’d give every drop of my blood… Illustrious prince, I am a poor wretch in soul and spirit, but ask the veriest scoundrel whether he would prefer to deal with one like himself, or with a noble-hearted man like you, and there is no doubt as to his choice! He’ll answer that he prefers the noble-hearted man—and there you have the triumph of virtue! *Au revoir*, honoured prince! You and I together—softly! softly!”

X.

The prince understood at last why he shivered with dread every time he thought of the three letters in his pocket, and why he had put off reading them until the evening.

When he fell into a heavy sleep on the sofa on the verandah, without having had the courage to open a single one of the three envelopes, he again dreamed a painful dream, and once more that poor, “sinful” woman appeared to him. Again she gazed at him with tears sparkling on her long lashes, and beckoned him after her; and again he awoke, as before, with the picture of her face haunting him.

He longed to get up and go to her at once—but he *could not*. At length, almost in despair, he unfolded the letters, and began to read them.

These letters, too, were like a dream. We sometimes have strange, impossible dreams, contrary to all the laws of nature. When we awake we remember them and wonder at their strangeness. You remember, perhaps, that you were in full possession of your reason during this succession of fantastic images; even that you acted with extraordinary logic and cunning while surrounded by murderers who hid their intentions and made great demonstrations of friendship, while waiting for an opportunity to cut your throat. You remember how you escaped them by some ingenious stratagem; then you doubted if they were really deceived, or whether they were only pretending not to know your hiding-place; then you thought of another plan and hoodwinked them once again. You remember all this quite clearly, but how is it that your reason calmly accepted all the manifest absurdities and impossibilities that crowded into your dream? One of the murderers suddenly changed into a woman before your very eyes; then the woman was transformed into a hideous, cunning little dwarf; and you believed it, and accepted it all almost as a matter of course—while at the same time your intelligence seemed unusually keen, and accomplished miracles of cunning, sagacity, and logic! Why is it that when you awake to the world of realities you nearly always feel, sometimes very vividly, that the vanished dream has carried with it some enigma which you have failed to solve? You smile at the extravagance of your dream, and yet you feel that this tissue of absurdity contained some real idea, something that belongs to your true life,—something that exists, and has always existed, in your heart. You search your dream for some prophecy that you were expecting. It has left a deep impression upon you, joyful or cruel, but what it means, or what has been predicted to you in it, you can neither understand nor remember.

The reading of these letters produced some such effect upon the prince. He felt, before he even opened the envelopes, that the very fact of their existence was like a nightmare. How could she ever have made up her mind to write to her? he asked himself. How could she write about that at all? And how could such a wild idea have entered her head? And yet, the strangest part of the matter was, that while he read the letters, he himself almost believed in the possibility, and even in the justification, of the idea he had thought so wild. Of course it was a mad dream, a nightmare, and yet

there was something cruelly real about it. For hours he was haunted by what he had read. Several passages returned again and again to his mind, and as he brooded over them, he felt inclined to say to himself that he had foreseen and known all that was written here; it even seemed to him that he had read the whole of this some time or other, long, long ago; and all that had tormented and grieved him up to now was to be found in these old, long since read, letters.

“When you open this letter” (so the first began), “look first at the signature. The signature will tell you all, so that I need explain nothing, nor attempt to justify myself. Were I in any way on a footing with you, you might be offended at my audacity; but who am I, and who are you? We are at such extremes, and I am so far removed from you, that I could not offend you if I wished to do so.”

Farther on, in another place, she wrote: “Do not consider my words as the sickly ecstasies of a diseased mind, but you are, in my opinion—perfection! I have seen you—I see you every day. I do not judge you; I have not weighed you in the scales of Reason and found you Perfection—it is simply an article of faith. But I must confess one sin against you—I love you. One should not love perfection. One should only look on it as perfection—yet I am in love with you. Though love equalizes, do not fear. I have not lowered you to my level, even in my most secret thoughts. I have written ‘Do not fear,’ as if you could fear. I would kiss your footprints if I could; but, oh! I am not putting myself on a level with you!—Look at the signature—quick, look at the signature!”

“However, observe” (she wrote in another of the letters), “that although I couple you with him, yet I have not once asked you whether you love him. He fell in love with you, though he saw you but once. He spoke of you as of ‘the light.’ These are his own words—I heard him use them. But I understood without his saying it that you were all that light is to him. I lived near him for a whole month, and I understood then that you, too, must love him. I think of you and him as one.”

