VII

This “next day,” the very Sunday which was to decide Stepan Trofimovitch’s fate irrevocably, was one of the most memorable days in my chronicle. It was a day of surprises, a day that solved past riddles and suggested new ones, a day of startling revelations, and still more hopeless perplexity. In the morning, as the reader is already aware, I had by Varvara Petrovna’s particular request to accompany my friend on his visit to her, and at three o’clock in the afternoon I had to be with Lizaveta Nikolaevna in order to tell her—I did not know what—and to assist her—I did not know how. And meanwhile it all ended as no one could have expected. In a word, it was a day of wonderful coincidences.

To begin with, when Stepan Trofimovitch and I arrived at Varvara Petrovna’s at twelve o’clock punctually, the time she had fixed, we did not find her at home; she had not yet come back from church. My poor friend was so disposed, or, more accurately speaking, so indisposed that this circumstance crushed him at once; he sank almost helpless into an arm-chair in the drawing-room. I suggested a glass of water; but in spite of his pallor and the trembling of his hands, he refused it with dignity. His get-up for the occasion was, by the way, extremely recherché: a shirt of batiste and embroidered, almost fit for a ball, a white tie, a new hat in his hand, new straw-coloured gloves, and even a suspicion of scent. We had hardly sat down when Shatov was shown in by the butler, obviously also by official invitation. Stepan Trofimovitch was rising to shake hands with him, but Shatov, after looking attentively at us both, turned away into a corner, and sat down there without even nodding to us. Stepan Trofimovitch looked at me in dismay again.

We sat like this for some minutes longer in complete silence. Stepan Trofimovitch suddenly began whispering something to me very quickly, but I could not catch it; and indeed, he was so agitated himself that he broke off without finishing. The butler came in once more, ostensibly to set something straight on the table, more probably to take a look at us.

Shatov suddenly addressed him with a loud question:

“Alexey Yegorytch, do you know whether Darya Pavlovna has gone with her?”

“Varvara Petrovna was pleased to drive to the cathedral alone, and Darya Pavlovna was pleased to remain in her room upstairs, being indisposed,” Alexey Yegorytch announced formally and reprovingly.

My poor friend again stole a hurried and agitated glance at me, so that at last I turned away from him. Suddenly a carriage rumbled at the entrance, and some commotion at

a distance in the house made us aware of the lady's return. We all leapt up from our easy chairs, but again a surprise awaited us; we heard the noise of many footsteps, so our hostess must have returned not alone, and this certainly was rather strange, since she had fixed that time herself. Finally, we heard some one come in with strange rapidity as though running, in a way that Varvara Petrovna could not have come in. And, all at once she almost flew into the room, panting and extremely agitated. After her a little later and much more quickly Lizaveta Nikolaevna came in, and with her, hand in hand, Marya Timofyevna Lebyadkin! If I had seen this in my dreams, even then I should not have believed it.

To explain their utterly unexpected appearance, I must go back an hour and describe more in detail an extraordinary adventure which had befallen Varvara Petrovna in church.

In the first place almost the whole town, that is, of course, all of the upper stratum of society, were assembled in the cathedral. It was known that the governor's wife was to make her appearance there for the first time since her arrival amongst us. I must mention that there were already rumours that she was a free-thinker, and a follower of "the new principles." All the ladies were also aware that she would be dressed with magnificence and extraordinary elegance. And so the costumes of our ladies were elaborate and gorgeous for the occasion.

Only Varvara Petrovna was modestly dressed in black as she always was, and had been for the last four years. She had taken her usual place in church in the first row on the left, and a footman in livery had put down a velvet cushion for her to kneel on; everything in fact, had been as usual. But it was noticed, too, that all through the service she prayed with extreme fervour. It was even asserted afterwards when people recalled it, that she had had tears in her eyes. The service was over at last, and our chief priest, Father Pavel, came out to deliver a solemn sermon. We liked his sermons and thought very highly of them. We used even to try to persuade him to print them, but he never could make up his mind to. On this occasion the sermon was a particularly long one.

And behold, during the sermon a lady drove up to the church in an old fashioned hired droshky, that is, one in which the lady could only sit sideways, holding on to the driver's sash, shaking at every jolt like a blade of grass in the breeze. Such droshkys are still to be seen in our town. Stopping at the corner of the cathedral—for there were a number of carriages, and mounted police too, at the gates—the lady sprang out of the droshky and handed the driver four kopecks in silver.

