II.

Hippolyte had now been five days at the Ptitsins'. His flitting from the prince's to these new quarters had been brought about quite naturally and without many words. He did not quarrel with the prince—in fact, they seemed to part as friends. Gania, who had been hostile enough on that eventful evening, had himself come to see him a couple of days later, probably in obedience to some sudden impulse. For some reason or other, Rogojin too had begun to visit the sick boy. The prince thought it might be better for him to move away from his (the prince's) house. Hippolyte informed him, as he took his leave, that Ptitsin "had been kind enough to offer him a corner," and did not say a word about Gania, though Gania had procured his invitation, and himself came to fetch him away. Gania noticed this at the time, and put it to Hippolyte's debit on account.

Gania was right when he told his sister that Hippolyte was getting better; that he was better was clear at the first glance. He entered the room now last of all, deliberately, and with a disagreeable smile on his lips.

Nina Alexandrovna came in, looking frightened. She had changed much since we last saw her, half a year ago, and had grown thin and pale. Colia looked worried and perplexed. He could not understand the vagaries of the general, and knew nothing of the last achievement of that worthy, which had caused so much commotion in the house. But he could see that his father had of late changed very much, and that he had begun to behave in so extraordinary a fashion both at home and abroad that he was not like the same man. What perplexed and disturbed him as much as anything was that his father had entirely given up drinking during the last few days. Colia knew that he had quarrelled with both Lebedeff and the prince, and had just bought a small bottle of vodka and brought it home for his father.

"Really, mother," he had assured Nina Alexandrovna upstairs, "really you had better let him drink. He has not had a drop for three days; he must be suffering agonies—" The general now entered the room, threw the door wide open, and stood on the threshold trembling with indignation.

"Look here, my dear sir," he began, addressing Ptitsin in a very loud tone of voice; "if you have really made up your mind to sacrifice an old man—your father too or at all events father of your wife—an old man who has served his emperor—to a wretched little atheist like this, all I can say is, sir, my foot shall cease to tread your floors. Make your choice, sir; make your choice quickly, if you please! Me or this—screw! Yes, screw, sir; I said it accidentally, but let the word stand—this screw, for he screws and drills himself into my soul—"

“Hadn’t you better say corkscrew?” said Hippolyte.

“No, sir, *not* corkscrew. I am a general, not a bottle, sir. Make your choice, sir—me or him.”

Here Colia handed him a chair, and he subsided into it, breathless with rage.

“Hadn’t you better—better—take a nap?” murmured the stupefied Ptitsin.

“A nap?” shrieked the general. “I am not drunk, sir; you insult me! I see,” he continued, rising, “I see that all are against me here. Enough—I go; but know, sirs—know that—”

He was not allowed to finish his sentence. Somebody pushed him back into his chair, and begged him to be calm. Nina Alexandrovna trembled, and cried quietly. Gania retired to the window in disgust.

“But what have I done? What is his grievance?” asked Hippolyte, grinning.

“What have you done, indeed?” put in Nina Alexandrovna. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, teasing an old man like that—and in your position, too.”

“And pray what *is* my position, madame? I have the greatest respect for you, personally; but—”

“He’s a little screw,” cried the general; “he drills holes in my heart and soul. He wishes me to be a pervert to atheism. Know, you young greenhorn, that I was covered with honours before ever you were born; and you are nothing better than a wretched little worm, torn in two with coughing, and dying slowly of your own malice and unbelief. What did Gavrila bring you over here for? They’re all against me, even to my own son—all against me.”

“Oh, come—nonsense!” cried Gania; “if you did not go shaming us all over the town, things might be better for all parties.”

“What—shame you? I?—what do you mean, you young calf? I shame you? I can only do you honour, sir; I cannot shame you.”

He jumped up from his chair in a fit of uncontrollable rage. Gania was very angry too.

“Honour, indeed!” said the latter, with contempt.

“What do you say, sir?” growled the general, taking a step towards him.

“I say that I have but to open my mouth, and you—”

Gania began, but did not finish. The two—father and son—stood before one another, both unspeakably agitated, especially Gania.

“Gania, Gania, reflect!” cried his mother, hurriedly.

“It’s all nonsense on both sides,” snapped out Varia. “Let them alone, mother.”

“It’s only for mother’s sake that I spare him,” said Gania, tragically.

“Speak!” said the general, beside himself with rage and excitement; “speak—under the penalty of a father’s curse!”

“Oh, father’s curse be hanged—you don’t frighten me that way!” said Gania. “Whose fault is it that you have been as mad as a March hare all this week? It is just a week—you see, I count the days. Take care now; don’t provoke me too much, or I’ll tell all. Why did you go to the Epanchins’ yesterday—tell me that? And you call yourself an old man, too, with grey hair, and father of a family! H’m—nice sort of a father.”

“Be quiet, Gania,” cried Colia. “Shut up, you fool!”

“Yes, but how have I offended him?” repeated Hippolyte, still in the same jeering voice. “Why does he call me a screw? You all heard it. He came to me himself and began telling me about some Captain Eropegoff. I don’t wish for your company, general. I always avoided you—you know that. What have I to do with Captain Eropegoff? All I did was to express my opinion that probably Captain Eropegoff never existed at all!”

“Of course he never existed!” Gania interrupted.

But the general only stood stupefied and gazed around in a dazed way. Gania’s speech had impressed him, with its terrible candour. For the first moment or two he could find no words to answer him, and it was only when Hippolyte burst out laughing, and said:

“There, you see! Even your own son supports my statement that there never was such a person as Captain Eropegoff!” that the old fellow muttered confusedly:

“Kapiton Eropegoff—not Captain Eropegoff!—Kapiton—major retired—Eropegoff—Kapiton.”

“Kapiton didn’t exist either!” persisted Gania, maliciously.

“What? Didn’t exist?” cried the poor general, and a deep blush suffused his face.

“That’ll do, Gania!” cried Varia and Ptitsin.

“Shut up, Gania!” said Colia.

But this intercession seemed to rekindle the general.

“What did you mean, sir, that he didn’t exist? Explain yourself,” he repeated, angrily.

“Because he *didn’t* exist—never could and never did—there! You’d better drop the subject, I warn you!”

“And this is my son—my own son—whom I—oh, gracious Heaven! Eropegoff—Eroshka Eropegoff didn’t exist!”

“Ha, ha! it’s Eroshka now,” laughed Hippolyte.

“No, sir, Kapitoshka—not Eroshka. I mean, Kapiton Alexeyevitch—retired major—married Maria Petrovna Lu—Lu—he was my friend and companion—Lutugoff—from our earliest beginnings. I closed his eyes for him—he was killed. Kapiton Eropegoff never existed! tfu!”

The general shouted in his fury; but it was to be concluded that his wrath was not kindled by the expressed doubt as to Kapiton’s existence. This was his scapegoat; but his excitement was caused by something quite different. As a rule he would have merely shouted down the doubt as to Kapiton, told a long yarn about his friend, and eventually retired upstairs to his room. But today, in the strange uncertainty of human nature, it seemed to require but so small an offence as this to make his cup to overflow. The old man grew purple in the face, he raised his hands. “Enough of this!” he yelled. “My curse—away, out of the house I go! Colia, bring my bag away!” He left the room hastily and in a paroxysm of rage.

His wife, Colia, and Ptitsin ran out after him.

“What have you done now?” said Varia to Gania. “He’ll probably be making off *there* again! What a disgrace it all is!”

“Well, he shouldn’t steal,” cried Gania, panting with fury. And just at this moment his eye met Hippolyte’s.

“As for you, sir,” he cried, “you should at least remember that you are in a strange house and—receiving hospitality; you should not take the opportunity of tormenting an old man, sir, who is too evidently out of his mind.”

Hippolyte looked furious, but he restrained himself.

“I don’t quite agree with you that your father is out of his mind,” he observed, quietly. “On the contrary, I cannot help thinking he has been less demented of late. Don’t you think so? He has grown so cunning and careful, and weighs his words so deliberately;

he spoke to me about that Kapiton fellow with an object, you know! Just fancy—he wanted me to—"

"Oh, devil take what he wanted you to do! Don't try to be too cunning with me, young man!" shouted Gania. "If you are aware of the real reason for my father's present condition (and you have kept such an excellent spying watch during these last few days that you are sure to be aware of it)—you had no right whatever to torment the—unfortunate man, and to worry my mother by your exaggerations of the affair; because the whole business is nonsense—simply a drunken freak, and nothing more, quite unproved by any evidence, and I don't believe that much of it!" (he snapped his fingers). "But you must needs spy and watch over us all, because you are a—a—"

"Screw!" laughed Hippolyte.

"Because you are a humbug, sir; and thought fit to worry people for half an hour, and tried to frighten them into believing that you would shoot yourself with your little empty pistol, pirouetting about and playing at suicide! I gave you hospitality, you have fattened on it, your cough has left you, and you repay all this—"

"Excuse me—two words! I am Varvara Ardalionovna's guest, not yours; *you* have extended no hospitality to me. On the contrary, if I am not mistaken, I believe you are yourself indebted to Mr. Ptitsin's hospitality. Four days ago I begged my mother to come down here and find lodgings, because I certainly do feel better here, though I am not fat, nor have I ceased to cough. I am today informed that my room is ready for me; therefore, having thanked your sister and mother for their kindness to me, I intend to leave the house this evening. I beg your pardon—I interrupted you—I think you were about to add something?"

"Oh—if that is the state of affairs—" began Gania.

"Excuse me—I will take a seat," interrupted Hippolyte once more, sitting down deliberately; "for I am not strong yet. Now then, I am ready to hear you. Especially as this is the last chance we shall have of a talk, and very likely the last meeting we shall ever have at all."

Gania felt a little guilty.

"I assure you I did not mean to reckon up debits and credits," he began, "and if you—"

"I don't understand your condescension," said Hippolyte. "As for me, I promised myself, on the first day of my arrival in this house, that I would have the satisfaction of settling accounts with you in a very thorough manner before I said good-bye to you. I intend to perform this operation now, if you like; after you, though, of course."

“May I ask you to be so good as to leave this room?”

“You’d better speak out. You’ll be sorry afterwards if you don’t.”

“Hippolyte, stop, please! It’s so dreadfully undignified,” said Varia.

“Well, only for the sake of a lady,” said Hippolyte, laughing. “I am ready to put off the reckoning, but only put it off, Varvara Ardalionovna, because an explanation between your brother and myself has become an absolute necessity, and I could not think of leaving the house without clearing up all misunderstandings first.”

“In a word, you are a wretched little scandal-monger,” cried Gania, “and you cannot go away without a scandal!”

“You see,” said Hippolyte, coolly, “you can’t restrain yourself. You’ll be dreadfully sorry afterwards if you don’t speak out now. Come, you shall have the first say. I’ll wait.”

Gania was silent and merely looked contemptuously at him.

“You won’t? Very well. I shall be as short as possible, for my part. Two or three times to-day I have had the word ‘hospitality’ pushed down my throat; this is not fair. In inviting me here you yourself entrapped me for your own use; you thought I wished to revenge myself upon the prince. You heard that Aglaya Ivanovna had been kind to me and read my confession. Making sure that I should give myself up to your interests, you hoped that you might get some assistance out of me. I will not go into details. I don’t ask either admission or confirmation of this from yourself; I am quite content to leave you to your conscience, and to feel that we understand one another capitally.”

“What a history you are weaving out of the most ordinary circumstances!” cried Varia.

“I told you the fellow was nothing but a scandal-monger,” said Gania.

“Excuse me, Varia Ardalionovna, I will proceed. I can, of course, neither love nor respect the prince, though he is a good-hearted fellow, if a little queer. But there is no need whatever for me to hate him. I quite understood your brother when he first offered me aid against the prince, though I did not show it; I knew well that your brother was making a ridiculous mistake in me. I am ready to spare him, however, even now; but solely out of respect for yourself, Varvara Ardalionovna.

“Having now shown you that I am not quite such a fool as I look, and that I have to be fished for with a rod and line for a good long while before I am caught, I will proceed to explain why I specially wished to make your brother look a fool. That my motive power is hate, I do not attempt to conceal. I have felt that before dying (and I am dying, however much fatter I may appear to you), I must absolutely make a fool of, at least,

one of that class of men which has dogged me all my life, which I hate so cordially, and which is so prominently represented by your much esteemed brother. I should not enjoy paradise nearly so much without having done this first. I hate you, Gavrila Ardalionovitch, solely (this may seem curious to you, but I repeat)—solely because you are the type, and incarnation, and head, and crown of the most impudent, the most self-satisfied, the most vulgar and detestable form of commonplaceness. You are ordinary of the ordinary; you have no chance of ever fathering the pettiest idea of your own. And yet you are as jealous and conceited as you can possibly be; you consider yourself a great genius; of this you are persuaded, although there are dark moments of doubt and rage, when even this fact seems uncertain. There are spots of darkness on your horizon, though they will disappear when you become completely stupid. But a long and chequered path lies before you, and of this I am glad. In the first place you will never gain a certain person."

"Come, come! This is intolerable! You had better stop, you little mischief-making wretch!" cried Varia. Gania had grown very pale; he trembled, but said nothing.

Hippolyte paused, and looked at him intently and with great gratification. He then turned his gaze upon Varia, bowed, and went out, without adding another word.

Gania might justly complain of the hardness with which fate treated him. Varia dared not speak to him for a long while, as he strode past her, backwards and forwards. At last he went and stood at the window, looking out, with his back turned towards her. There was a fearful row going on upstairs again.

"Are you off?" said Gania, suddenly, remarking that she had risen and was about to leave the room. "Wait a moment—look at this."

He approached the table and laid a small sheet of paper before her. It looked like a little note.

"Good heavens!" cried Varia, raising her hands.

This was the note:

"GAVRILA ARDOLIONOVITCH,—persuaded of your kindness of heart, I have determined to ask your advice on a matter of great importance to myself. I should like to meet you tomorrow morning at seven o'clock by the green bench in the park. It is not far from our house. Varvara Ardalionovna, who must accompany you, knows the place well.

"A. E."

“What on earth is one to make of a girl like that?” said Varia.

Gania, little as he felt inclined for swagger at this moment, could not avoid showing his triumph, especially just after such humiliating remarks as those of Hippolyte. A smile of self-satisfaction beamed on his face, and Varia too was brimming over with delight.

“And this is the very day that they were to announce the engagement! What will she do next?”

“What do you suppose she wants to talk about tomorrow?” asked Gania.

“Oh, *that’s* all the same! The chief thing is that she wants to see you after six months’ absence. Look here, Gania, this is a *serious* business. Don’t swagger again and lose the game—play carefully, but don’t funk, do you understand? As if she could possibly avoid seeing what I have been working for all this last six months! And just imagine, I was there this morning and not a word of this! I was there, you know, on the sly. The old lady did not know, or she would have kicked me out. I ran some risk for you, you see. I did so want to find out, at all hazards.”

Here there was a frantic noise upstairs once more; several people seemed to be rushing downstairs at once.

“Now, Gania,” cried Varia, frightened, “we can’t let him go out! We can’t afford to have a breath of scandal about the town at this moment. Run after him and beg his pardon—quick.”