“What was the matter yesterday?” (she wrote on another sheet). “I passed by you, and you seemed to me to *blush*. Perhaps it was only my fancy. If I were to bring you to the most loathsome den, and show you the revelation of undisguised vice—you should not blush. You can never feel the sense of personal affront. You may hate all who are mean, or base, or unworthy—but not for yourself—only for those whom they wrong. No one can wrong *you*. Do you know, I think you ought to love me—for you are the same in my eyes as in his—you are as light. An angel cannot hate, perhaps cannot love, either. I often ask myself—is it possible to love everybody? Indeed it is not; it is not in nature. Abstract love of humanity is nearly always love of self. But you are different. You cannot help loving all, since you can compare with none, and are above

all personal offence or anger. Oh! how bitter it would be to me to know that you felt anger or shame on my account, for that would be your fall—you would become comparable at once with such as me.

“Yesterday, after seeing you, I went home and thought out a picture.

“Artists always draw the Saviour as an actor in one of the Gospel stories. I should do differently. I should represent Christ alone—the disciples did leave Him alone occasionally. I should paint one little child left with Him. This child has been playing about near Him, and had probably just been telling the Saviour something in its pretty baby prattle. Christ had listened to it, but was now musing—one hand reposing on the child’s bright head. His eyes have a far-away expression. Thought, great as the Universe, is in them—His face is sad. The little one leans its elbow upon Christ’s knee, and with its cheek resting on its hand, gazes up at Him, pondering as children sometimes do ponder. The sun is setting. There you have my picture.

“You are innocent—and in your innocence lies all your perfection—oh, remember that! What is my passion to you?—you are mine now; I shall be near you all my life—I shall not live long!”

At length, in the last letter of all, he found:

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t misunderstand me! Do not think that I humiliate myself by writing thus to you, or that I belong to that class of people who take a satisfaction in humiliating themselves—from pride. I have my consolation, though it would be difficult to explain it—but I do not humiliate myself.

“Why do I wish to unite you two? For your sakes or my own? For my own sake, naturally. All the problems of my life would thus be solved; I have thought so for a long time. I know that once when your sister Adelaida saw my portrait she said that such beauty could overthrow the world. But I have renounced the world. You think it strange that I should say so, for you saw me decked with lace and diamonds, in the company of drunkards and wastrels. Take no notice of that; I know that I have almost ceased to exist. God knows what it is dwelling within me now—it is not myself. I can see it every day in two dreadful eyes which are always looking at me, even when not present. These eyes are silent now, they say nothing; but I know their secret. His house is gloomy, and there is a secret in it. I am convinced that in some box he has a razor hidden, tied round with silk, just like the one that Moscow murderer had. This man also lived with his mother, and had a razor hidden away, tied round with white silk, and with this razor he intended to cut a throat.

“All the while I was in their house I felt sure that somewhere beneath the floor there was hidden away some dreadful corpse, wrapped in oil-cloth, perhaps buried there by his father, who knows? Just as in the Moscow case. I could have shown you the very spot!

“He is always silent, but I know well that he loves me so much that he must hate me. My wedding and yours are to be on the same day; so I have arranged with him. I have no secrets from him. I would kill him from very fright, but he will kill me first. He has just burst out laughing, and says that I am raving. He knows I am writing to you.”

There was much more of this delirious wandering in the letters—one of them was very long.

At last the prince came out of the dark, gloomy park, in which he had wandered about for hours just as yesterday. The bright night seemed to him to be lighter than ever. “It must be quite early,” he thought. (He had forgotten his watch.) There was a sound of distant music somewhere. “Ah,” he thought, “the Vauxhall! They won’t be there today, of course!” At this moment he noticed that he was close to their house; he had felt that he must gravitate to this spot eventually, and, with a beating heart, he mounted the verandah steps.

No one met him; the verandah was empty, and nearly pitch dark. He opened the door into the room, but it, too, was dark and empty. He stood in the middle of the room in perplexity. Suddenly the door opened, and in came Alexandra, candle in hand. Seeing the prince she stopped before him in surprise, looking at him questioningly.

It was clear that she had been merely passing through the room from door to door, and had not had the remotest notion that she would meet anyone.