“Isn’t it enough, Vanya?” she cried, seeing his grimace. “It’s all I’ve got,” she added plaintively.

“Well, there, bless you. I took you without fixing the price,” said the driver with a hopeless gesture, and looking at her he added as though reflecting:

“And it would be a sin to take advantage of you too.”

Then, thrusting his leather purse into his bosom, he touched up his horse and drove off, followed by the jeers of the drivers standing near. Jeers, and wonder too, followed the lady as she made her way to the cathedral gates, between the carriages and the footmen waiting for their masters to come out. And indeed, there certainly was something extraordinary and surprising to every one in such a person’s suddenly appearing in the street among people. She was painfully thin and she limped, she was heavily powdered and rouged; her long neck was quite bare, she had neither kerchief nor pelisse; she had nothing on but an old dark dress in spite of the cold and windy, though bright, September day. She was bareheaded, and her hair was twisted up into a tiny knot, and on the right side of it was stuck an artificial rose, such as are used to dedicate cherubs sold in Palm week. I had noticed just such a one with a wreath of paper roses in a corner under the ikons when I was at Marya Timofyevna’s the day before. To put a finishing-touch to it, though the lady walked with modestly downcast eyes there was a sly and merry smile on her face. If she had lingered a moment longer, she would perhaps not have been allowed to enter the cathedral. But she succeeded in slipping by, and entering the building, gradually pressed forward.

Though it was half-way through the sermon, and the dense crowd that filled the cathedral was listening to it with absorbed and silent attention, yet several pairs of eyes glanced with curiosity and amazement at the new-comer. She sank on to the floor, bowed her painted face down to it, lay there a long time, unmistakably weeping; but raising her head again and getting up from her knees, she soon recovered, and was diverted. Gaily and with evident and intense enjoyment she let her eyes rove over the faces, and over the walls of the cathedral. She looked with particular curiosity at some of the ladies, even standing on tip-toe to look at them, and even laughed once or twice, giggling strangely. But the sermon was over, and they brought out the cross. The governor’s wife was the first to go up to the cross, but she stopped short two steps from it, evidently wishing to make way for Varvara Petrovna, who, on her side, moved towards it quite directly as though she noticed no one in front of her. There was an obvious and, in its way, clever malice implied in this extraordinary act of deference on the part of the governor’s wife; every one felt this; Varvara Petrovna must have felt it too; but she went on as before, apparently noticing no one, and with the same

unfaltering air of dignity kissed the cross, and at once turned to leave the cathedral. A footman in livery cleared the way for her, though every one stepped back spontaneously to let her pass. But just as she was going out, in the porch the closely packed mass of people blocked the way for a moment. Varvara Petrovna stood still, and suddenly a strange, extraordinary creature, the woman with the paper rose on her head, squeezed through the people, and fell on her knees before her. Varvara Petrovna, who was not easily disconcerted, especially in public, looked at her sternly and with dignity.

I hasten to observe here, as briefly as possible, that though Varvara Petrovna had become, it was said, excessively careful and even stingy, yet sometimes she was not sparing of money, especially for benevolent objects. She was a member of a charitable society in the capital. In the last famine year she had sent five hundred roubles to the chief committee for the relief of the sufferers, and people talked of it in the town. Moreover, just before the appointment of the new governor, she had been on the very point of founding a local committee of ladies to assist the poorest mothers in the town and in the province. She was severely censured among us for ambition; but Varvara Petrovna's well-known strenuousness and, at the same time, her persistence nearly triumphed over all obstacles. The society was almost formed, and the original idea embraced a wider and wider scope in the enthusiastic mind of the foundress. She was already dreaming of founding a similar society in Moscow, and the gradual expansion of its influence over all the provinces of Russia. And now, with the sudden change of governor, everything was at a standstill; and the new governor's wife had, it was said, already uttered in society some biting, and, what was worse, apt and sensible remarks about the impracticability of the fundamental idea of such a committee, which was, with additions of course, repeated to Varvara Petrovna. God alone knows the secrets of men's hearts; but I imagine that Varvara Petrovna stood still now at the very cathedral gates positively with a certain pleasure, knowing that the governor's wife and, after her, all the congregation, would have to pass by immediately, and "let her see for herself how little I care what she thinks, and what pointed things she says about the vanity of my benevolence. So much for all of you!"

"What is it my dear? What are you asking?" said Varvara Petrovna, looking more attentively at the kneeling woman before her, who gazed at her with a fearfully panic-stricken, shame-faced, but almost reverent expression, and suddenly broke into the same strange giggle.