But the father of the family was out in the road already. Colia was carrying his bag for him; Nina Alexandrovna stood and cried on the doorstep; she wanted to run after the general, but Ptitsin kept her back.

“You will only excite him more,” he said. “He has nowhere else to go to—he’ll be back here in half an hour. I’ve talked it all over with Colia; let him play the fool a bit, it will do him good.”

“What are you up to? Where are you off to? You’ve nowhere to go to, you know,” cried Gania, out of the window.

“Come back, father; the neighbours will hear!” cried Varia.

The general stopped, turned round, raised his hands and remarked: “My curse be upon this house!”

“Which observation should always be made in as theatrical a tone as possible,” muttered Gania, shutting the window with a bang.

The neighbours undoubtedly did hear. Varia rushed out of the room.

No sooner had his sister left him alone, than Gania took the note out of his pocket, kissed it, and pirouetted around.

III.

As a general rule, old General Ivolgin’s paroxysms ended in smoke. He had before this experienced fits of sudden fury, but not very often, because he was really a man of peaceful and kindly disposition. He had tried hundreds of times to overcome the dissolute habits which he had contracted of late years. He would suddenly remember that he was “a father,” would be reconciled with his wife, and shed genuine tears. His feeling for Nina Alexandrovna amounted almost to adoration; she had pardoned so much in silence, and loved him still in spite of the state of degradation into which he had fallen. But the general’s struggles with his own weakness never lasted very long. He was, in his way, an impetuous man, and a quiet life of repentance in the bosom of his family soon became insupportable to him. In the end he rebelled, and flew into rages which he regretted, perhaps, even as he gave way to them, but which were beyond his control. He picked quarrels with everyone, began to hold forth eloquently, exacted unlimited respect, and at last disappeared from the house, and sometimes did not return for a long time. He had given up interfering in the affairs of his family for two years now, and knew nothing about them but what he gathered from hearsay.

But on this occasion there was something more serious than usual. Everyone seemed to know something, but to be afraid to talk about it.

The general had turned up in the bosom of his family two or three days before, but not, as usual, with the olive branch of peace in his hand, not in the garb of penitence—in which he was usually clad on such occasions—but, on the contrary, in an uncommonly bad temper. He had arrived in a quarrelsome mood, pitching into everyone he came across, and talking about all sorts and kinds of subjects in the most unexpected manner, so that it was impossible to discover what it was that was really putting him out. At moments he would be apparently quite bright and happy; but as a rule he would sit moody and thoughtful. He would abruptly commence to hold forth about the Epanchins, about Lebedeff, or the prince, and equally abruptly would stop short and refuse to speak another word, answering all further questions with a stupid smile, unconscious that he was smiling, or that he had been asked a question. The whole of the previous night he had spent tossing about and groaning, and poor Nina

Alexandrovna had been busy making cold compresses and warm fomentations and so on, without being very clear how to apply them. He had fallen asleep after a while, but not for long, and had awaked in a state of violent hypochondria which had ended in his quarrel with Hippolyte, and the solemn cursing of Ptitsin's establishment generally. It was also observed during those two or three days that he was in a state of morbid self-esteem, and was specially touchy on all points of honour. Colia insisted, in discussing the matter with his mother, that all this was but the outcome of abstinence from drink, or perhaps of pining after Lebedeff, with whom up to this time the general had been upon terms of the greatest friendship; but with whom, for some reason or other, he had quarrelled a few days since, parting from him in great wrath. There had also been a scene with the prince. Colia had asked an explanation of the latter, but had been forced to conclude that he was not told the whole truth.

If Hippolyte and Nina Alexandrovna had, as Gania suspected, had some special conversation about the general's actions, it was strange that the malicious youth, whom Gania had called a scandal-monger to his face, had not allowed himself a similar satisfaction with Colia.

The fact is that probably Hippolyte was not quite so black as Gania painted him; and it was hardly likely that he had informed Nina Alexandrovna of certain events, of which we know, for the mere pleasure of giving her pain. We must never forget that human motives are generally far more complicated than we are apt to suppose, and that we can very rarely accurately describe the motives of another. It is much better for the writer, as a rule, to content himself with the bare statement of events; and we shall take this line with regard to the catastrophe recorded above, and shall state the remaining events connected with the general's trouble shortly, because we feel that we have already given to this secondary character in our story more attention than we originally intended.

The course of events had marched in the following order. When Lebedeff returned, in company with the general, after their expedition to town a few days since, for the purpose of investigation, he brought the prince no information whatever. If the latter had not himself been occupied with other thoughts and impressions at the time, he must have observed that Lebedeff not only was very uncommunicative, but even appeared anxious to avoid him.

When the prince did give the matter a little attention, he recalled the fact that during these days he had always found Lebedeff to be in radiantly good spirits, when they happened to meet; and further, that the general and Lebedeff were always together. The two friends did not seem ever to be parted for a moment.

Occasionally the prince heard loud talking and laughing upstairs, and once he detected the sound of a jolly soldier's song going on above, and recognized the unmistakable bass of the general's voice. But the sudden outbreak of song did not last; and for an hour afterwards the animated sound of apparently drunken conversation continued to be heard from above. At length there was the clearest evidence of a grand mutual embracing, and someone burst into tears. Shortly after this, however, there was a violent but short-lived quarrel, with loud talking on both sides.

All these days Colia had been in a state of great mental preoccupation. Muishkin was usually out all day, and only came home late at night. On his return he was invariably informed that Colia had been looking for him. However, when they did meet, Colia never had anything particular to tell him, excepting that he was highly dissatisfied with the general and his present condition of mind and behaviour.

"They drag each other about the place," he said, "and get drunk together at the pub close by here, and quarrel in the street on the way home, and embrace one another after it, and don't seem to part for a moment."

When the prince pointed out that there was nothing new about that, for that they had always behaved in this manner together, Colia did not know what to say; in fact he could not explain what it was that specially worried him, just now, about his father.

On the morning following the bacchanalian songs and quarrels recorded above, as the prince stepped out of the house at about eleven o'clock, the general suddenly appeared before him, much agitated.

"I have long sought the honour and opportunity of meeting you—much-esteemed Lef Nicolaievitch," he murmured, pressing the prince's hand very hard, almost painfully so; "long—very long."

The prince begged him to step in and sit down.

"No—I will not sit down,—I am keeping you, I see,—another time!—I think I may be permitted to congratulate you upon the realization of your heart's best wishes, is it not so?"

"What best wishes?"

The prince blushed. He thought, as so many in his position do, that nobody had seen, heard, noticed, or understood anything.

“Oh—be easy, sir, be easy! I shall not wound your tenderest feelings. I’ve been through it all myself, and I know well how unpleasant it is when an outsider sticks his nose in where he is not wanted. I experience this every morning. I came to speak to you about another matter, though, an important matter. A very important matter, prince.”

The latter requested him to take a seat once more, and sat down himself.

“Well—just for one second, then. The fact is, I came for advice. Of course I live now without any very practical objects in life; but, being full of self-respect, in which quality the ordinary Russian is so deficient as a rule, and of activity, I am desirous, in a word, prince, of placing myself and my wife and children in a position of—in fact, I want advice.”

The prince commended his aspirations with warmth.

“Quite so—quite so! But this is all mere nonsense. I came here to speak of something quite different, something very important, prince. And I have determined to come to you as to a man in whose sincerity and nobility of feeling I can trust like—like—are you surprised at my words, prince?”

The prince was watching his guest, if not with much surprise, at all events with great attention and curiosity.

The old man was very pale; every now and then his lips trembled, and his hands seemed unable to rest quietly, but continually moved from place to place. He had twice already jumped up from his chair and sat down again without being in the least aware of it. He would take up a book from the table and open it—talking all the while,—look at the heading of a chapter, shut it and put it back again, seizing another immediately, but holding it unopened in his hand, and waving it in the air as he spoke.

“But enough!” he cried, suddenly. “I see I have been boring you with my—”

“Not in the least—not in the least, I assure you. On the contrary, I am listening most attentively, and am anxious to guess—”

“Prince, I wish to place myself in a respectable position—I wish to esteem myself—and to—”

“My dear sir, a man of such noble aspirations is worthy of all esteem by virtue of those aspirations alone.”

The prince brought out his “copy-book sentence” in the firm belief that it would produce a good effect. He felt instinctively that some such well-sounding humbug, brought out at the proper moment, would soothe the old man’s feelings, and would be

specially acceptable to such a man in such a position. At all hazards, his guest must be despatched with heart relieved and spirit comforted; that was the problem before the prince at this moment.

The phrase flattered the general, touched him, and pleased him mightily. He immediately changed his tone, and started off on a long and solemn explanation. But listen as he would, the prince could make neither head nor tail of it.

The general spoke hotly and quickly for ten minutes; he spoke as though his words could not keep pace with his crowding thoughts. Tears stood in his eyes, and yet his speech was nothing but a collection of disconnected sentences, without beginning and without end—a string of unexpected words and unexpected sentiments—colliding with one another, and jumping over one another, as they burst from his lips.

"Enough!" he concluded at last, "you understand me, and that is the great thing. A heart like yours cannot help understanding the sufferings of another. Prince, you are the ideal of generosity; what are other men beside yourself? But you are young—accept my blessing! My principal object is to beg you to fix an hour for a most important conversation—that is my great hope, prince. My heart needs but a little friendship and sympathy, and yet I cannot always find means to satisfy it."

"But why not now? I am ready to listen, and—"

"No, no—prince, not now! Now is a dream! And it is too, too important! It is to be the hour of Fate to me—*my own* hour. Our interview is not to be broken in upon by every chance comer, every impertinent guest—and there are plenty of such stupid, impertinent fellows"—(he bent over and whispered mysteriously, with a funny, frightened look on his face)—"who are unworthy to tie your shoe, prince. I don't say *mine*, mind—you will understand me, prince. Only *you* understand me, prince—no one else. *He* doesn't understand me, he is absolutely—*absolutely* unable to sympathize. The first qualification for understanding another is Heart."

The prince was rather alarmed at all this, and was obliged to end by appointing the same hour of the following day for the interview desired. The general left him much comforted and far less agitated than when he had arrived.

At seven in the evening, the prince sent to request Lebedeff to pay him a visit. Lebedeff came at once, and "esteemed it an honour," as he observed, the instant he entered the room. He acted as though there had never been the slightest suspicion of the fact that he had systematically avoided the prince for the last three days.

He sat down on the edge of his chair, smiling and making faces, and rubbing his hands, and looking as though he were in delighted expectation of hearing some important communication, which had been long guessed by all.

The prince was instantly covered with confusion; for it appeared to be plain that everyone expected something of him—that everyone looked at him as though anxious to congratulate him, and greeted him with hints, and smiles, and knowing looks.

Keller, for instance, had run into the house three times of late, “just for a moment,” and each time with the air of desiring to offer his congratulations. Colia, too, in spite of his melancholy, had once or twice begun sentences in much the same strain of suggestion or insinuation.

The prince, however, immediately began, with some show of annoyance, to question Lebedeff categorically, as to the general’s present condition, and his opinion thereon. He described the morning’s interview in a few words.

“Everyone has his worries, prince, especially in these strange and troublous times of ours,” Lebedeff replied, drily, and with the air of a man disappointed of his reasonable expectations.

“Dear me, what a philosopher you are!” laughed the prince.

“Philosophy is necessary, sir—very necessary—in our day. It is too much neglected. As for me, much esteemed prince, I am sensible of having experienced the honour of your confidence in a certain matter up to a certain point, but never beyond that point. I do not for a moment complain—”

“Lebedeff, you seem to be angry for some reason!” said the prince.

“Not the least bit in the world, esteemed and revered prince! Not the least bit in the world!” cried Lebedeff, solemnly, with his hand upon his heart. “On the contrary, I am too painfully aware that neither by my position in the world, nor by my gifts of intellect and heart, nor by my riches, nor by any former conduct of mine, have I in any way deserved your confidence, which is far above my highest aspirations and hopes. Oh no, prince; I may serve you, but only as your humble slave! I am not angry, oh no! Not angry; pained perhaps, but nothing more.

“My dear Lebedeff, I—”

“Oh, nothing more, nothing more! I was saying to myself but now… ‘I am quite unworthy of friendly relations with him,’ say I; ‘but perhaps as landlord of this house I

may, at some future date, in his good time, receive information as to certain imminent and much to be desired changes—'"

So saying Lebedeff fixed the prince with his sharp little eyes, still in hope that he would get his curiosity satisfied.

The prince looked back at him in amazement.

"I don't understand what you are driving at!" he cried, almost angrily, "and, and—what an intriguer you are, Lebedeff!" he added, bursting into a fit of genuine laughter.

Lebedeff followed suit at once, and it was clear from his radiant face that he considered his prospects of satisfaction immensely improved.

"And do you know," the prince continued, "I am amazed at your naive ways, Lebedeff! Don't be angry with me—not only yours, everybody else's also! You are waiting to hear something from me at this very moment with such simplicity that I declare I feel quite ashamed of myself for having nothing whatever to tell you. I swear to you solemnly, that there is nothing to tell. There! Can you take that in?" The prince laughed again.

Lebedeff assumed an air of dignity. It was true enough that he was sometimes naive to a degree in his curiosity; but he was also an excessively cunning gentleman, and the prince was almost converting him into an enemy by his repeated rebuffs. The prince did not snub Lebedeff's curiosity, however, because he felt any contempt for him; but simply because the subject was too delicate to talk about. Only a few days before he had looked upon his own dreams almost as crimes. But Lebedeff considered the refusal as caused by personal dislike to himself, and was hurt accordingly. Indeed, there was at this moment a piece of news, most interesting to the prince, which Lebedeff knew and even had wished to tell him, but which he now kept obstinately to himself.

"And what can I do for you, esteemed prince? Since I am told you sent for me just now," he said, after a few moments' silence.

"Oh, it was about the general," began the prince, waking abruptly from the fit of musing which he too had indulged in "and—and about the theft you told me of."

"That is—er—about—what theft?"

"Oh come! just as if you didn't understand, Lukian Timofeyovitch! What are you up to? I can't make you out! The money, the money, sir! The four hundred roubles that you lost that day. You came and told me about it one morning, and then went off to Petersburg. There, *now* do you understand?"

“Oh—h—h! You mean the four hundred roubles!” said Lebedeff, dragging the words out, just as though it had only just dawned upon him what the prince was talking about. “Thanks very much, prince, for your kind interest—you do me too much honour. I found the money, long ago!”

“You found it? Thank God for that!”

“Your exclamation proves the generous sympathy of your nature, prince; for four hundred roubles—to a struggling family man like myself—is no small matter!”

“I didn’t mean that; at least, of course, I’m glad for your sake, too,” added the prince, correcting himself, “but—how did you find it?”

“Very simply indeed! I found it under the chair upon which my coat had hung; so that it is clear the purse simply fell out of the pocket and on to the floor!”

“Under the chair? Impossible! Why, you told me yourself that you had searched every corner of the room? How could you not have looked in the most likely place of all?”