“How did you come here?” she asked, at last.

“I—I—came in—”

“Mamma is not very well, nor is Aglaya. Adelaida has gone to bed, and I am just going. We were alone the whole evening. Father and Prince S. have gone to town.”

“I have come to you—now—to—”

“Do you know what time it is?”

“N—no!”

“Half-past twelve. We are always in bed by one.”

“I—I thought it was half-past nine!”

“Never mind!” she laughed, “but why didn’t you come earlier? Perhaps you were expected!”

“I thought” he stammered, making for the door.

“*Au revoir!* I shall amuse them all with this story tomorrow!”

He walked along the road towards his own house. His heart was beating, his thoughts were confused, everything around seemed to be part of a dream.

And suddenly, just as twice already he had awaked from sleep with the same vision, that very apparition now seemed to rise up before him. The woman appeared to step out from the park, and stand in the path in front of him, as though she had been waiting for him there.

He shuddered and stopped; she seized his hand and pressed it frenziedly.

No, this was no apparition!

There she stood at last, face to face with him, for the first time since their parting.

She said something, but he looked silently back at her. His heart ached with anguish. Oh! never would he banish the recollection of this meeting with her, and he never remembered it but with the same pain and agony of mind.

She went on her knees before him—there in the open road—like a madwoman. He retreated a step, but she caught his hand and kissed it, and, just as in his dream, the tears were sparkling on her long, beautiful lashes.

“Get up!” he said, in a frightened whisper, raising her. “Get up at once!”

“Are you happy—are you happy?” she asked. “Say this one word. Are you happy now? Today, this moment? Have you just been with her? What did she say?”

She did not rise from her knees; she would not listen to him; she put her questions hurriedly, as though she were pursued.

“I am going away tomorrow, as you bade me—I won’t write—so that this is the last time I shall see you, the last time! This is really the *last time!*”

“Oh, be calm—be calm! Get up!” he entreated, in despair.

She gazed thirstily at him and clutched his hands.

“Good-bye!” she said at last, and rose and left him, very quickly.

The prince noticed that Rogojin had suddenly appeared at her side, and had taken her arm and was leading her away.

“Wait a minute, prince,” shouted the latter, as he went. “I shall be back in five minutes.”

He reappeared in five minutes as he had said. The prince was waiting for him.

“I’ve put her in the carriage,” he said; “it has been waiting round the corner there since ten o’clock. She expected that you would be with *them* all the evening. I told her exactly what you wrote me. She won’t write to the girl any more, she promises; and tomorrow she will be off, as you wish. She desired to see you for the last time, although you refused, so we’ve been sitting and waiting on that bench till you should pass on your way home.”

“Did she bring you with her of her own accord?”

“Of course she did!” said Rogojin, showing his teeth; “and I saw for myself what I knew before. You’ve read her letters, I suppose?”

“Did you read them?” asked the prince, struck by the thought.

“Of course—she showed them to me herself. You are thinking of the razor, eh? Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, she is mad!” cried the prince, wringing his hands.

“Who knows? Perhaps she is not so mad after all,” said Rogojin, softly, as though thinking aloud.

The prince made no reply.

“Well, good-bye,” said Rogojin. “I’m off tomorrow too, you know. Remember me kindly! By-the-by,” he added, turning round sharply again, “did you answer her question just now? Are you happy, or not?”

“No, no, no!” cried the prince, with unspeakable sadness.

“Ha, ha! I never supposed you would say ‘yes,’” cried Rogojin, laughing sardonically.

And he disappeared, without looking round again.

PART IV

I.

A week had elapsed since the rendezvous of our two friends on the green bench in the park, when, one fine morning at about half-past ten o'clock, Varvara Ardalionovna, otherwise Mrs. Ptitsin, who had been out to visit a friend, returned home in a state of considerable mental depression.

There are certain people of whom it is difficult to say anything which will at once throw them into relief—in other words, describe them graphically in their typical characteristics. These are they who are generally known as "commonplace people," and this class comprises, of course, the immense majority of mankind. Authors, as a rule, attempt to select and portray types rarely met with in their entirety, but these types are nevertheless more real than real life itself.