"What does she want? Who is she?"

Varvara Petrovna bent an imperious and inquiring gaze on all around her. Every one was silent.

“You are unhappy? You are in need of help?”

“I am in need.... I have come ...” faltered the “unhappy” creature, in a voice broken with emotion. “I have come only to kiss your hand....”

Again she giggled. With the childish look with which little children caress someone, begging for a favour, she stretched forward to seize Varvara Petrovna’s hand, but, as though panic-stricken, drew her hands back.

“Is that all you have come for?” said Varvara Petrovna, with a compassionate smile; but at once she drew her mother-of-pearl purse out of her pocket, took out a ten-rouble note and gave it to the unknown. The latter took it. Varvara Petrovna was much interested and evidently did not look upon her as an ordinary low-class beggar.

“I say, she gave her ten roubles!” someone said in the crowd.

“Let me kiss your hand,” faltered the unknown, holding tight in the fingers of her left hand the corner of the ten-rouble note, which fluttered in the draught. Varvara Petrovna frowned slightly, and with a serious, almost severe, face held out her hand. The cripple kissed it with reverence. Her grateful eyes shone with positive ecstasy. At that moment the governor’s wife came up, and a whole crowd of ladies and high officials flocked after her. The governor’s wife was forced to stand still for a moment in the crush; many people stopped.

“You are trembling. Are you cold?” Varvara Petrovna observed suddenly, and flinging off her pelisse which a footman caught in mid-air, she took from her own shoulders a very expensive black shawl, and with her own hands wrapped it round the bare neck of the still kneeling woman.

“But get up, get up from your knees I beg you!”

The woman got up.

“Where do you live? Is it possible no one knows where she lives?” Varvara Petrovna glanced round impatiently again. But the crowd was different now: she saw only the faces of acquaintances, people in society, surveying the scene, some with severe astonishment, others with sly curiosity and at the same time guileless eagerness for a sensation, while others positively laughed.

“I believe her name’s Lebyadkin,” a good-natured person volunteered at last in answer to Varvara Petrovna. It was our respectable and respected merchant Andreev, a man

in spectacles with a grey beard, wearing Russian dress and holding a high round hat in his hands. “They live in the Filipovs’ house in Bogoyavlensky Street.”

“Lebyadkin? Filipovs’ house? I have heard something.... Thank you, Nikon Semyonitch. But who is this Lebyadkin?”

“He calls himself a captain, a man, it must be said, not over careful in his behaviour. And no doubt this is his sister. She must have escaped from under control,” Nikon Semyonitch went on, dropping his voice, and glancing significantly at Varvara Petrovna.

“I understand. Thank you, Nikon Semyonitch. Your name is Mlle. Lebyadkin?”

“No, my name’s not Lebyadkin.”

“Then perhaps your brother’s name is Lebyadkin?”

“My brother’s name is Lebyadkin.”

“This is what I’ll do, I’ll take you with me now, my dear, and you shall be driven from me to your family. Would you like to go with me?”

“Ach, I should!” cried Mlle. Lebyadkin, clasping her hands.

“Auntie, auntie, take me with you too!” the voice of Lizaveta Nikolaevna cried suddenly.

I must observe that Lizaveta Nikolaevna had come to the cathedral with the governor’s wife, while Praskovya Ivanovna had by the doctor’s orders gone for a drive in her carriage, taking Mavriky Nikolaevitch to entertain her. Liza suddenly left the governor’s wife and ran up to Varvara Petrovna.

“My dear, you know I’m always glad to have you, but what will your mother say?” Varvara Petrovna began majestically, but she became suddenly confused, noticing Liza’s extraordinary agitation.

“Auntie, auntie, I must come with you!” Liza implored, kissing Varvara Petrovna.

“Mais qu’avez vous donc, Lise?” the governor’s wife asked with expressive wonder.

“Ah, forgive me, darling, *chère cousine,* I’m going to auntie’s.”

Liza turned in passing to her unpleasantly surprised *chère cousine*, and kissed her twice.

“And tell maman to follow me to auntie’s directly; maman meant, fully meant to come and see you, she said so this morning herself, I forgot to tell you,” Liza pattered on. “I beg your pardon, don’t be angry, *Julie, chère … cousine*.… Auntie, I’m ready!”

“If you don’t take me with you, auntie, I’ll run after your carriage, screaming,” she whispered rapidly and despairingly in Varvara Petrovna’s ear; it was lucky that no one heard. Varvara Petrovna positively staggered back, and bent her penetrating gaze on the mad girl. That gaze settled everything. She made up her mind to take Liza with her.