“Of course I looked there,—of course I did! Very much so! I looked and scrambled about, and felt for it, and wouldn’t believe it was not there, and looked again and again. It is always so in such cases. One longs and expects to find a lost article; one sees it is not there, and the place is as bare as one’s palm; and yet one returns and looks again and again, fifteen or twenty times, likely enough!”

“Oh, quite so, of course. But how was it in your case?—I don’t quite understand,” said the bewildered prince. “You say it wasn’t there at first, and that you searched the place thoroughly, and yet it turned up on that very spot!”

“Yes, sir—on that very spot.” The prince gazed strangely at Lebedeff. “And the general?” he asked, abruptly.

“The—the general? How do you mean, the general?” said Lebedeff, dubiously, as though he had not taken in the drift of the prince’s remark.

“Oh, good heavens! I mean, what did the general say when the purse turned up under the chair? You and he had searched for it together there, hadn’t you?”

“Quite so—together! But the second time I thought better to say nothing about finding it. I found it alone.”

“But—why in the world—and the money? Was it all there?”

“I opened the purse and counted it myself; right to a single rouble.”

“I think you might have come and told me,” said the prince, thoughtfully.

“Oh—I didn’t like to disturb you, prince, in the midst of your private and doubtless most interesting personal reflections. Besides, I wanted to appear, myself, to have found nothing. I took the purse, and opened it, and counted the money, and shut it and put it down again under the chair.”

“What in the world for?”

“Oh, just out of curiosity,” said Lebedeff, rubbing his hands and sniggering.

“What, it’s still there then, is it? Ever since the day before yesterday?”

“Oh no! You see, I was half in hopes the general might find it. Because if I found it, why should not he too observe an object lying before his very eyes? I moved the chair several times so as to expose the purse to view, but the general never saw it. He is very absent just now, evidently. He talks and laughs and tells stories, and suddenly flies into a rage with me, goodness knows why.”

“Well, but—have you taken the purse away now?”

“No, it disappeared from under the chair in the night.”

“Where is it now, then?”

“Here,” laughed Lebedeff, at last, rising to his full height and looking pleasantly at the prince, “here, in the lining of my coat. Look, you can feel it for yourself, if you like!”

Sure enough there was something sticking out of the front of the coat—something large. It certainly felt as though it might well be the purse fallen through a hole in the pocket into the lining.

“I took it out and had a look at it; it’s all right. I’ve let it slip back into the lining now, as you see, and so I have been walking about ever since yesterday morning; it knocks against my legs when I walk along.”

“H’m! and you take no notice of it?”

“Quite so, I take no notice of it. Ha, ha! and think of this, prince, my pockets are always strong and whole, and yet, here in one night, is a huge hole. I know the phenomenon is unworthy of your notice; but such is the case. I examined the hole, and I declare it actually looks as though it had been made with a pen-knife, a most improbable contingency.”

“And—and—the general?”

“Ah, very angry all day, sir; all yesterday and all today. He shows decided bacchanalian predilections at one time, and at another is tearful and sensitive, but at any moment he is liable to paroxysms of such rage that I assure you, prince, I am quite alarmed. I am not a military man, you know. Yesterday we were sitting together in the tavern, and the lining of my coat was—quite accidentally, of course—sticking out right in front. The general squinted at it, and flew into a rage. He never looks me quite in the face now, unless he is very drunk or maudlin; but yesterday he looked at me in such a way that a shiver went all down my back. I intend to find the purse tomorrow; but till then I am going to have another night of it with him.”

“What’s the good of tormenting him like this?” cried the prince.

“I don’t torment him, prince, I don’t indeed!” cried Lebedeff, hotly. “I love him, my dear sir, I esteem him; and believe it or not, I love him all the better for this business, yes—and value him more.”

Lebedeff said this so seriously that the prince quite lost his temper with him.

“Nonsense! love him and torment him so! Why, by the very fact that he put the purse prominently before you, first under the chair and then in your lining, he shows that he does not wish to deceive you, but is anxious to beg your forgiveness in this artless way. Do you hear? He is asking your pardon. He confides in the delicacy of your feelings, and in your friendship for him. And you can allow yourself to humiliate so thoroughly honest a man!”

“Thoroughly honest, quite so, prince, thoroughly honest!” said Lebedeff, with flashing eyes. “And only you, prince, could have found so very appropriate an expression. I honour you for it, prince. Very well, that’s settled; I shall find the purse now and not tomorrow. Here, I find it and take it out before your eyes! And the money is all right. Take it, prince, and keep it till tomorrow, will you? Tomorrow or next day I’ll take it back again. I think, prince, that the night after its disappearance it was buried under a bush in the garden. So I believe—what do you think of that?”

“Well, take care you don’t tell him to his face that you have found the purse. Simply let him see that it is no longer in the lining of your coat, and form his own conclusions.”

“Do you think so? Had I not just better tell him I have found it, and pretend I never guessed where it was?”

“No, I don’t think so,” said the prince, thoughtfully; “it’s too late for that—that would be dangerous now. No, no! Better say nothing about it. Be nice with him, you know, but don’t show him—oh, *you* know well enough—”

“I know, prince, of course I know, but I’m afraid I shall not carry it out; for to do so one needs a heart like your own. He is so very irritable just now, and so proud. At one moment he will embrace me, and the next he flies out at me and sneers at me, and then I stick the lining forward on purpose. Well, *au revoir*, prince, I see I am keeping you, and boring you, too, interfering with your most interesting private reflections.”

“Now, do be careful! Secrecy, as before!”

“Oh, silence isn’t the word! Softly, softly!”

But in spite of this conclusion to the episode, the prince remained as puzzled as ever, if not more so. He awaited next morning’s interview with the general most impatiently.

IV.

The time appointed was twelve o’clock, and the prince, returning home unexpectedly late, found the general waiting for him. At the first glance, he saw that the latter was displeased, perhaps because he had been kept waiting. The prince apologized, and quickly took a seat. He seemed strangely timid before the general this morning, for some reason, and felt as though his visitor were some piece of china which he was afraid of breaking.

On scrutinizing him, the prince soon saw that the general was quite a different man from what he had been the day before; he looked like one who had come to some momentous resolve. His calmness, however, was more apparent than real. He was courteous, but there was a suggestion of injured innocence in his manner.

“I’ve brought your book back,” he began, indicating a book lying on the table. “Much obliged to you for lending it to me.”

“Ah, yes. Well, did you read it, general? It’s curious, isn’t it?” said the prince, delighted to be able to open up conversation upon an outside subject.

“Curious enough, yes, but crude, and of course dreadful nonsense; probably the man lies in every other sentence.”

The general spoke with considerable confidence, and dragged his words out with a conceited drawl.

“Oh, but it’s only the simple tale of an old soldier who saw the French enter Moscow. Some of his remarks were wonderfully interesting. Remarks of an eye-witness are always valuable, whoever he be, don’t you think so?”

“Had I been the publisher I should not have printed it. As to the evidence of eye-witnesses, in these days people prefer impudent lies to the stories of men of worth and long service. I know of some notes of the year 1812, which—I have determined, prince, to leave this house, Mr. Lebedeff’s house.”

The general looked significantly at his host.

“Of course you have your own lodging at Pavlofsk at—at your daughter’s house,” began the prince, quite at a loss what to say. He suddenly recollected that the general had come for advice on a most important matter, affecting his destiny.

“At my wife’s; in other words, at my own place, my daughter’s house.”

“I beg your pardon, I—”

“I leave Lebedeff’s house, my dear prince, because I have quarrelled with this person. I broke with him last night, and am very sorry that I did not do so before. I expect respect, prince, even from those to whom I give my heart, so to speak. Prince, I have often given away my heart, and am nearly always deceived. This person was quite unworthy of the gift.”

“There is much that might be improved in him,” said the prince, moderately, “but he has some qualities which—though amid them one cannot but discern a cunning nature—reveal what is often a diverting intellect.”

The prince’s tone was so natural and respectful that the general could not possibly suspect him of any insincerity.

“Oh, that he possesses good traits, I was the first to show, when I very nearly made him a present of my friendship. I am not dependent upon his hospitality, and upon his house; I have my own family. I do not attempt to justify my own weakness. I have drunk with this man, and perhaps I deplore the fact now, but I did not take him up for the sake of drink alone (excuse the crudeness of the expression, prince); I did not make friends with him for that alone. I was attracted by his good qualities; but when the fellow declares that he was a child in 1812, and had his left leg cut off, and buried in the Vagarkoff cemetery, in Moscow, such a cock-and-bull story amounts to disrespect, my dear sir, to—to impudent exaggeration.”

“Oh, he was very likely joking; he said it for fun.”

“I quite understand you. You mean that an innocent lie for the sake of a good joke is harmless, and does not offend the human heart. Some people lie, if you like to put it so, out of pure friendship, in order to amuse their fellows; but when a man makes use

of extravagance in order to show his disrespect and to make clear how the intimacy bores him, it is time for a man of honour to break off the said intimacy, and to teach the offender his place."

The general flushed with indignation as he spoke.

"Oh, but Lebedeff cannot have been in Moscow in 1812. He is much too young; it is all nonsense."

"Very well, but even if we admit that he *was* alive in 1812, can one believe that a French chasseur pointed a cannon at him for a lark, and shot his left leg off? He says he picked his own leg up and took it away and buried it in the cemetery. He swore he had a stone put up over it with the inscription: 'Here lies the leg of Collegiate Secretary Lebedeff,' and on the other side, 'Rest, beloved ashes, till the morn of joy,' and that he has a service read over it every year (which is simply sacrilege), and goes to Moscow once a year on purpose. He invites me to Moscow in order to prove his assertion, and show me his leg's tomb, and the very cannon that shot him; he says it's the eleventh from the gate of the Kremlin, an old-fashioned falconet taken from the French afterwards."

"And, meanwhile both his legs are still on his body," said the prince, laughing. "I assure you, it is only an innocent joke, and you need not be angry about it."

"Excuse me—wait a minute—he says that the leg we see is a wooden one, made by Tchernosvitoff."

"They do say one can dance with those!"

"Quite so, quite so; and he swears that his wife never found out that one of his legs was wooden all the while they were married. When I showed him the ridiculousness of all this, he said, 'Well, if you were one of Napoleon's pages in 1812, you might let me bury my leg in the Moscow cemetery.'"

"Why, did you say—" began the prince, and paused in confusion.

The general gazed at his host disdainfully.

"Oh, go on," he said, "finish your sentence, by all means. Say how odd it appears to you that a man fallen to such a depth of humiliation as I, can ever have been the actual eye-witness of great events. Go on, *I* don't mind! Has *he* found time to tell you scandal about me?"

"No, I've heard nothing of this from Lebedeff, if you mean Lebedeff."

“H’m; I thought differently. You see, we were talking over this period of history. I was criticizing a current report of something which then happened, and having been myself an eye-witness of the occurrence—you are smiling, prince—you are looking at my face as if—”

“Oh no! not at all—I—”

“I am rather young-looking, I know; but I am actually older than I appear to be. I was ten or eleven in the year 1812. I don’t know my age exactly, but it has always been a weakness of mine to make it out less than it really is.”

“I assure you, general, I do not in the least doubt your statement. One of our living autobiographers states that when he was a small baby in Moscow in 1812 the French soldiers fed him with bread.”

“Well, there you see!” said the general, condescendingly. “There is nothing whatever unusual about my tale. Truth very often appears to be impossible. I was a page—it sounds strange, I dare say. Had I been fifteen years old I should probably have been terribly frightened when the French arrived, as my mother was (who had been too slow about clearing out of Moscow); but as I was only just ten I was not in the least alarmed, and rushed through the crowd to the very door of the palace when Napoleon alighted from his horse.”

“Undoubtedly, at ten years old you would not have felt the sense of fear, as you say,” blurted out the prince, horribly uncomfortable in the sensation that he was just about to blush.

“Of course; and it all happened so easily and naturally. And yet, were a novelist to describe the episode, he would put in all kinds of impossible and incredible details.”

“Oh,” cried the prince, “I have often thought that! Why, I know of a murder, for the sake of a watch. It’s in all the papers now. But if some writer had invented it, all the critics would have jumped down his throat and said the thing was too improbable for anything. And yet you read it in the paper, and you can’t help thinking that out of these strange disclosures is to be gained the full knowledge of Russian life and character. You said that well, general; it is so true,” concluded the prince, warmly, delighted to have found a refuge from the fiery blushes which had covered his face.

“Yes, it’s quite true, isn’t it?” cried the general, his eyes sparkling with gratification. “A small boy, a child, would naturally realize no danger; he would shove his way through the crowds to see the shine and glitter of the uniforms, and especially the great man of whom everyone was speaking, for at that time all the world had been talking of no

one but this man for some years past. The world was full of his name; I—so to speak—drew it in with my mother's milk. Napoleon, passing a couple of paces from me, caught sight of me accidentally. I was very well dressed, and being all alone, in that crowd, as you will easily imagine…"

"Oh, of course! Naturally the sight impressed him, and proved to him that not *all* the aristocracy had left Moscow; that at least some nobles and their children had remained behind."

"Just so! just so! He wanted to win over the aristocracy! When his eagle eye fell on me, mine probably flashed back in response. '*Voilà un garçon bien éveillé! Qui est ton père?*' I immediately replied, almost panting with excitement, 'A general, who died on the battle-fields of his country!' '*Le fils d'un boyard et d'un brave, pardessus le marché. J'aime les boyards. M'aimes-tu, petit?*'

"To this keen question I replied as keenly, 'The Russian heart can recognize a great man even in the bitter enemy of his country.' At least, I don't remember the exact words, you know, but the idea was as I say. Napoleon was struck; he thought a minute and then said to his suite: 'I like that boy's pride; if all Russians think like this child, then—' he didn't finish, but went on and entered the palace. I instantly mixed with his suite, and followed him. I was already in high favour. I remember when he came into the first hall, the emperor stopped before a portrait of the Empress Katherine, and after a thoughtful glance remarked, 'That was a great woman,' and passed on.

"Well, in a couple of days I was known all over the palace and the Kremlin as 'le petit boyard.' I only went home to sleep. They were nearly out of their minds about me at home. A couple of days after this, Napoleon's page, De Bazancour, died; he had not been able to stand the trials of the campaign. Napoleon remembered me; I was taken away without explanation; the dead page's uniform was tried on me, and when I was taken before the emperor, dressed in it, he nodded his head to me, and I was told that I was appointed to the vacant post of page.

"Well, I was glad enough, for I had long felt the greatest sympathy for this man; and then the pretty uniform and all that—only a child, you know—and so on. It was a dark green dress coat with gold buttons—red facings, white trousers, and a white silk waistcoat—silk stockings, shoes with buckles, and top-boots if I were riding out with his majesty or with the suite.

"Though the position of all of us at that time was not particularly brilliant, and the poverty was dreadful all round, yet the etiquette at court was strictly preserved, and the more strictly in proportion to the growth of the forebodings of disaster."

“Quite so, quite so, of course!” murmured the poor prince, who didn’t know where to look. “Your memoirs would be most interesting.”