"Podkoleosin" [A character in Gogol's comedy, The Wedding.] was perhaps an exaggeration, but he was by no means a non-existent character; on the contrary, how many intelligent people, after hearing of this Podkoleosin from Gogol, immediately began to find that scores of their friends were exactly like him! They knew, perhaps, before Gogol told them, that their friends were like Podkoleosin, but they did not know what name to give them. In real life, young fellows seldom jump out of the window just before their weddings, because such a feat, not to speak of its other aspects, must be a decidedly unpleasant mode of escape; and yet there are plenty of bridegrooms, intelligent fellows too, who would be ready to confess themselves Podkoleosins in the depths of their consciousness, just before marriage. Nor does every husband feel bound to repeat at every step, "*Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin!*" like another typical personage; and yet how many millions and billions of Georges Dandins there are in real life who feel inclined to utter this soul-drawn cry after their honeymoon, if not the day after the wedding! Therefore, without entering into any more serious examination of the question, I will content myself with remarking that in real life typical characters are "watered down," so to speak; and all these Dandins and Podkoleosins actually exist among us every day, but in a diluted form. I will just add, however, that Georges Dandin might have existed exactly as Molière presented him, and probably does exist now and then, though rarely; and so I will end this scientific examination, which is beginning to look like a newspaper criticism. But for all this, the question remains,—what are the novelists to do with commonplace people, and how are they to be presented to the reader in such a form as to be in the least degree interesting? They cannot be left out altogether, for commonplace people meet one at every turn of life, and to leave them out would be to destroy the whole reality and probability of the story. To fill a novel with typical characters only, or with merely strange and uncommon people, would render the book unreal and improbable, and would very

likely destroy the interest. In my opinion, the duty of the novelist is to seek out points of interest and instruction even in the characters of commonplace people.

For instance, when the whole essence of an ordinary person's nature lies in his perpetual and unchangeable commonplaceness; and when in spite of all his endeavours to do something out of the common, this person ends, eventually, by remaining in his unbroken line of routine—. I think such an individual really does become a type of his own—a type of commonplaceness which will not for the world, if it can help it, be contented, but strains and yearns to be something original and independent, without the slightest possibility of being so. To this class of commonplace people belong several characters in this novel;—characters which—I admit—I have not drawn very vividly up to now for my reader's benefit.

Such were, for instance, Varvara Ardalionovna Ptitsin, her husband, and her brother, Gania.

There is nothing so annoying as to be fairly rich, of a fairly good family, pleasing presence, average education, to be "not stupid," kind-hearted, and yet to have no talent at all, no originality, not a single idea of one's own—to be, in fact, "just like everyone else."

Of such people there are countless numbers in this world—far more even than appear. They can be divided into two classes as all men can—that is, those of limited intellect, and those who are much cleverer. The former of these classes is the happier.

To a commonplace man of limited intellect, for instance, nothing is simpler than to imagine himself an original character, and to revel in that belief without the slightest misgiving.

Many of our young women have thought fit to cut their hair short, put on blue spectacles, and call themselves Nihilists. By doing this they have been able to persuade themselves, without further trouble, that they have acquired new convictions of their own. Some men have but felt some little qualm of kindness towards their fellow-men, and the fact has been quite enough to persuade them that they stand alone in the van of enlightenment and that no one has such humanitarian feelings as they. Others have but to read an idea of somebody else's, and they can immediately assimilate it and believe that it was a child of their own brain. The "impudence of ignorance," if I may use the expression, is developed to a wonderful extent in such cases;—unlikely as it appears, it is met with at every turn.

This confidence of a stupid man in his own talents has been wonderfully depicted by Gogol in the amazing character of Pirogoff. Pirogoff has not the slightest doubt of his

own genius,—nay, of his *superiority* of genius,—so certain is he of it that he never questions it. How many Pirogoffs have there not been among our writers—scholars, propagandists? I say "have been," but indeed there are plenty of them at this very day.

Our friend, Gania, belonged to the other class—to the "much cleverer" persons, though he was from head to foot permeated and saturated with the longing to be original. This class, as I have said above, is far less happy. For the "clever commonplace" person, though he may possibly imagine himself a man of genius and originality, none the less has within his heart the deathless worm of suspicion and doubt; and this doubt sometimes brings a clever man to despair. (As a rule, however, nothing tragic happens;—his liver becomes a little damaged in the course of time, nothing more serious. Such men do not give up their aspirations after originality without a severe struggle,—and there have been men who, though good fellows in themselves, and even benefactors to humanity, have sunk to the level of base criminals for the sake of originality).

Gania was a beginner, as it were, upon this road. A deep and unchangeable consciousness of his own lack of talent, combined with a vast longing to be able to persuade himself that he was original, had rankled in his heart, even from childhood.

He seemed to have been born with overwrought nerves, and in his passionate desire to excel, he was often led to the brink of some rash step; and yet, having resolved upon such a step, when the moment arrived, he invariably proved too sensible to take it. He was ready, in the same way, to do a base action in order to obtain his wished-for object; and yet, when the moment came to do it, he found that he was too honest for any great baseness. (Not that he objected to acts of petty meanness—he was always ready for *them*.) He looked with hate and loathing on the poverty and downfall of his family, and treated his mother with haughty contempt, although he knew that his whole future depended on her character and reputation.

Aglaya had simply frightened him; yet he did not give up all thoughts of her—though he never seriously hoped that she would condescend to him. At the time of his "adventure" with Nastasia Philipovna he had come to the conclusion that money was his only hope—money should do all for him.

At the moment when he lost Aglaya, and after the scene with Nastasia, he had felt so low in his own eyes that he actually brought the money back to the prince. Of this returning of the money given to him by a madwoman who had received it from a madman, he had often repented since—though he never ceased to be proud of his action. During the short time that Muishkin remained in Petersburg Gania had had time to come to hate him for his sympathy, though the prince told him that it was "not

everyone who would have acted so nobly" as to return the money. He had long pondered, too, over his relations with Aglaya, and had persuaded himself that with such a strange, childish, innocent character as hers, things might have ended very differently. Remorse then seized him; he threw up his post, and buried himself in self-torment and reproach.

He lived at Ptitsin's, and openly showed contempt for the latter, though he always listened to his advice, and was sensible enough to ask for it when he wanted it. Gavrila Ardalionovitch was angry with Ptitsin because the latter did not care to become a Rothschild. "If you are to be a Jew," he said, "do it properly—squeeze people right and left, show some character; be the King of the Jews while you are about it."

Ptitsin was quiet and not easily offended—he only laughed. But on one occasion he explained seriously to Gania that he was no Jew, that he did nothing dishonest, that he could not help the market price of money, that, thanks to his accurate habits, he had already a good footing and was respected, and that his business was flourishing.

"I shan't ever be a Rothschild, and there is no reason why I should," he added, smiling; "but I shall have a house in the Liteynaya, perhaps two, and that will be enough for me." "Who knows but what I may have three!" he concluded to himself; but this dream, cherished inwardly, he never confided to a soul.

Nature loves and favours such people. Ptitsin will certainly have his reward, not three houses, but four, precisely because from childhood up he had realized that he would never be a Rothschild. That will be the limit of Ptitsin's fortune, and, come what may, he will never have more than four houses.

Varvara Ardalionovna was not like her brother. She too, had passionate desires, but they were persistent rather than impetuous. Her plans were as wise as her methods of carrying them out. No doubt she also belonged to the category of ordinary people who dream of being original, but she soon discovered that she had not a grain of true originality, and she did not let it trouble her too much. Perhaps a certain kind of pride came to her help. She made her first concession to the demands of practical life with great resolution when she consented to marry Ptitsin. However, when she married she did not say to herself, "Never mind a mean action if it leads to the end in view," as her brother would certainly have said in such a case; it is quite probable that he may have said it when he expressed his elder-brotherly satisfaction at her decision. Far from this; Varvara Ardalionovna did not marry until she felt convinced that her future husband was unassuming, agreeable, almost cultured, and that nothing on earth would tempt him to a really dishonourable deed. As to small meannesses, such trifles did not trouble her. Indeed, who is free from them? It is absurd to expect the ideal!

Besides, she knew that her marriage would provide a refuge for all her family. Seeing Gania unhappy, she was anxious to help him, in spite of their former disputes and misunderstandings. Ptitsin, in a friendly way, would press his brother-in-law to enter the army. “You know,” he said sometimes, jokingly, “you despise generals and generaldom, but you will see that ‘they’ will all end by being generals in their turn. You will see it if you live long enough!”

“But why should they suppose that I despise generals?” Gania thought sarcastically to himself.