The general was, of course, repeating what he had told Lebedeff the night before, and thus brought it out glibly enough, but here he looked suspiciously at the prince out of the corners of his eyes.

“My memoirs!” he began, with redoubled pride and dignity. “Write my memoirs? The idea has not tempted me. And yet, if you please, my memoirs have long been written, but they shall not see the light until dust returns to dust. Then, I doubt not, they will be translated into all languages, not of course on account of their actual literary merit, but because of the great events of which I was the actual witness, though but a child at the time. As a child, I was able to penetrate into the secrecy of the great man’s private room. At nights I have heard the groans and wailings of this ‘giant in distress.’ He could feel no shame in weeping before such a mere child as I was, though I understood even then that the reason for his suffering was the silence of the Emperor Alexander.”

“Yes, of course; he had written letters to the latter with proposals of peace, had he not?” put in the prince.

“We did not know the details of his proposals, but he wrote letter after letter, all day and every day. He was dreadfully agitated. Sometimes at night I would throw myself upon his breast with tears (Oh, how I loved that man!). ‘Ask forgiveness, Oh, ask forgiveness of the Emperor Alexander!’ I would cry. I should have said, of course, ‘Make peace with Alexander,’ but as a child I expressed my idea in the naive way recorded. ‘Oh, my child,’ he would say (he loved to talk to me and seemed to forget my tender years), ‘Oh, my child, I am ready to kiss Alexander’s feet, but I hate and abominate the King of Prussia and the Austrian Emperor, and—and—but you know nothing of politics, my child.’ He would pull up, remembering whom he was speaking to, but his eyes would sparkle for a long while after this. Well now, if I were to describe all this, and I have seen greater events than these, all these critical gentlemen of the press and political parties—Oh, no thanks! I’m their very humble servant, but no thanks!”

“Quite so—parties—you are very right,” said the prince. “I was reading a book about Napoleon and the Waterloo campaign only the other day, by Charasse, in which the author does not attempt to conceal his joy at Napoleon’s discomfiture at every page. Well now, I don’t like that; it smells of ‘party,’ you know. You are quite right. And were you much occupied with your service under Napoleon?”

The general was in ecstasies, for the prince's remarks, made, as they evidently were, in all seriousness and simplicity, quite dissipated the last relics of his suspicion.

"I know Charasse's book! Oh! I was so angry with his work! I wrote to him and said—I forget what, at this moment. You ask whether I was very busy under the Emperor? Oh no! I was called 'page,' but hardly took my duty seriously. Besides, Napoleon very soon lost hope of conciliating the Russians, and he would have forgotten all about me had he not loved me—for personal reasons—I don't mind saying so now. My heart was greatly drawn to him, too. My duties were light. I merely had to be at the palace occasionally to escort the Emperor out riding, and that was about all. I rode very fairly well. He used to have a ride before dinner, and his suite on those occasions were generally Davoust, myself, and Roustan."

"Constant?" said the prince, suddenly, and quite involuntarily.

"No; Constant was away then, taking a letter to the Empress Josephine. Instead of him there were always a couple of orderlies—and that was all, excepting, of course, the generals and marshals whom Napoleon always took with him for the inspection of various localities, and for the sake of consultation generally. I remember there was one—Davoust—nearly always with him—a big man with spectacles. They used to argue and quarrel sometimes. Once they were in the Emperor's study together—just those two and myself—I was unobserved—and they argued, and the Emperor seemed to be agreeing to something under protest. Suddenly his eye fell on me and an idea seemed to flash across him.

"'Child,' he said, abruptly. 'If I were to recognize the Russian orthodox religion and emancipate the serfs, do you think Russia would come over to me?'"

"'Never!' I cried, indignantly."

"The Emperor was much struck."

"'In the flashing eyes of this patriotic child I read and accept the fiat of the Russian people. Enough, Davoust, it is mere phantasy on our part. Come, let's hear your other project.'"

"Yes, but that was a great idea," said the prince, clearly interested. "You ascribe it to Davoust, do you?"

"Well, at all events, they were consulting together at the time. Of course it was the idea of an eagle, and must have originated with Napoleon; but the other project was good too—it was the 'Conseil du lion!' as Napoleon called it. This project consisted in a proposal to occupy the Kremlin with the whole army; to arm and fortify it

scientifically, to kill as many horses as could be got, and salt their flesh, and spend the winter there; and in spring to fight their way out. Napoleon liked the idea—it attracted him. We rode round the Kremlin walls every day, and Napoleon used to give orders where they were to be patched, where built up, where pulled down and so on. All was decided at last. They were alone together—those two and myself.

"Napoleon was walking up and down with folded arms. I could not take my eyes off his face—my heart beat loudly and painfully.

"'I'm off,' said Davoust. 'Where to?' asked Napoleon.

"'To salt horse-flesh,' said Davoust. Napoleon shuddered—his fate was being decided.

"'Child,' he addressed me suddenly, 'what do you think of our plan?' Of course he only applied to me as a sort of toss-up, you know. I turned to Davoust and addressed my reply to him. I said, as though inspired:

"'Escape, general! Go home!—'

"The project was abandoned; Davoust shrugged his shoulders and went out, whispering to himself—'*Bah, il devient superstitieux!*' Next morning the order to retreat was given."

"All this is most interesting," said the prince, very softly, "if it really was so—that is, I mean—" he hastened to correct himself.

"Oh, my dear prince," cried the general, who was now so intoxicated with his own narrative that he probably could not have pulled up at the most patent indiscretion. "You say, 'if it really was so!' There was more—*much* more, I assure you! These are merely a few little political acts. I tell you I was the eye-witness of the nightly sorrow and groanings of the great man, and of *that* no one can speak but myself. Towards the end he wept no more, though he continued to emit an occasional groan; but his face grew more overcast day by day, as though Eternity were wrapping its gloomy mantle about him. Occasionally we passed whole hours of silence together at night, Roustan snoring in the next room—that fellow slept like a pig. 'But he's loyal to me and my dynasty,' said Napoleon of him.

"Sometimes it was very painful to me, and once he caught me with tears in my eyes. He looked at me kindly. 'You are sorry for me,' he said, 'you, my child, and perhaps one other child—my son, the King of Rome—may grieve for me. All the rest hate me; and my brothers are the first to betray me in misfortune.' I sobbed and threw myself into his arms. He could not resist me—he burst into tears, and our tears mingled as we folded each other in a close embrace.

“‘Write, oh, write a letter to the Empress Josephine!’ I cried, sobbing. Napoleon started, reflected, and said, ‘You remind me of a third heart which loves me. Thank you, my friend;’ and then and there he sat down and wrote that letter to Josephine, with which Constant was sent off next day.”

“You did a good action,” said the prince, “for in the midst of his angry feelings you insinuated a kind thought into his heart.”

“Just so, prince, just so. How well you bring out that fact! Because your own heart is good!” cried the ecstatic old gentleman, and, strangely enough, real tears glistened in his eyes. “Yes, prince, it was a wonderful spectacle. And, do you know, I all but went off to Paris, and should assuredly have shared his solitary exile with him; but, alas, our destinies were otherwise ordered! We parted, he to his island, where I am sure he thought of the weeping child who had embraced him so affectionately at parting in Moscow; and I was sent off to the cadet corps, where I found nothing but roughness and harsh discipline. Alas, my happy days were done!”

“‘I do not wish to deprive your mother of you, and, therefore, I will not ask you to go with me,’ he said, the morning of his departure, ‘but I should like to do something for you.’ He was mounting his horse as he spoke. ‘Write something in my sister’s album for me,’ I said rather timidly, for he was in a state of great dejection at the moment. He turned, called for a pen, took the album. ‘How old is your sister?’ he asked, holding the pen in his hand. ‘Three years old,’ I said. ‘Ah, *petite fille alors!*’ and he wrote in the album:

“‘Ne mentez jamais! NAPOLÉON (votre ami sincère).’

“Such advice, and at such a moment, you must allow, prince, was—”

“Yes, quite so; very remarkable.”

“This page of the album, framed in gold, hung on the wall of my sister’s drawing-room all her life, in the most conspicuous place, till the day of her death; where it is now, I really don’t know. Heavens! it’s two o’clock! *How* I have kept you, prince! It is really most unpardonable of me.”

The general rose.

“Oh, not in the least,” said the prince. “On the contrary, I have been so much interested, I’m really very much obliged to you.”

“Prince,” said the general, pressing his hand, and looking at him with flashing eyes, and an expression as though he were under the influence of a sudden thought which

had come upon him with stunning force. “Prince, you are so kind, so simple-minded, that sometimes I really feel sorry for you! I gaze at you with a feeling of real affection. Oh, Heaven bless you! May your life blossom and fructify in love. Mine is over. Forgive me, forgive me!”

He left the room quickly, covering his face with his hands.

The prince could not doubt the sincerity of his agitation. He understood, too, that the old man had left the room intoxicated with his own success. The general belonged to that class of liars, who, in spite of their transports of lying, invariably suspect that they are not believed. On this occasion, when he recovered from his exaltation, he would probably suspect Muishkin of pitying him, and feel insulted.

“Have I been acting rightly in allowing him to develop such vast resources of imagination?” the prince asked himself. But his answer was a fit of violent laughter which lasted ten whole minutes. He tried to reproach himself for the laughing fit, but eventually concluded that he needn’t do so, since in spite of it he was truly sorry for the old man. The same evening he received a strange letter, short but decided. The general informed him that they must part for ever; that he was grateful, but that even from him he could not accept “signs of sympathy which were humiliating to the dignity of a man already miserable enough.”

When the prince heard that the old man had gone to Nina Alexandrovna, though, he felt almost easy on his account.

We have seen, however, that the general paid a visit to Lizabetha Prokofievna and caused trouble there, the final upshot being that he frightened Mrs. Epanchin, and angered her by bitter hints as to his son Gania.

He had been turned out in disgrace, eventually, and this was the cause of his bad night and quarrelsome day, which ended in his sudden departure into the street in a condition approaching insanity, as recorded before.

Colia did not understand the position. He tried severity with his father, as they stood in the street after the latter had cursed the household, hoping to bring him round that way.

“Well, where are we to go to now, father?” he asked. “You don’t want to go to the prince’s; you have quarrelled with Lebedeff; you have no money; I never have any; and here we are in the middle of the road, in a nice sort of mess.”

“Better to be of a mess than in a mess! I remember making a joke something like that at the mess in eighteen hundred and forty—forty—I forget. ‘Where is my youth, where is my golden youth?’ Who was it said that, Colia?”

“It was Gogol, in Dead Souls, father,” cried Colia, glancing at him in some alarm.

“‘Dead Souls,’ yes, of course, dead. When I die, Colia, you must engrave on my tomb:

“‘Here lies a Dead Soul,
Shame pursues me.’

“Who said that, Colia?”

“I don’t know, father.”

“There was no Eropegoff? Eroshka Eropegoff?” he cried, suddenly, stopping in the road in a frenzy. “No Eropegoff! And my own son to say it! Eropegoff was in the place of a brother to me for eleven months. I fought a duel for him. He was married afterwards, and then killed on the field of battle. The bullet struck the cross on my breast and glanced off straight into his temple. ‘I’ll never forget you,’ he cried, and expired. I served my country well and honestly, Colia, but shame, shame has pursued me! You and Nina will come to my grave, Colia; poor Nina, I always used to call her Nina in the old days, and how she loved.... Nina, Nina, oh, Nina. What have I ever done to deserve your forgiveness and long-suffering? Oh, Colia, your mother has an angelic spirit, an angelic spirit, Colia!”

“I know that, father. Look here, dear old father, come back home! Let’s go back to mother. Look, she ran after us when we came out. What have you stopped her for, just as though you didn’t take in what I said? Why are you crying, father?”

Poor Colia cried himself, and kissed the old man’s hands

“You kiss my hands, *mine?*”

“Yes, yes, yours, yours! What is there to surprise anyone in that? Come, come, you mustn’t go on like this, crying in the middle of the road; and you a general too, a military man! Come, let’s go back.”

“God bless you, dear boy, for being respectful to a disgraced man. Yes, to a poor disgraced old fellow, your father. You shall have such a son yourself; le roi de Rome. Oh, curses on this house!”

“Come, come, what does all this mean?” cried Colia beside himself at last. “What is it? What has happened to you? Why don’t you wish to come back home? Why have you gone out of your mind, like this?”

“I’ll explain it, I’ll explain all to you. Don’t shout! You shall hear. Le roi de Rome. Oh, I am sad, I am melancholy!

“‘Nurse, where is your tomb?’

“Who said that, Colia?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know who said it. Come home at once; come on! I’ll punch Gania’s head myself, if you like—only come. Oh, where *are* you off to again?” The general was dragging him away towards the door of a house nearby. He sat down on the step, still holding Colia by the hand.

“Bend down—bend down your ear. I’ll tell you all—disgrace—bend down, I’ll tell you in your ear.”

“What are you dreaming of?” said poor, frightened Colia, stooping down towards the old man, all the same.

“Le roi de Rome,” whispered the general, trembling all over.

“What? What *do* you mean? What roi de Rome?”

“I—I,” the general continued to whisper, clinging more and more tightly to the boy’s shoulder. “I—wish—to tell you—all—Maria—Maria Petrovna—Su—Su—Su……”

Colia broke loose, seized his father by the shoulders, and stared into his eyes with frenzied gaze. The old man had grown livid—his lips were shaking, convulsions were passing over his features. Suddenly he leant over and began to sink slowly into Colia’s arms.

“He’s got a stroke!” cried Colia, loudly, realizing what was the matter at last.

V.

In point of fact, Varia had rather exaggerated the certainty of her news as to the prince’s betrothal to Aglaya. Very likely, with the perspicacity of her sex, she gave out as an accomplished fact what she felt was pretty sure to become a fact in a few days. Perhaps she could not resist the satisfaction of pouring one last drop of bitterness into her brother Gania’s cup, in spite of her love for him. At all events, she had been unable to obtain any definite news from the Epanchin girls—the most she could get out of them being hints and surmises, and so on. Perhaps Aglaya’s sisters had merely been

pumping Varia for news while pretending to impart information; or perhaps, again, they had been unable to resist the feminine gratification of teasing a friend—for, after all this time, they could scarcely have helped divining the aim of her frequent visits.

On the other hand, the prince, although he had told Lebedeff,—as we know, that nothing had happened, and that he had nothing to impart,—the prince may have been in error. Something strange seemed to have happened, without anything definite having actually happened. Varia had guessed that with her true feminine instinct.

How or why it came about that everyone at the Epanchins' became imbued with one conviction—that something very important had happened to Aglaya, and that her fate was in process of settlement—it would be very difficult to explain. But no sooner had this idea taken root, than all at once declared that they had seen and observed it long ago; that they had remarked it at the time of the "poor knight" joke, and even before, though they had been unwilling to believe in such nonsense.

So said the sisters. Of course, Lizabetha Prokofievna had foreseen it long before the rest; her "heart had been sore" for a long while, she declared, and it was now so sore that she appeared to be quite overwhelmed, and the very thought of the prince became distasteful to her.