To serve her brother’s interests, Varvara Ardalionovna was constantly at the Epanchins’ house, helped by the fact that in childhood she and Gania had played with General Ivan Fedorovitch’s daughters. It would have been inconsistent with her character if in these visits she had been pursuing a chimera; her project was not chimerical at all; she was building on a firm basis—on her knowledge of the character of the Epanchin family, especially Aglaya, whom she studied closely. All Varvara’s efforts were directed towards bringing Aglaya and Gania together. Perhaps she achieved some result; perhaps, also, she made the mistake of depending too much upon her brother, and expecting more from him than he would ever be capable of giving. However this may be, her manoeuvres were skilful enough. For weeks at a time she would never mention Gania. Her attitude was modest but dignified, and she was always extremely truthful and sincere. Examining the depths of her conscience, she found nothing to reproach herself with, and this still further strengthened her in her designs. But Varvara Ardalionovna sometimes remarked that she felt spiteful; that there was a good deal of vanity in her, perhaps even of wounded vanity. She noticed this at certain times more than at others, and especially after her visits to the Epanchins.

Today, as I have said, she returned from their house with a heavy feeling of dejection. There was a sensation of bitterness, a sort of mocking contempt, mingled with it.

Arrived at her own house, Varia heard a considerable commotion going on in the upper storey, and distinguished the voices of her father and brother. On entering the salon she found Gania pacing up and down at frantic speed, pale with rage and almost tearing his hair. She frowned, and subsided on to the sofa with a tired air, and without taking the trouble to remove her hat. She very well knew that if she kept quiet and asked her brother nothing about his reason for tearing up and down the room, his wrath would fall upon her head. So she hastened to put the question:

“The old story, eh?”

“Old story? No! Heaven knows what’s up now—I don’t! Father has simply gone mad; mother’s in floods of tears. Upon my word, Varia, I must kick him out of the house; or else go myself,” he added, probably remembering that he could not well turn people out of a house which was not his own.

“You must make allowances,” murmured Varia.

“Make allowances? For whom? Him—the old blackguard? No, no, Varia—that won’t do! It won’t do, I tell you! And look at the swagger of the man! He’s all to blame himself, and yet he puts on so much ‘side’ that you’d think—my word!—‘It’s too much trouble to go through the gate, you must break the fence for me!’ That’s the sort of air he puts on; but what’s the matter with you, Varia? What a curious expression you have!”

“I’m all right,” said Varia, in a tone that sounded as though she were all wrong.

Gania looked more intently at her.

“You’ve been *there?*” he asked, suddenly.

“Yes.”

“Did you find out anything?”

“Nothing unexpected. I discovered that it’s all true. My husband was wiser than either of us. Just as he suspected from the beginning, so it has fallen out. Where is he?”

“Out. Well—what has happened?—go on.”

“The prince is formally engaged to her—that’s settled. The elder sisters told me about it. Aglaya has agreed. They don’t attempt to conceal it any longer; you know how mysterious and secret they have all been up to now. Adelaida’s wedding is put off again, so that both can be married on one day. Isn’t that delightfully romantic? Somebody ought to write a poem on it. Sit down and write an ode instead of tearing up and down like that. This evening Princess Bielokonski is to arrive; she comes just in time—they have a party tonight. He is to be presented to old Bielokonski, though I believe he knows her already; probably the engagement will be openly announced. They are only afraid that he may knock something down, or trip over something when he comes into the room. It would be just like him.”

Gania listened attentively, but to his sister’s astonishment he was by no means so impressed by this news (which should, she thought, have been so important to him) as she had expected.

“Well, it was clear enough all along,” he said, after a moment’s reflection. “So that’s the end,” he added, with a disagreeable smile, continuing to walk up and down the room, but much slower than before, and glancing slyly into his sister’s face.

“It’s a good thing that you take it philosophically, at all events,” said Varia. “I’m really very glad of it.”

“Yes, it’s off our hands—off *yours*, I should say.”

“I think I have served you faithfully. I never even asked you what happiness you expected to find with Aglaya.”

“Did I ever expect to find happiness with Aglaya?”

“Come, come, don’t overdo your philosophy. Of course you did. Now it’s all over, and a good thing, too; pair of fools that we have been! I confess I have never been able to look at it seriously. I busied myself in it for your sake, thinking that there was no knowing what might happen with a funny girl like that to deal with. There were ninety to one chances against it. To this moment I can’t make out why you wished for it.”

“H’m! now, I suppose, you and your husband will never weary of egging me on to work again. You’ll begin your lectures about perseverance and strength of will, and all that. I know it all by heart,” said Gania, laughing.

“He’s got some new idea in his head,” thought Varia. “Are they pleased over there—the parents?” asked Gania, suddenly.

“N-no, I don’t think they are. You can judge for yourself. I think the general is pleased enough; her mother is a little uneasy. She always loathed the idea of the prince as a *husband*; everybody knows that.”

“Of course, naturally. The bridegroom is an impossible and ridiculous one. I mean, has *she* given her formal consent?”

“She has not said ‘no,’ up to now, and that’s all. It was sure to be so with her. You know what she is like. You know how absurdly shy she is. You remember how she used to hide in a cupboard as a child, so as to avoid seeing visitors, for hours at a time. She is just the same now; but, do you know, I think there is something serious in the matter, even from her side; I feel it, somehow. She laughs at the prince, they say, from morn to night in order to hide her real feelings; but you may be sure she finds occasion to say something or other to him on the sly, for he himself is in a state of radiant happiness. He walks in the clouds; they say he is extremely funny just now; I heard it from

themselves. They seemed to be laughing at me in their sleeves—those elder girls—I don't know why."

Gania had begun to frown, and probably Varia added this last sentence in order to probe his thought. However, at this moment, the noise began again upstairs.

"I'll turn him out!" shouted Gania, glad of the opportunity of venting his vexation. "I shall just turn him out—we can't have this."

"Yes, and then he'll go about the place and disgrace us as he did yesterday."

"How 'as he did yesterday'? What do you mean? What did he do yesterday?" asked Gania, in alarm.

"Why, goodness me, don't you know?" Varia stopped short.

"What? You don't mean to say that he went there yesterday!" cried Gania, flushing red with shame and anger. "Good heavens, Varia! Speak! You have just been there. *Was* he there or not, *quick?*" And Gania rushed for the door. Varia followed and caught him by both hands.

"What are you doing? Where are you going to? You can't let him go now; if you do he'll go and do something worse."

"What did he do there? What did he say?"

"They couldn't tell me themselves; they couldn't make head or tail of it; but he frightened them all. He came to see the general, who was not at home; so he asked for Lizabetha Prokofievna. First of all, he begged her for some place, or situation, for work of some kind, and then he began to complain about *us*, about me and my husband, and you, especially *you*; he said a lot of things."

"Oh! couldn't you find out?" muttered Gania, trembling hysterically.

"No—nothing more than that. Why, they couldn't understand him themselves; and very likely didn't tell me all."

Gania seized his head with both hands and tottered to the window; Varia sat down at the other window.

"Funny girl, Aglaya," she observed, after a pause. "When she left me she said, 'Give my special and personal respects to your parents; I shall certainly find an opportunity to see your father one day,' and so serious over it. She's a strange creature."

"Wasn't she joking? She was speaking sarcastically!"

“Not a bit of it; that’s just the strange part of it.”

“Does she know about father, do you think—or not?”

“That they do *not* know about it in the house is quite certain, the rest of them, I mean; but you have given me an idea. Aglaya perhaps knows. She alone, though, if anyone; for the sisters were as astonished as I was to hear her speak so seriously. If she knows, the prince must have told her.”

“Oh! it’s not a great matter to guess who told her. A thief! A thief in our family, and the head of the family, too!”

“Oh! nonsense!” cried Varia, angrily. “That was nothing but a drunkard’s tale. Nonsense! Why, who invented the whole thing—Lebedeff and the prince—a pretty pair! Both were probably drunk.”

“Father is a drunkard and a thief; I am a beggar, and the husband of my sister is a usurer,” continued Gania, bitterly. “There was a pretty list of advantages with which to enchant the heart of Aglaya.”

“That same husband of your sister, the usurer—”

“Feeds me? Go on. Don’t stand on ceremony, pray.”

“Don’t lose your temper. You are just like a schoolboy. You think that all this sort of thing would harm you in Aglaya’s eyes, do you? You little know her character. She is capable of refusing the most brilliant party, and running away and starving in a garret with some wretched student; that’s the sort of girl she is. You never could or did understand how interesting you would have seen in her eyes if you had come firmly and proudly through our misfortunes. The prince has simply caught her with hook and line; firstly, because he never thought of fishing for her, and secondly, because he is an idiot in the eyes of most people. It’s quite enough for her that by accepting him she puts her family out and annoys them all round—that’s what she likes. You don’t understand these things.”