There was a question to be decided—most important, but most difficult; so much so, that Mrs. Epanchin did not even see how to put it into words. Would the prince do or not? Was all this good or bad? If good (which might be the case, of course), *why* good? If bad (which was hardly doubtful), *wherein*, especially, bad? Even the general, the paterfamilias, though astonished at first, suddenly declared that, "upon his honour, he really believed he had fancied something of the kind, after all. At first, it seemed a new idea, and then, somehow, it looked as familiar as possible." His wife frowned him down there. This was in the morning; but in the evening, alone with his wife, he had given tongue again.

"Well, really, you know"—(silence)—"of course, you know all this is very strange, if true, which I cannot deny; but"—(silence).—"But, on the other hand, if one looks things in the face, you know—upon my honour, the prince is a rare good fellow—and—and—and—well, his name, you know—your family name—all this looks well, and perpetuates the name and title and all that—which at this moment is not standing so high as it might—from one point of view—don't you know? The world, the world is the world, of course—and people will talk—and—and—the prince has property, you know—if it is not very large—and then he—he—" (Continued silence, and collapse of the general.)

Hearing these words from her husband, Lizabetha Prokofievna was driven beside herself.

According to her opinion, the whole thing had been one huge, fantastical, absurd, unpardonable mistake. “First of all, this prince is an idiot, and, secondly, he is a fool—knows nothing of the world, and has no place in it. Whom can he be shown to? Where can you take him to? What will old Bielokonski say? We never thought of such a husband as *that* for our Aglaya!”

Of course, the last argument was the chief one. The maternal heart trembled with indignation to think of such an absurdity, although in that heart there rose another voice, which said: “And *why* is not the prince such a husband as you would have desired for Aglaya?” It was this voice which annoyed Lizabetha Prokofievna more than anything else.

For some reason or other, the sisters liked the idea of the prince. They did not even consider it very strange; in a word, they might be expected at any moment to range themselves strongly on his side. But both of them decided to say nothing either way. It had always been noticed in the family that the stronger Mrs. Epanchin’s opposition was to any project, the nearer she was, in reality, to giving in.

Alexandra, however, found it difficult to keep absolute silence on the subject. Long since holding, as she did, the post of “confidential adviser to mamma,” she was now perpetually called in council, and asked her opinion, and especially her assistance, in order to recollect “how on earth all this happened?” Why did no one see it? Why did no one say anything about it? What did all that wretched “poor knight” joke mean? Why was she, Lizabetha Prokofievna, driven to think, and foresee, and worry for everybody, while they all sucked their thumbs, and counted the crows in the garden, and did nothing? At first, Alexandra had been very careful, and had merely replied that perhaps her father’s remark was not so far out: that, in the eyes of the world, probably the choice of the prince as a husband for one of the Epanchin girls would be considered a very wise one. Warming up, however, she added that the prince was by no means a fool, and never had been; and that as to “place in the world,” no one knew what the position of a respectable person in Russia would imply in a few years—whether it would depend on successes in the government service, on the old system, or what.

To all this her mother replied that Alexandra was a freethinker, and that all this was due to that “cursed woman’s rights question.”

Half an hour after this conversation, she went off to town, and thence to the Kammenny Ostrof, [“Stone Island,” a suburb and park of St. Petersburg] to see Princess Bielokonski, who had just arrived from Moscow on a short visit. The princess was Aglaya’s godmother.

“Old Bielokonski” listened to all the fevered and despairing lamentations of Lizabetha Prokofievna without the least emotion; the tears of this sorrowful mother did not evoke answering sighs—in fact, she laughed at her. She was a dreadful old despot, this princess; she could not allow equality in anything, not even in friendship of the oldest standing, and she insisted on treating Mrs. Epanchin as her *protégée*, as she had been thirty-five years ago. She could never put up with the independence and energy of Lizabetha’s character. She observed that, as usual, the whole family had gone much too far ahead, and had converted a fly into an elephant; that, so far as she had heard their story, she was persuaded that nothing of any seriousness had occurred; that it would surely be better to wait until something *did* happen; that the prince, in her opinion, was a very decent young fellow, though perhaps a little eccentric, through illness, and not quite as weighty in the world as one could wish. The worst feature was, she said, Nastasia Philipovna.

Lizabetha Prokofievna well understood that the old lady was angry at the failure of Evgenie Pavlovitch—her own recommendation. She returned home to Pavlofsk in a worse humour than when she left, and of course everybody in the house suffered. She pitched into everyone, because, she declared, they had ‘gone mad.’ Why were things always mismanaged in her house? Why had everybody been in such a frantic hurry in this matter? So far as she could see, nothing whatever had happened. Surely they had better wait and see what was to happen, instead of making mountains out of molehills.

And so the conclusion of the matter was that it would be far better to take it quietly, and wait coolly to see what would turn up. But, alas! peace did not reign for more than ten minutes. The first blow dealt to its power was in certain news communicated to Lizabetha Prokofievna as to events which had happened during her trip to see the princess. (This trip had taken place the day after that on which the prince had turned up at the Epanchins at nearly one o’clock at night, thinking it was nine.)

The sisters replied candidly and fully enough to their mother’s impatient questions on her return. They said, in the first place, that nothing particular had happened since her departure; that the prince had been, and that Aglaya had kept him waiting a long while before she appeared—half an hour, at least; that she had then come in, and immediately asked the prince to have a game of chess; that the prince did not know

the game, and Aglaya had beaten him easily; that she had been in a wonderfully merry mood, and had laughed at the prince, and chaffed him so unmercifully that one was quite sorry to see his wretched expression.

She had then asked him to play cards—the game called "little fools." At this game the tables were turned completely, for the prince had shown himself a master at it. Aglaya had cheated and changed cards, and stolen others, in the most bare-faced way, but, in spite of everything the prince had beaten her hopelessly five times running, and she had been left "little fool" each time.

Aglaya then lost her temper, and began to say such awful things to the prince that he laughed no more, but grew dreadfully pale, especially when she said that she should not remain in the house with him, and that he ought to be ashamed of coming to their house at all, especially at night, "*after all that had happened*."

So saying, she had left the room, banging the door after her, and the prince went off, looking as though he were on his way to a funeral, in spite of all their attempts at consolation.

Suddenly, a quarter of an hour after the prince's departure, Aglaya had rushed out of her room in such a hurry that she had not even wiped her eyes, which were full of tears. She came back because Colia had brought a hedgehog. Everybody came in to see the hedgehog. In answer to their questions Colia explained that the hedgehog was not his, and that he had left another boy, Kostia Lebedeff, waiting for him outside. Kostia was too shy to come in, because he was carrying a hatchet; they had bought the hedgehog and the hatchet from a peasant whom they had met on the road. He had offered to sell them the hedgehog, and they had paid fifty copecks for it; and the hatchet had so taken their fancy that they had made up their minds to buy it of their own accord. On hearing this, Aglaya urged Colia to sell her the hedgehog; she even called him "dear Colia," in trying to coax him. He refused for a long time, but at last he could hold out no more, and went to fetch Kostia Lebedeff. The latter appeared, carrying his hatchet, and covered with confusion. Then it came out that the hedgehog was not theirs, but the property of a schoolmate, one Petroff, who had given them some money to buy Schlosser's History for him, from another schoolfellow who at that moment was driven to raising money by the sale of his books. Colia and Kostia were about to make this purchase for their friend when chance brought the hedgehog to their notice, and they had succumbed to the temptation of buying it. They were now taking Petroff the hedgehog and hatchet which they had bought with his money, instead of Schlosser's History. But Aglaya so entreated them that at last they consented to sell her the hedgehog. As soon as she had got possession of it, she put it

in a wicker basket with Colia's help, and covered it with a napkin. Then she said to Colia: "Go and take this hedgehog to the prince from me, and ask him to accept it as a token of my profound respect." Colia joyfully promised to do the errand, but he demanded explanations. "What does the hedgehog mean? What is the meaning of such a present?" Aglaya replied that it was none of his business. "I am sure that there is some allegory about it," Colia persisted. Aglaya grew angry, and called him "a silly boy." "If I did not respect all women in your person," replied Colia, "and if my own principles would permit it, I would soon prove to you, that I know how to answer such an insult!" But, in the end, Colia went off with the hedgehog in great delight, followed by Kostia Lebedeff. Aglaya's annoyance was soon over, and seeing that Colia was swinging the hedgehog's basket violently to and fro, she called out to him from the verandah, as if they had never quarrelled: "Colia, dear, please take care not to drop him!" Colia appeared to have no grudge against her, either, for he stopped, and answered most cordially: "No, I will not drop him! Don't be afraid, Aglaya Ivanovna!" After which he went on his way. Aglaya burst out laughing and ran up to her room, highly delighted. Her good spirits lasted the whole day.

All this filled poor Lizabetha's mind with chaotic confusion. What on earth did it all mean? The most disturbing feature was the hedgehog. What was the symbolic signification of a hedgehog? What did they understand by it? What underlay it? Was it a cryptic message?

Poor General Epanchin "put his foot in it" by answering the above questions in his own way. He said there was no cryptic message at all. As for the hedgehog, it was just a hedgehog, which meant nothing—unless, indeed, it was a pledge of friendship,—the sign of forgetting of offences and so on. At all events, it was a joke, and, of course, a most pardonable and innocent one.

We may as well remark that the general had guessed perfectly accurately.

The prince, returning home from the interview with Aglaya, had sat gloomy and depressed for half an hour. He was almost in despair when Colia arrived with the hedgehog.

Then the sky cleared in a moment. The prince seemed to arise from the dead; he asked Colia all about it, made him repeat the story over and over again, and laughed and shook hands with the boys in his delight.

It seemed clear to the prince that Aglaya forgave him, and that he might go there again this very evening; and in his eyes that was not only the main thing, but everything in the world.

“What children we are still, Colia!” he cried at last, enthusiastically,—“and how delightful it is that we can be children still!”

“Simply—my dear prince,—simply she is in love with you,—that’s the whole of the secret!” replied Colia, with authority.

The prince blushed, but this time he said nothing. Colia burst out laughing and clapped his hands. A minute later the prince laughed too, and from this moment until the evening he looked at his watch every other minute to see how much time he had to wait before evening came.

But the situation was becoming rapidly critical.

Mrs. Epanchin could bear her suspense no longer, and in spite of the opposition of husband and daughters, she sent for Aglaya, determined to get a straightforward answer out of her, once for all.

“Otherwise,” she observed hysterically, “I shall die before evening.”

It was only now that everyone realized to what a ridiculous dead-lock the whole matter had been brought. Excepting feigned surprise, indignation, laughter, and jeering—both at the prince and at everyone who asked her questions,—nothing could be got out of Aglaya.

Lizabetha Prokofievna went to bed and only rose again in time for tea, when the prince might be expected.

She awaited him in trembling agitation; and when he at last arrived she nearly went off into hysterics.

Muishkin himself came in very timidly. He seemed to feel his way, and looked in each person’s eyes in a questioning way,—for Aglaya was absent, which fact alarmed him at once.

This evening there were no strangers present—no one but the immediate members of the family. Prince S. was still in town, occupied with the affairs of Evgenie Pavlovitch’s uncle.

“I wish at least *he* would come and say something!” complained poor Lizabetha Prokofievna.

The general sat still with a most preoccupied air. The sisters were looking very serious and did not speak a word, and Lizabetha Prokofievna did not know how to commence the conversation.

At length she plunged into an energetic and hostile criticism of railways, and glared at the prince defiantly.

Alas Aglaya still did not come—and the prince was quite lost. He had the greatest difficulty in expressing his opinion that railways were most useful institutions,—and in the middle of his speech Adelaida laughed, which threw him into a still worse state of confusion.

At this moment in marched Aglaya, as calm and collected as could be. She gave the prince a ceremonious bow and solemnly took up a prominent position near the big round table. She looked at the prince questioningly.

All present realized that the moment for the settlement of perplexities had arrived.

“Did you get my hedgehog?” she inquired, firmly and almost angrily.

“Yes, I got it,” said the prince, blushing.

“Tell us now, at once, what you made of the present? I must have you answer this question for mother’s sake; she needs pacifying, and so do all the rest of the family!”

“Look here, Aglaya—” began the general.

“This—this is going beyond all limits!” said Lizabetha Prokofievna, suddenly alarmed.

“It is not in the least beyond all limits, mamma!” said her daughter, firmly. “I sent the prince a hedgehog this morning, and I wish to hear his opinion of it. Go on, prince.”

“What—what sort of opinion, Aglaya Ivanovna?”

“About the hedgehog.”

“That is—I suppose you wish to know how I received the hedgehog, Aglaya Ivanovna,—or, I should say, how I regarded your sending him to me? In that case, I may tell you—in a word—that I—in fact—”

He paused, breathless.

“Come—you haven’t told us much!” said Aglaya, after waiting some five seconds. “Very well, I am ready to drop the hedgehog, if you like; but I am anxious to be able to clear up this accumulation of misunderstandings. Allow me to ask you, prince,—I wish to hear from you, personally—are you making me an offer, or not?”

“Gracious heavens!” exclaimed Lizabetha Prokofievna. The prince started. The general stiffened in his chair; the sisters frowned.

“Don’t deceive me now, prince—tell the truth. All these people persecute me with astounding questions—about you. Is there any ground for all these questions, or not? Come!”

“I have not asked you to marry me yet, Aglaya Ivanovna,” said the prince, becoming suddenly animated; “but you know yourself how much I love you and trust you.”

“No—I asked you this—answer this! Do you intend to ask for my hand, or not?”

“Yes—I do ask for it!” said the prince, more dead than alive now.

There was a general stir in the room.

“No—no—my dear girl,” began the general. “You cannot proceed like this, Aglaya, if that’s how the matter stands. It’s impossible. Prince, forgive it, my dear fellow, but—Lizabetha Prokofievna!”—he appealed to his spouse for help—“you must really—”

“Not I—not I! I retire from all responsibility,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna, with a wave of the hand.

“Allow me to speak, please, mamma,” said Aglaya. “I think I ought to have something to say in the matter. An important moment of my destiny is about to be decided”—(this is how Aglaya expressed herself)—“and I wish to find out how the matter stands, for my own sake, though I am glad you are all here. Allow me to ask you, prince, since you cherish those intentions, how you consider that you will provide for my happiness?”

“I—I don’t quite know how to answer your question, Aglaya Ivanovna. What is there to say to such a question? And—and must I answer?”

“I think you are rather overwhelmed and out of breath. Have a little rest, and try to recover yourself. Take a glass of water, or—but they’ll give you some tea directly.”

“I love you, Aglaya Ivanovna,—I love you very much. I love only you—and—please don’t jest about it, for I do love you very much.”

“Well, this matter is important. We are not children—we must look into it thoroughly. Now then, kindly tell me—what does your fortune consist of?”

“No—Aglaya—come, enough of this, you mustn’t behave like this,” said her father, in dismay.

“It’s disgraceful,” said Lizabetha Prokofievna in a loud whisper.

“She’s mad—quite!” said Alexandra.

“Fortune—money—do you mean?” asked the prince in some surprise.

“Just so.”

“I have now—let’s see—I have a hundred and thirty-five thousand roubles,” said the prince, blushing violently.