“We shall see whether I understand or no!” said Gania, enigmatically. “But I shouldn’t like her to know all about father, all the same. I thought the prince would manage to hold his tongue about this, at least. He prevented Lebedeff spreading the news—he wouldn’t even tell me all when I asked him—”

“Then you must see that he is not responsible. What does it matter to you now, in any case? What are you hoping for still? If you *have* a hope left, it is that your suffering air may soften her heart towards you.”

“Oh, she would funk a scandal like anyone else. You are all tarred with one brush!”

“What! *Aglaya* would have funked? You are a chicken-hearted fellow, Gania!” said Varia, looking at her brother with contempt. “Not one of us is worth much. Aglaya may be a wild sort of a girl, but she is far nobler than any of us, a thousand times nobler!”

“Well—come! there’s nothing to get cross about,” said Gania.

“All I’m afraid of is—mother. I’m afraid this scandal about father may come to her ears; perhaps it has already. I am dreadfully afraid.”

“It undoubtedly has already!” observed Gania.

Varia had risen from her place and had started to go upstairs to her mother; but at this observation of Gania’s she turned and gazed at him attentively.

“Who could have told her?”

“Hippolyte, probably. He would think it the most delightful amusement in the world to tell her of it the instant he moved over here; I haven’t a doubt of it.”

“But how could he know anything of it? Tell me that. Lebedeff and the prince determined to tell no one—even Colia knows nothing.”

“What, Hippolyte? He found it out himself, of course. Why, you have no idea what a cunning little animal he is; dirty little gossip! He has the most extraordinary nose for smelling out other people’s secrets, or anything approaching to scandal. Believe it or not, but I’m pretty sure he has got round Aglaya. If he hasn’t, he soon will. Rogojin is intimate with him, too. How the prince doesn’t notice it, I can’t understand. The little wretch considers me his enemy now and does his best to catch me tripping. What on earth does it matter to him, when he’s dying? However, you’ll see; I shall catch *him* tripping yet, and not he me.”

“Why did you get him over here, if you hate him so? And is it really worth your while to try to score off him?”

“Why, it was yourself who advised me to bring him over!”

“I thought he might be useful. You know he is in love with Aglaya himself, now, and has written to her; he has even written to Lizabetha Prokofievna!”

“Oh! he’s not dangerous there!” cried Gania, laughing angrily. “However, I believe there is something of that sort in the air; he is very likely to be in love, for he is a mere boy. But he won’t write anonymous letters to the old lady; that would be too audacious a thing for him to attempt; but I dare swear the very first thing he did was to

show me up to Aglaya as a base deceiver and intriguer. I confess I was fool enough to attempt something through him at first. I thought he would throw himself into my service out of revengeful feelings towards the prince, the sly little beast! But I know him better now. As for the theft, he may have heard of it from the widow in Petersburg, for if the old man committed himself to such an act, he can have done it for no other object but to give the money to her. Hippolyte said to me, without any prelude, that the general had promised the widow four hundred roubles. Of course I understood, and the little wretch looked at me with a nasty sort of satisfaction. I know him; you may depend upon it he went and told mother too, for the pleasure of wounding her. And why doesn't he die, I should like to know? He undertook to die within three weeks, and here he is getting fatter. His cough is better, too. It was only yesterday that he said that was the second day he hadn't coughed blood."

"Well, turn him out!"

"I don't *hate*, I despise him," said Gania, grandly. "Well, I do hate him, if you like!" he added, with a sudden access of rage, "and I'll tell him so to his face, even when he's dying! If you had but read his confession—good Lord! what refinement of impudence! Oh, but I'd have liked to whip him then and there, like a schoolboy, just to see how surprised he would have been! Now he hates everybody because he—Oh, I say, what on earth are they doing there! Listen to that noise! I really can't stand this any longer. Ptitsin!" he cried, as the latter entered the room, "what in the name of goodness are we coming to? Listen to that—"

But the noise came rapidly nearer, the door burst open, and old General Ivolgin, raging, furious, purple-faced, and trembling with anger, rushed in. He was followed by Nina Alexandrovna, Colia, and behind the rest, Hippolyte.