“Is that all, really?” said Aglaya, candidly, without the slightest show of confusion. “However, it’s not so bad, especially if managed with economy. Do you intend to serve?”

“I—I intended to try for a certificate as private tutor.”

“Very good. That would increase our income nicely. Have you any intention of being a Kammer-junker?”

“A Kammer-junker? I had not thought of it, but—”

But here the two sisters could restrain themselves no longer, and both of them burst into irrepressible laughter.

Adelaida had long since detected in Aglaya’s features the gathering signs of an approaching storm of laughter, which she restrained with amazing self-control.

Aglaya looked menacingly at her laughing sisters, but could not contain herself any longer, and the next minute she too had burst into an irrepressible, and almost hysterical, fit of mirth. At length she jumped up, and ran out of the room.

“I knew it was all a joke!” cried Adelaida. “I felt it ever since—since the hedgehog.”

“No, no! I cannot allow this,—this is a little too much,” cried Lizabetha Prokofievna, exploding with rage, and she rose from her seat and followed Aglaya out of the room as quickly as she could.

The two sisters hurriedly went after her.

The prince and the general were the only two persons left in the room.

“It’s—it’s really—now could you have imagined anything like it, Lef Nicolaievitch?” cried the general. He was evidently so much agitated that he hardly knew what he wished to say. “Seriously now, seriously I mean—”

“I only see that Aglaya Ivanovna is laughing at me,” said the poor prince, sadly.

“Wait a bit, my boy, I’ll just go—you stay here, you know. But do just explain, if you can, Lef Nicolaievitch, how in the world has all this come about? And what does it all

mean? You must understand, my dear fellow; I am a father, you see, and I ought to be allowed to understand the matter—do explain, I beg you!"

"I love Aglaya Ivanovna—she knows it,—and I think she must have long known it."

The general shrugged his shoulders.

"Strange—it's strange," he said, "and you love her very much?"

"Yes, very much."

"Well—it's all most strange to me. That is—my dear fellow, it is such a surprise—such a blow—that... You see, it is not your financial position (though I should not object if you were a bit richer)—I am thinking of my daughter's happiness, of course, and the thing is—are you able to give her the happiness she deserves? And then—is all this a joke on her part, or is she in earnest? I don't mean on your side, but on hers."

At this moment Alexandra's voice was heard outside the door, calling out "Papa!"

"Wait for me here, my boy—will you? Just wait and think it all over, and I'll come back directly," he said hurriedly, and made off with what looked like the rapidity of alarm in response to Alexandra's call.

He found the mother and daughter locked in one another's arms, mingling their tears.

These were the tears of joy and peace and reconciliation. Aglaya was kissing her mother's lips and cheeks and hands; they were hugging each other in the most ardent way.

"There, look at her now—Ivan Fedorovitch! Here she is—all of her! This is our *real* Aglaya at last!" said Lizabetha Prokofievna.

Aglaya raised her happy, tearful face from her mother's breast, glanced at her father, and burst out laughing. She sprang at him and hugged him too, and kissed him over and over again. She then rushed back to her mother and hid her face in the maternal bosom, and there indulged in more tears. Her mother covered her with a corner of her shawl.

"Oh, you cruel little girl! How will you treat us all next, I wonder?" she said, but she spoke with a ring of joy in her voice, and as though she breathed at last without the oppression which she had felt so long.

"Cruel?" sobbed Aglaya. "Yes, I *am* cruel, and worthless, and spoiled—tell father so,—oh, here he is—I forgot Father, listen!" She laughed through her tears.

“My darling, my little idol,” cried the general, kissing and fondling her hands (Aglaya did not draw them away); “so you love this young man, do you?”

“No, no, no, can’t *bear* him, I can’t *bear* your young man!” cried Aglaya, raising her head. “And if you dare say that *once* more, papa—I’m serious, you know, I’m,—do you hear me—I’m serious!”

She certainly did seem to be serious enough. She had flushed up all over and her eyes were blazing.

The general felt troubled and remained silent, while Lizabetha Prokofievna telegraphed to him from behind Aglaya to ask no questions.

“If that’s the case, darling—then, of course, you shall do exactly as you like. He is waiting alone downstairs. Hadn’t I better hint to him gently that he can go?” The general telegraphed to Lizabetha Prokofievna in his turn.

“No, no, you needn’t do anything of the sort; you mustn’t hint gently at all. I’ll go down myself directly. I wish to apologize to this young man, because I hurt his feelings.”

“Yes, *seriously*,” said the general, gravely.

“Well, you’d better stay here, all of you, for a little, and I’ll go down to him alone to begin with. I’ll just go in and then you can follow me almost at once. That’s the best way.”

She had almost reached the door when she turned round again.

“I shall laugh—I know I shall; I shall die of laughing,” she said, lugubriously.

However, she turned and ran down to the prince as fast as her feet could carry her.

“Well, what does it all mean? What do you make of it?” asked the general of his spouse, hurriedly.

“I hardly dare say,” said Lizabetha, as hurriedly, “but I think it’s as plain as anything can be.”

“I think so too, as clear as day; she loves him.”

“Loves him? She is head over ears in love, that’s what she is,” put in Alexandra.

“Well, God bless her, God bless her, if such is her destiny,” said Lizabetha, crossing herself devoutly.

“H’m destiny it is,” said the general, “and there’s no getting out of destiny.”

With these words they all moved off towards the drawing-room, where another surprise awaited them. Aglaya had not only not laughed, as she had feared, but had gone to the prince rather timidly, and said to him:

“Forgive a silly, horrid, spoilt girl”—(she took his hand here)—“and be quite assured that we all of us esteem you beyond all words. And if I dared to turn your beautiful, admirable simplicity to ridicule, forgive me as you would a little child its mischief. Forgive me all my absurdity of just now, which, of course, meant nothing, and could not have the slightest consequence.” She spoke these words with great emphasis.

Her father, mother, and sisters came into the room and were much struck with the last words, which they just caught as they entered—“absurdity which of course meant nothing”—and still more so with the emphasis with which Aglaya had spoken.

They exchanged glances questioningly, but the prince did not seem to have understood the meaning of Aglaya’s words; he was in the highest heaven of delight.

“Why do you speak so?” he murmured. “Why do you ask my forgiveness?”

He wished to add that he was unworthy of being asked for forgiveness by her, but paused. Perhaps he did understand Aglaya’s sentence about “absurdity which meant nothing,” and like the strange fellow that he was, rejoiced in the words.

Undoubtedly the fact that he might now come and see Aglaya as much as he pleased again was quite enough to make him perfectly happy; that he might come and speak to her, and see her, and sit by her, and walk with her—who knows, but that all this was quite enough to satisfy him for the whole of his life, and that he would desire no more to the end of time?

(Lizabetha Prokofievna felt that this might be the case, and she didn’t like it; though very probably she could not have put the idea into words.)

It would be difficult to describe the animation and high spirits which distinguished the prince for the rest of the evening.

He was so happy that “it made one feel happy to look at him,” as Aglaya’s sisters expressed it afterwards. He talked, and told stories just as he had done once before, and never since, namely on the very first morning of his acquaintance with the Epanchins, six months ago. Since his return to Petersburg from Moscow, he had been remarkably silent, and had told Prince S. on one occasion, before everyone, that he did not think himself justified in degrading any thought by his unworthy words.

But this evening he did nearly all the talking himself, and told stories by the dozen, while he answered all questions put to him clearly, gladly, and with any amount of detail.

There was nothing, however, of love-making in his talk. His ideas were all of the most serious kind; some were even mystical and profound.

He aired his own views on various matters, some of his most private opinions and observations, many of which would have seemed rather funny, so his hearers agreed afterwards, had they not been so well expressed.

The general liked serious subjects of conversation; but both he and Lizabetha Prokofievna felt that they were having a little too much of a good thing tonight, and as the evening advanced, they both grew more or less melancholy; but towards night, the prince fell to telling funny stories, and was always the first to burst out laughing himself, which he invariably did so joyously and simply that the rest laughed just as much at him as at his stories.

As for Aglaya, she hardly said a word all the evening; but she listened with all her ears to Lef Nicolaievitch's talk, and scarcely took her eyes off him.

"She looked at him, and stared and stared, and hung on every word he said," said Lizabetha afterwards, to her husband, "and yet, tell her that she loves him, and she is furious!"

"What's to be done? It's fate," said the general, shrugging his shoulders, and, for a long while after, he continued to repeat: "It's fate, it's fate!"

We may add that to a business man like General Epanchin the present position of affairs was most unsatisfactory. He hated the uncertainty in which they had been, perforce, left. However, he decided to say no more about it, and merely to look on, and take his time and tune from Lizabetha Prokofievna.

The happy state in which the family had spent the evening, as just recorded, was not of very long duration. Next day Aglaya quarrelled with the prince again, and so she continued to behave for the next few days. For whole hours at a time she ridiculed and chaffed the wretched man, and made him almost a laughing-stock.

It is true that they used to sit in the little summer-house together for an hour or two at a time, very often, but it was observed that on these occasions the prince would read the paper, or some book, aloud to Aglaya.

“Do you know,” Aglaya said to him once, interrupting the reading, “I’ve remarked that you are dreadfully badly educated. You never know anything thoroughly, if one asks you; neither anyone’s name, nor dates, nor about treaties and so on. It’s a great pity, you know!”

“I told you I had not had much of an education,” replied the prince.

“How am I to respect you, if that’s the case? Read on now. No—don’t! Stop reading!”

And once more, that same evening, Aglaya mystified them all. Prince S. had returned, and Aglaya was particularly amiable to him, and asked a great deal after Evgenie Pavlovitch. (Muishkin had not come in as yet.)

Suddenly Prince S. hinted something about “a new and approaching change in the family.” He was led to this remark by a communication inadvertently made to him by Lizabetha Prokofievna, that Adelaida’s marriage must be postponed a little longer, in order that the two weddings might come off together.

It is impossible to describe Aglaya’s irritation. She flared up, and said some indignant words about “all these silly insinuations.” She added that “she had no intentions as yet of replacing anybody’s mistress.”

These words painfully impressed the whole party; but especially her parents. Lizabetha Prokofievna summoned a secret council of two, and insisted upon the general’s demanding from the prince a full explanation of his relations with Nastasia Philipovna. The general argued that it was only a whim of Aglaya’s; and that, had not Prince S. unfortunately made that remark, which had confused the child and made her blush, she never would have said what she did; and that he was sure Aglaya knew well that anything she might have heard of the prince and Nastasia Philipovna was merely the fabrication of malicious tongues, and that the woman was going to marry Rogojin. He insisted that the prince had nothing whatever to do with Nastasia Philipovna, so far as any liaison was concerned; and, if the truth were to be told about it, he added, never had had.

Meanwhile nothing put the prince out, and he continued to be in the seventh heaven of bliss. Of course he could not fail to observe some impatience and ill-temper in Aglaya now and then; but he believed in something else, and nothing could now shake his conviction. Besides, Aglaya’s frowns never lasted long; they disappeared of themselves.

Perhaps he was too easy in his mind. So thought Hippolyte, at all events, who met him in the park one day.

“Didn’t I tell you the truth now, when I said you were in love?” he said, coming up to Muishkin of his own accord, and stopping him.

The prince gave him his hand and congratulated him upon “looking so well.”

Hippolyte himself seemed to be hopeful about his state of health, as is often the case with consumptives.

He had approached the prince with the intention of talking sarcastically about his happy expression of face, but very soon forgot his intention and began to talk about himself. He began complaining about everything, disconnectedly and endlessly, as was his wont.

“You wouldn’t believe,” he concluded, “how irritating they all are there. They are such wretchedly small, vain, egotistical, *commonplace* people! Would you believe it, they invited me there under the express condition that I should die quickly, and they are all as wild as possible with me for not having died yet, and for being, on the contrary, a good deal better! Isn’t it a comedy? I don’t mind betting that you don’t believe me!”

The prince said nothing.

“I sometimes think of coming over to you again,” said Hippolyte, carelessly. “So you *don’t* think them capable of inviting a man on the condition that he is to look sharp and die?”

“I certainly thought they invited you with quite other views.”

“Ho, ho! you are not nearly so simple as they try to make you out! This is not the time for it, or I would tell you a thing or two about that beauty, Gania, and his hopes. You are being undermined, pitilessly undermined, and—and it is really melancholy to see you so calm about it. But alas! it’s your nature—you can’t help it!”

“My word! what a thing to be melancholy about! Why, do you think I should be any happier if I were to feel disturbed about the excavations you tell me of?”

“It is better to be unhappy and know the worst, than to be happy in a fool’s paradise! I suppose you don’t believe that you have a rival in that quarter?”

“Your insinuations as to rivalry are rather cynical, Hippolyte. I’m sorry to say I have no right to answer you! As for Gania, I put it to you, *can* any man have a happy mind after passing through what he has had to suffer? I think that is the best way to look at it. He will change yet, he has lots of time before him, and life is rich; besides—besides…” the prince hesitated. “As to being undermined, I don’t know what in the world you are driving at, Hippolyte. I think we had better drop the subject!”

“Very well, we’ll drop it for a while. You can’t look at anything but in your exalted, generous way. You must put out your finger and touch a thing before you’ll believe it, eh? Ha! ha! ha! I suppose you despise me dreadfully, prince, eh? What do you think?”

“Why? Because you have suffered more than we have?”

“No; because I am unworthy of my sufferings, if you like!”

“Whoever *can* suffer is worthy to suffer, I should think. Aglaya Ivanovna wished to see you, after she had read your confession, but—”

“She postponed the pleasure—I see—I quite understand!” said Hippolyte, hurriedly, as though he wished to banish the subject. “I hear—they tell me—that you read her all that nonsense aloud? Stupid bosh it was—written in delirium. And I can’t understand how anyone can be so—I won’t say *cruel*, because the word would be humiliating to myself, but we’ll say childishly vain and revengeful, as to *reproach* me with this confession, and use it as a weapon against me. Don’t be afraid, I’m not referring to yourself.”

“Oh, but I’m sorry you repudiate the confession, Hippolyte—it is sincere; and, do you know, even the absurd parts of it—and these are many” (here Hippolyte frowned savagely) “are, as it were, redeemed by suffering—for it must have cost you something to admit what you there say—great torture, perhaps, for all I know. Your motive must have been a very noble one all through. Whatever may have appeared to the contrary, I give you my word, I see this more plainly every day. I do not judge you; I merely say this to have it off my mind, and I am only sorry that I did not say it all *then*—”

Hippolyte flushed hotly. He had thought at first that the prince was “humbugging” him; but on looking at his face he saw that he was absolutely serious, and had no thought of any deception. Hippolyte beamed with gratification.

“And yet I must die,” he said, and almost added: “a man like me!

“And imagine how that Gania annoys me! He has developed the idea—or pretends to believe—that in all probability three or four others who heard my confession will die before I do. There’s an idea for you—and all this by way of *consoling* me! Ha! ha! ha! In the first place they haven’t died yet; and in the second, if they *did* die—all of them—what would be the satisfaction to me in that? He judges me by himself. But he goes further, he actually pitches into me because, as he declares, ‘any decent fellow’ would die quietly, and that ‘all this’ is mere egotism on my part. He doesn’t see what refinement of egotism it is on his own part—and at the same time, what ox-like

coarseness! Have you ever read of the death of one Stepan Gleboff, in the eighteenth century? I read of it yesterday by chance."

"Who was he?"

"He was impaled on a stake in the time of Peter."

"I know, I know! He lay there fifteen hours in the hard frost, and died with the most extraordinary fortitude—I know—what of him?"

"Only that God gives that sort of dying to some, and not to others. Perhaps you think, though, that I could not die like Gleboff?"

"Not at all!" said the prince, blushing. "I was only going to say that you—not that you could not be like Gleboff—but that you would have been more like—"

"I guess what you mean—I should be an Osterman, not a Gleboff—eh? Is that what you meant?"

"What Osterman?" asked the prince in some surprise.

"Why, Osterman—the diplomatist. Peter's Osterman," muttered Hippolyte, confused. There was a moment's pause of mutual confusion.

"Oh, no, no!" said the prince at last, "that was not what I was going to say—oh no! I don't think you would ever have been like Osterman."

Hippolyte frowned gloomily.

"I'll tell you why I draw the conclusion," explained the prince, evidently desirous of clearing up the matter a little. "Because, though I often think over the men of those times, I cannot for the life of me imagine them to be like ourselves. It really appears to me that they were of another race altogether than ourselves of today. At that time people seemed to stick so to one idea; now, they are more nervous, more sensitive, more enlightened—people of two or three ideas at once—as it were. The man of today is a broader man, so to speak—and I declare I believe that is what prevents him from being so self-contained and independent a being as his brother of those earlier days. Of course my remark was only made under this impression, and not in the least—"

"I quite understand. You are trying to comfort me for the naiveness with which you disagreed with me—eh? Ha! ha! ha! You are a regular child, prince! However, I cannot help seeing that you always treat me like—like a fragile china cup. Never mind, never mind, I'm not a bit angry! At all events we have had a very funny talk. Do you know, all things considered, I should like to be something better than Osterman! I wouldn't take

the trouble to rise from the dead to be an Osterman. However, I see I must make arrangements to die soon, or I myself—. Well—leave me now! *Au revoir.* Look here—before you go, just give me your opinion: how do you think I ought to die, now? I mean—the best, the most virtuous way? Tell me!"

"You should pass us by and forgive us our happiness," said the prince in a low voice.

"Ha! ha! ha! I thought so. I thought I should hear something like that. Well, you are—you really are—oh dear me! Eloquence, eloquence! Good-bye!"

VI.

As to the evening party at the Epanchins' at which Princess Bielokonski was to be present, Varia had reported with accuracy; though she had perhaps expressed herself too strongly.

The thing was decided in a hurry and with a certain amount of quite unnecessary excitement, doubtless because "nothing could be done in this house like anywhere else."

The impatience of Lizabetha Prokofievna "to get things settled" explained a good deal, as well as the anxiety of both parents for the happiness of their beloved daughter. Besides, Princess Bielokonski was going away soon, and they hoped that she would take an interest in the prince. They were anxious that he should enter society under the auspices of this lady, whose patronage was the best of recommendations for any young man.

Even if there seems something strange about the match, the general and his wife said to each other, the "world" will accept Aglaya's fiance without any question if he is under the patronage of the princess. In any case, the prince would have to be "shown" sooner or later; that is, introduced into society, of which he had, so far, not the least idea. Moreover, it was only a question of a small gathering of a few intimate friends. Besides Princess Bielokonski, only one other lady was expected, the wife of a high dignitary. Evgenie Pavlovitch, who was to escort the princess, was the only young man.

Muishkin was told of the princess's visit three days beforehand, but nothing was said to him about the party until the night before it was to take place.

He could not help observing the excited and agitated condition of all members of the family, and from certain hints dropped in conversation he gathered that they were all anxious as to the impression he should make upon the princess. But the Epanchins, one and all, believed that Muishkin, in his simplicity of mind, was quite incapable of

realizing that they could be feeling any anxiety on his account, and for this reason they all looked at him with dread and uneasiness.

In point of fact, he did attach marvellously little importance to the approaching event. He was occupied with altogether different thoughts. Aglaya was growing hourly more capricious and gloomy, and this distressed him. When they told him that Evgenie Pavlovitch was expected, he evinced great delight, and said that he had long wished to see him—and somehow these words did not please anyone.

Aglaya left the room in a fit of irritation, and it was not until late in the evening, past eleven, when the prince was taking his departure, that she said a word or two to him, privately, as she accompanied him as far as the front door.

“I should like you,” she said, “not to come here tomorrow until evening, when the guests are all assembled. You know there are to be guests, don’t you?”

She spoke impatiently and with severity; this was the first allusion she had made to the party of tomorrow.

She hated the idea of it, everyone saw that; and she would probably have liked to quarrel about it with her parents, but pride and modesty prevented her from broaching the subject.

The prince jumped to the conclusion that Aglaya, too, was nervous about him, and the impression he would make, and that she did not like to admit her anxiety; and this thought alarmed him.

“Yes, I am invited,” he replied.

She was evidently in difficulties as to how best to go on. “May I speak of something serious to you, for once in my life?” she asked, angrily. She was irritated at she knew not what, and could not restrain her wrath.

“Of course you may; I am very glad to listen,” replied Muishkin.

Aglaya was silent a moment and then began again with evident dislike of her subject:

“I do not wish to quarrel with them about this; in some things they won’t be reasonable. I always did feel a loathing for the laws which seem to guide mamma’s conduct at times. I don’t speak of father, for he cannot be expected to be anything but what he is. Mother is a noble-minded woman, I know; you try to suggest anything mean to her, and you’ll see! But she is such a slave to these miserable creatures! I don’t mean old Bielokonski alone. She is a contemptible old thing, but she is able to twist people round her little finger, and I admire that in her, at all events! How mean it

all is, and how foolish! We were always middle-class, thoroughly middle-class, people. Why should we attempt to climb into the giddy heights of the fashionable world? My sisters are all for it. It's Prince S. they have to thank for poisoning their minds. Why are you so glad that Evgenie Pavlovitch is coming?"

"Listen to me, Aglaya," said the prince, "I do believe you are nervous lest I shall make a fool of myself tomorrow at your party?"

"Nervous about you?" Aglaya blushed. "Why should I be nervous about you? What would it matter to me if you were to make ever such a fool of yourself? How can you say such a thing? What do you mean by 'making a fool of yourself'? What a vulgar expression! I suppose you intend to talk in that sort of way tomorrow evening? Look up a few more such expressions in your dictionary; do, you'll make a grand effect! I'm sorry that you seem to be able to come into a room as gracefully as you do; where did you learn the art? Do you think you can drink a cup of tea decently, when you know everybody is looking at you, on purpose to see how you do it?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Can you? I'm sorry for it then, for I should have had a good laugh at you otherwise. Do break *something* at least, in the drawing-room! Upset the Chinese vase, won't you? It's a valuable one; *do* break it. Mamma values it, and she'll go out of her mind—it was a present. She'll cry before everyone, you'll see! Wave your hand about, you know, as you always do, and just smash it. Sit down near it on purpose."

"On the contrary, I shall sit as far from it as I can. Thanks for the hint."

"Ha, ha! Then you are afraid you *will* wave your arms about! I wouldn't mind betting that you'll talk about some lofty subject, something serious and learned. How delightful, how tactful that will be!"

"I should think it would be very foolish indeed, unless it happened to come in appropriately."

"Look here, once for all," cried Aglaya, boiling over, "if I hear you talking about capital punishment, or the economical condition of Russia, or about Beauty redeeming the world, or anything of that sort, I'll—well, of course I shall laugh and seem very pleased, but I warn you beforehand, don't look me in the face again! I'm serious now, mind, this time I *am really* serious." She certainly did say this very seriously, so much so, that she looked quite different from what she usually was, and the prince could not help noticing the fact. She did not seem to be joking in the slightest degree.

“Well, you’ve put me into such a fright that I shall certainly make a fool of myself, and very likely break something too. I wasn’t a bit alarmed before, but now I’m as nervous as can be.”

“Then don’t speak at all. Sit still and don’t talk.”

“Oh, I can’t do that, you know! I shall say something foolish out of pure ‘funk,’ and break something for the same excellent reason; I know I shall. Perhaps I shall slip and fall on the slippery floor; I’ve done that before now, you know. I shall dream of it all night now. Why did you say anything about it?”

Aglaya looked blackly at him.

“Do you know what, I had better not come at all tomorrow! I’ll plead sick-list and stay away,” said the prince, with decision.

Aglaya stamped her foot, and grew quite pale with anger.

“Oh, my goodness! Just listen to that! ‘Better not come,’ when the party is on purpose for him! Good Lord! What a delightful thing it is to have to do with such a—such a stupid as you are!”

“Well, I’ll come, I’ll come,” interrupted the prince, hastily, “and I’ll give you my word of honour that I will sit the whole evening and not say a word.”

“I believe that’s the best thing you can do. You said you’d ‘plead sick-list’ just now; where in the world do you get hold of such expressions? Why do you talk to me like this? Are you trying to irritate me, or what?”

“Forgive me, it’s a schoolboy expression. I won’t do it again. I know quite well, I see it, that you are anxious on my account (now, don’t be angry), and it makes me very happy to see it. You wouldn’t believe how frightened I am of misbehaving somehow, and how glad I am of your instructions. But all this panic is simply nonsense, you know, Aglaya! I give you my word it is; I am so pleased that you are such a child, such a dear good child. How *charming* you can be if you like, Aglaya.”

Aglaya wanted to be angry, of course, but suddenly some quite unexpected feeling seized upon her heart, all in a moment.

“And you won’t reproach me for all these rude words of mine—some day—afterwards?” she asked, of a sudden.

“What an idea! Of course not. And what are you blushing for again? And there comes that frown once more! You’ve taken to looking too gloomy sometimes, Aglaya, much more than you used to. I know why it is.”

“Be quiet, do be quiet!”

“No, no, I had much better speak out. I have long wished to say it, and *have* said it, but that’s not enough, for you didn’t believe me. Between us two there stands a being who—”

“Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet, be quiet!” Aglaya struck in, suddenly, seizing his hand in hers, and gazing at him almost in terror.

At this moment she was called by someone. She broke loose from him with an air of relief and ran away.

The prince was in a fever all night. It was strange, but he had suffered from fever for several nights in succession. On this particular night, while in semi-delirium, he had an idea: what if on the morrow he were to have a fit before everybody? The thought seemed to freeze his blood within him. All night he fancied himself in some extraordinary society of strange persons. The worst of it was that he was talking nonsense; he knew that he ought not to speak at all, and yet he talked the whole time; he seemed to be trying to persuade them all to something. Evgenie and Hippolyte were among the guests, and appeared to be great friends.

He awoke towards nine o’clock with a headache, full of confused ideas and strange impressions. For some reason or other he felt most anxious to see Rogojin, to see and talk to him, but what he wished to say he could not tell. Next, he determined to go and see Hippolyte. His mind was in a confused state, so much so that the incidents of the morning seemed to be imperfectly realized, though acutely felt.

One of these incidents was a visit from Lebedeff. Lebedeff came rather early—before ten—but he was tipsy already. Though the prince was not in an observant condition, yet he could not avoid seeing that for at least three days—ever since General Ivolgin had left the house Lebedeff had been behaving very badly. He looked untidy and dirty at all times of the day, and it was said that he had begun to rage about in his own house, and that his temper was very bad. As soon as he arrived this morning, he began to hold forth, beating his breast and apparently blaming himself for something.

“I’ve—I’ve had a reward for my meanness—I’ve had a slap in the face,” he concluded, tragically.

“A slap in the face? From whom? And so early in the morning?”

“Early?” said Lebedeff, sarcastically. “Time counts for nothing, even in physical chastisement; but my slap in the face was not physical, it was moral.”

He suddenly took a seat, very unceremoniously, and began his story. It was very disconnected; the prince frowned, and wished he could get away; but suddenly a few words struck him. He sat stiff with wonder—Lebedeff said some extraordinary things.

In the first place he began about some letter; the name of Aglaya Ivanovna came in. Then suddenly he broke off and began to accuse the prince of something; he was apparently offended with him. At first he declared that the prince had trusted him with his confidences as to “a certain person” (Nastasia Philipovna), but that of late his friendship had been thrust back into his bosom, and his innocent question as to “approaching family changes” had been curtly put aside, which Lebedeff declared, with tipsy tears, he could not bear; especially as he knew so much already both from Rogojin and Nastasia Philipovna and her friend, and from Varvara Ardalionovna, and even from Aglaya Ivanovna, through his daughter Vera. “And who told Lizabetha Prokofievna something in secret, by letter? Who told her all about the movements of a certain person called Nastasia Philipovna? Who was the anonymous person, eh? Tell me!”

“Surely not you?” cried the prince.

“Just so,” said Lebedeff, with dignity; “and only this very morning I have sent up a letter to the noble lady, stating that I have a matter of great importance to communicate. She received the letter; I know she got it; and she received *me*, too.”

“Have you just seen Lizabetha Prokofievna?” asked the prince, scarcely believing his ears.

“Yes, I saw her, and got the said slap in the face as mentioned. She chucked the letter back to me unopened, and kicked me out of the house, morally, not physically, although not far off it.”

“What letter do you mean she returned unopened?”

“What! didn’t I tell you? Ha, ha, ha! I thought I had. Why, I received a letter, you know, to be handed over—”

“From whom? To whom?”

But it was difficult, if not impossible, to extract anything from Lebedeff. All the prince could gather was, that the letter had been received very early, and had a request written on the outside that it might be sent on to the address given.

“Just as before, sir, just as before! To a certain person, and from a certain hand. The individual’s name who wrote the letter is to be represented by the letter A.—”

“What? Impossible! To Nastasia Philipovna? Nonsense!” cried the prince.

“It was, I assure you, and if not to her then to Rogojin, which is the same thing. Mr. Hippolyte has had letters, too, and all from the individual whose name begins with an A.,” smirked Lebedeff, with a hideous grin.

As he kept jumping from subject to subject, and forgetting what he had begun to talk about, the prince said nothing, but waited, to give him time.

It was all very vague. Who had taken the letters, if letters there were? Probably Vera—and how could Lebedeff have got them? In all probability, he had managed to steal the present letter from Vera, and had himself gone over to Lizabetha Prokofievna with some idea in his head. So the prince concluded at last.

“You are mad!” he cried, indignantly.

“Not quite, esteemed prince,” replied Lebedeff, with some acerbity. “I confess I thought of doing you the service of handing the letter over to yourself, but I decided that it would pay me better to deliver it up to the noble lady aforesaid, as I had informed her of everything hitherto by anonymous letters; so when I sent her up a note from myself, with the letter, you know, in order to fix a meeting for eight o’clock this morning, I signed it ‘your secret correspondent.’ They let me in at once—very quickly—by the back door, and the noble lady received me.”

“Well? Go on.”

“Oh, well, when I saw her she almost punched my head, as I say; in fact so nearly that one might almost say she did punch my head. She threw the letter in my face; she seemed to reflect first, as if she would have liked to keep it, but thought better of it and threw it in my face instead. ‘If anybody can have been such a fool as to trust a man like you to deliver the letter,’ says she, ‘take it and deliver it!’ Hey! she was grandly indignant. A fierce, fiery lady that, sir!”

“Where’s the letter now?”

“Oh, I’ve still got it, here!”

And he handed the prince the very letter from Aglaya to Gania, which the latter showed with so much triumph to his sister at a later hour.

“This letter cannot be allowed to remain in your hands.”

“It’s for you—for you! I’ve brought it you on purpose!” cried Lebedeff, excitedly. “Why, I’m yours again now, heart and hand, your slave; there was but a momentary pause in the flow of my love and esteem for you. Mea culpa, mea culpa! as the Pope of Rome says.”

“This letter should be sent on at once,” said the prince, disturbed. “I’ll hand it over myself.”

“Wouldn’t it be better, esteemed prince, wouldn’t it be better—to—don’t you know—”

Lebedeff made a strange and very expressive grimace; he twisted about in his chair, and did something, apparently symbolical, with his hands.

“What do you mean?” said the prince.

“Why, open it, for the time being, don’t you know?” he said, most confidentially and mysteriously.

The prince jumped up so furiously that Lebedeff ran towards the door; having gained which strategic position, however, he stopped and looked back to see if he might hope for pardon.

“Oh, Lebedeff, Lebedeff! Can a man really sink to such depths of meanness?” said the prince, sadly.

Lebedeff’s face brightened.

“Oh, I’m a mean wretch—a mean wretch!” he said, approaching the prince once more, and beating his breast, with tears in his eyes.

“It’s abominable dishonesty, you know!”

“Dishonesty—it is, it is! That’s the very word!”

“What in the world induces you to act so? You are nothing but a spy. Why did you write anonymously to worry so noble and generous a lady? Why should not Aglaya Ivanovna write a note to whomever she pleases? What did you mean to complain of today? What did you expect to get by it? What made you go at all?”

“Pure amiable curiosity,—I assure you—desire to do a service. That’s all. Now I’m entirely yours again, your slave; hang me if you like!”

“Did you go before Lizabetha Prokofievna in your present condition?” inquired the prince.

“No—oh no, fresher—more the correct card. I only became this like after the humiliation I suffered there.”

“Well—that’ll do; now leave me.”

This injunction had to be repeated several times before the man could be persuaded to move. Even then he turned back at the door, came as far as the middle of the room, and there went through his mysterious motions designed to convey the suggestion that the prince should open the letter. He did not dare put his suggestion into words again.

After this performance, he smiled sweetly and left the room on tiptoe.

All this had been very painful to listen to. One fact stood out certain and clear, and that was that poor Aglaya must be in a state of great distress and indecision and mental torment (“from jealousy,” the prince whispered to himself). Undoubtedly in this inexperienced, but hot and proud little head, there were all sorts of plans forming, wild and impossible plans, maybe; and the idea of this so frightened the prince that he could not make up his mind what to do. Something must be done, that was clear.

He looked at the address on the letter once more. Oh, he was not in the least degree alarmed about Aglaya writing such a letter; he could trust her. What he did not like about it was that he could not trust Gania.

However, he made up his mind that he would himself take the note and deliver it. Indeed, he went so far as to leave the house and walk up the road, but changed his mind when he had nearly reached Ptitsin’s door. However, he there luckily met Colia, and commissioned him to deliver the letter to his brother as if direct from Aglaya. Colia asked no questions but simply delivered it, and Gania consequently had no suspicion that it had passed through so many hands.

Arrived home again, the prince sent for Vera Lebedeff and told her as much as was necessary, in order to relieve her mind, for she had been in a dreadful state of anxiety since she had missed the letter. She heard with horror that her father had taken it. Muishkin learned from her that she had on several occasions performed secret missions both for Aglaya and for Rogojin, without, however, having had the slightest idea that in so doing she might injure the prince in any way.

The latter, with one thing and another, was now so disturbed and confused, that when, a couple of hours or so later, a message came from Colia that the general was ill, he could hardly take the news in.

However, when he did master the fact, it acted upon him as a tonic by completely distracting his attention. He went at once to Nina Alexandrovna's, whither the general had been carried, and stayed there until the evening. He could do no good, but there are people whom to have near one is a blessing at such times. Colia was in an almost hysterical state; he cried continuously, but was running about all day, all the same; fetching doctors, of whom he collected three; going to the chemist's, and so on.

The general was brought round to some extent, but the doctors declared that he could not be said to be out of danger. Varia and Nina Alexandrovna never left the sick man's bedside; Gania was excited and distressed, but would not go upstairs, and seemed afraid to look at the patient. He wrung his hands when the prince spoke to him, and said that "such a misfortune at such a moment" was terrible.

The prince thought he knew what Gania meant by "such a moment."

Hippolyte was not in the house. Lebedeff turned up late in the afternoon; he had been asleep ever since his interview with the prince in the morning. He was quite sober now, and cried with real sincerity over the sick general—mourning for him as though he were his own brother. He blamed himself aloud, but did not explain why. He repeated over and over again to Nina Alexandrovna that he alone was to blame—no one else—but that he had acted out of "pure amiable curiosity," and that "the deceased," as he insisted upon calling the still living general, had been the greatest of geniuses.

He laid much stress on the genius of the sufferer, as if this idea must be one of immense solace in the present crisis.

Nina Alexandrovna—seeing his sincerity of feeling—said at last, and without the faintest suspicion of reproach in her voice: "Come, come—don't cry! God will forgive you!"

Lebedeff was so impressed by these words, and the tone in which they were spoken, that he could not leave Nina Alexandrovna all the evening—in fact, for several days. Till the general's death, indeed, he spent almost all his time at his side.

Twice during the day a messenger came to Nina Alexandrovna from the Epanchins to inquire after the invalid.

When—late in the evening—the prince made his appearance in Lizabetha Prokofievna's drawing-room, he found it full of guests. Mrs. Epanchin questioned him very fully about the general as soon as he appeared; and when old Princess

Bielokonski wished to know “who this general was, and who was Nina Alexandrovna,” she proceeded to explain in a manner which pleased the prince very much.

He himself, when relating the circumstances of the general’s illness to Lizabetha Prokofievna, “spoke beautifully,” as Aglaya’s sisters declared afterwards—“modestly, quietly, without gestures or too many words, and with great dignity.” He had entered the room with propriety and grace, and he was perfectly dressed; he not only did not “fall down on the slippery floor,” as he had expressed it, but evidently made a very favourable impression upon the assembled guests.

As for his own impression on entering the room and taking his seat, he instantly remarked that the company was not in the least such as Aglaya’s words had led him to fear, and as he had dreamed of—in nightmare form—all night.

This was the first time in his life that he had seen a little corner of what was generally known by the terrible name of “society.” He had long thirsted, for reasons of his own, to penetrate the mysteries of the magic circle, and, therefore, this assemblage was of the greatest possible interest to him.

His first impression was one of fascination. Somehow or other he felt that all these people must have been born on purpose to be together! It seemed to him that the Epanchins were not having a party at all; that these people must have been here always, and that he himself was one of them—returned among them after a long absence, but one of them, naturally and indisputably.

It never struck him that all this refined simplicity and nobility and wit and personal dignity might possibly be no more than an exquisite artistic polish. The majority of the guests—who were somewhat empty-headed, after all, in spite of their aristocratic bearing—never guessed, in their self-satisfied composure, that much of their superiority was mere veneer, which indeed they had adopted unconsciously and by inheritance.

The prince would never so much as suspect such a thing in the delight of his first impression.

He saw, for instance, that one important dignitary, old enough to be his grandfather, broke off his own conversation in order to listen to *him*—a young and inexperienced man; and not only listened, but seemed to attach value to his opinion, and was kind and amiable, and yet they were strangers and had never seen each other before. Perhaps what most appealed to the prince’s impressionability was the refinement of the old man’s courtesy towards him. Perhaps the soil of his susceptible nature was really predisposed to receive a pleasant impression.

Meanwhile all these people—though friends of the family and of each other to a certain extent—were very far from being such intimate friends of the family and of each other as the prince concluded. There were some present who never would think of considering the Epanchins their equals. There were even some who hated one another cordially. For instance, old Princess Bielokonski had all her life despised the wife of the "dignitary," while the latter was very far from loving Lizabetha Prokofievna. The dignitary himself had been General Epanchin's protector from his youth up; and the general considered him so majestic a personage that he would have felt a hearty contempt for himself if he had even for one moment allowed himself to pose as the great man's equal, or to think of him—in his fear and reverence—as anything less than an Olympic God! There were others present who had not met for years, and who had no feeling whatever for each other, unless it were dislike; and yet they met tonight as though they had seen each other but yesterday in some friendly and intimate assembly of kindred spirits.

It was not a large party, however. Besides Princess Bielokonski and the old dignitary (who was really a great man) and his wife, there was an old military general—a count or baron with a German name, a man reputed to possess great knowledge and administrative ability. He was one of those Olympian administrators who know everything except Russia, pronounce a word of extraordinary wisdom, admired by all, about once in five years, and, after being an eternity in the service, generally die full of honour and riches, though they have never done anything great, and have even been hostile to all greatness. This general was Ivan Fedorovitch's immediate superior in the service; and it pleased the latter to look upon him also as a patron. On the other hand, the great man did not at all consider himself Epanchin's patron. He was always very cool to him, while taking advantage of his ready services, and would instantly have put another in his place if there had been the slightest reason for the change.

Another guest was an elderly, important-looking gentleman, a distant relative of Lizabetha Prokofievna's. This gentleman was rich, held a good position, was a great talker, and had the reputation of being "one of the dissatisfied," though not belonging to the dangerous sections of that class. He had the manners, to some extent, of the English aristocracy, and some of their tastes (especially in the matter of under-done roast beef, harness, men-servants, etc.). He was a great friend of the dignitary's, and Lizabetha Prokofievna, for some reason or other, had got hold of the idea that this worthy intended at no distant date to offer the advantages of his hand and heart to Alexandra.

Besides the elevated and more solid individuals enumerated, there were present a few younger though not less elegant guests. Besides Prince S. and Evgenie Pavlovitch, we

must name the eminent and fascinating Prince N.—once the vanquisher of female hearts all over Europe. This gentleman was no longer in the first bloom of youth—he was forty-five, but still very handsome. He was well off, and lived, as a rule, abroad, and was noted as a good teller of stories. Then came a few guests belonging to a lower stratum of society—people who, like the Epanchins themselves, moved only occasionally in this exalted sphere. The Epanchins liked to draft among their more elevated guests a few picked representatives of this lower stratum, and Lizabetha Prokofievna received much praise for this practice, which proved, her friends said, that she was a woman of tact. The Epanchins prided themselves upon the good opinion people held of them.

One of the representatives of the middle-class present today was a colonel of engineers, a very serious man and a great friend of Prince S., who had introduced him to the Epanchins. He was extremely silent in society, and displayed on the forefinger of his right hand a large ring, probably bestowed upon him for services of some sort. There was also a poet, German by name, but a Russian poet; very presentable, and even handsome—the sort of man one could bring into society with impunity. This gentleman belonged to a German family of decidedly bourgeois origin, but he had a knack of acquiring the patronage of "big-wigs," and of retaining their favour. He had translated some great German poem into Russian verse, and claimed to have been a friend of a famous Russian poet, since dead. (It is strange how great a multitude of literary people there are who have had the advantages of friendship with some great man of their own profession who is, unfortunately, dead.) The dignitary's wife had introduced this worthy to the Epanchins. This lady posed as the patroness of literary people, and she certainly had succeeded in obtaining pensions for a few of them, thanks to her influence with those in authority on such matters. She was a lady of weight in her own way. Her age was about forty-five, so that she was a very young wife for such an elderly husband as the dignitary. She had been a beauty in her day and still loved, as many ladies of forty-five do love, to dress a little too smartly. Her intellect was nothing to boast of, and her literary knowledge very doubtful. Literary patronage was, however, with her as much a mania as was the love of gorgeous clothes. Many books and translations were dedicated to her by her proteges, and a few of these talented individuals had published some of their own letters to her, upon very weighty subjects.

This, then, was the society that the prince accepted at once as true coin, as pure gold without alloy.

It so happened, however, that on this particular evening all these good people were in excellent humour and highly pleased with themselves. Every one of them felt that they

were doing the Epanchins the greatest possible honour by their presence. But alas! the prince never suspected any such subtleties! For instance, he had no suspicion of the fact that the Epanchins, having in their mind so important a step as the marriage of their daughter, would never think of presuming to take it without having previously "shown off" the proposed husband to the dignitary—the recognized patron of the family. The latter, too, though he would probably have received news of a great disaster to the Epanchin family with perfect composure, would nevertheless have considered it a personal offence if they had dared to marry their daughter without his advice, or we might almost say, his leave.

The amiable and undoubtedly witty Prince N. could not but feel that he was as a sun, risen for one night only to shine upon the Epanchin drawing-room. He accounted them immeasurably his inferiors, and it was this feeling which caused his special amiability and delightful ease and grace towards them. He knew very well that he must tell some story this evening for the edification of the company, and led up to it with the inspiration of anticipatory triumph.

The prince, when he heard the story afterwards, felt that he had never yet come across so wonderful a humorist, or such remarkable brilliancy as was shown by this man; and yet if he had only known it, this story was the oldest, stalest, and most worn-out yarn, and every drawing-room in town was sick to death of it. It was only in the innocent Epanchin household that it passed for a new and brilliant tale—as a sudden and striking reminiscence of a splendid and talented man.

Even the German poet, though as amiable as possible, felt that he was doing the house the greatest of honours by his presence in it.

But the prince only looked at the bright side; he did not turn the coat and see the shabby lining.

Aglaya had not foreseen that particular calamity. She herself looked wonderfully beautiful this evening. All three sisters were dressed very tastefully, and their hair was done with special care.

Aglaya sat next to Evgenie Pavlovitch, and laughed and talked to him with an unusual display of friendliness. Evgenie himself behaved rather more sedately than usual, probably out of respect to the dignitary. Evgenie had been known in society for a long while. He had appeared at the Epanchins' today with crape on his hat, and Princess Bielokonski had commended this action on his part. Not every society man would have worn crape for "such an uncle." Lizabetha Prokofievna had liked it also, but was

too preoccupied to take much notice. The prince remarked that Aglaya looked attentively at him two or three times, and seemed to be satisfied with his behaviour.

Little by little he became very happy indeed. All his late anxieties and apprehensions (after his conversation with Lebedeff) now appeared like so many bad dreams—impossible, and even laughable.

He did not speak much, only answering such questions as were put to him, and gradually settled down into unbroken silence, listening to what went on, and steeped in perfect satisfaction and contentment.

Little by little a sort of inspiration, however, began to stir within him, ready to spring into life at the right moment. When he did begin to speak, it was accidentally, in response to a question, and apparently without any special object.