“We must put an end to this!” broke from her lips. “Very well, I’ll take you with pleasure, Liza,” she added aloud, “if Yulia Mihailovna is willing to let you come, of course.” With a candid air and straightforward dignity she addressed the governor’s wife directly.

“Oh, certainly, I don’t want to deprive her of such a pleasure especially as I am myself …” Yulia Mihailovna lisped with amazing affability—“I myself … know well what a fantastic, wilful little head it is!” Yulia Mihailovna gave a charming smile.

“I thank you extremely,” said Varvara Petrovna, with a courteous and dignified bow.

“And I am the more gratified,” Yulia Mihailovna went on, lisping almost rapturously, flushing all over with agreeable excitement, “that, apart from the pleasure of being with you Liza should be carried away by such an excellent, I may say lofty, feeling … of compassion …” (she glanced at the “unhappy creature”) “and … and at the very portal of the temple….”

“Such a feeling does you honour,” Varvara Petrovna approved magnificently. Yulia Mihailovna impulsively held out her hand and Varvara Petrovna with perfect readiness touched it with her fingers. The general effect was excellent, the faces of some of those present beamed with pleasure, some bland and insinuating smiles were to be seen.

In short it was made manifest to every one in the town that it was not Yulia Mihailovna who had up till now neglected Varvara Petrovna in not calling upon her, but on the contrary that Varvara Petrovna had “kept Yulia Mihailovna within bounds at a distance, while the latter would have hastened to pay her a visit, going on foot perhaps if necessary, had she been fully assured that Varvara Petrovna would not turn her away.” And Varvara Petrovna’s prestige was enormously increased.

“Get in, my dear.” Varvara Petrovna motioned Mlle. Lebyadkin towards the carriage which had driven up.

The “unhappy creature” hurried gleefully to the carriage door, and there the footman lifted her in.

“What! You’re lame!” cried Varvara Petrovna, seeming quite alarmed, and she turned pale. (Every one noticed it at the time, but did not understand it.)

The carriage rolled away. Varvara Petrovna’s house was very near the cathedral. Liza told me afterwards that Miss Lebyadkin laughed hysterically for the three minutes that the drive lasted, while Varvara Petrovna sat “as though in a mesmeric sleep.” Liza’s own expression.

CHAPTER V. THE SUBTLE SERPENT

I

VARVARA PETROVNA rang the bell and threw herself into an easy chair by the window.

“Sit here, my dear.” She motioned Marya Timofyevna to a seat in the middle of the room, by a large round table. “Stepan Trofimovitch, what is the meaning of this? See, see, look at this woman, what is the meaning of it?”

“I ... I ...” faltered Stepan Trofimovitch.

But a footman came in.

“A cup of coffee at once, we must have it as quickly as possible! Keep the horses!”

“Mais, chère et excellente amie, dans quelle inquiétude ...” Stepan Trofimovitch exclaimed in a dying voice.

“Ach! French! French! I can see at once that it’s the highest society,” cried Marya Timofyevna, clapping her hands, ecstatically preparing herself to listen to a conversation in French. Varvara Petrovna stared at her almost in dismay.

We all sat in silence, waiting to see how it would end. Shatov did not lift up his head, and Stepan Trofimovitch was overwhelmed with confusion as though it were all his fault; the perspiration stood out on his temples. I glanced at Liza (she was sitting in the corner almost beside Shatov). Her eyes darted keenly from Varvara Petrovna to the cripple and back again; her lips were drawn into a smile, but not a pleasant one. Varvara Petrovna saw that smile. Meanwhile Marya Timofyevna was absolutely transported. With evident enjoyment and without a trace of embarrassment she

stared at Varvara Petrovna's beautiful drawing-room—the furniture, the carpets, the pictures on the walls, the old-fashioned painted ceiling, the great bronze crucifix in the corner, the china lamp, the albums, the objects on the table.

"And you're here, too, Shatushka!" she cried suddenly. "Only fancy, I saw you a long time ago, but I thought it couldn't be you! How could you come here!" And she laughed gaily.

"You know this woman?" said Varvara Petrovna, turning to him at once.

"I know her," muttered Shatov. He seemed about to move from his chair, but remained sitting.

"What do you know of her? Make haste, please!"

"Oh, well ..." he stammered with an incongruous smile. "You see for yourself...."

"What do I see? Come now, say something!"

"She lives in the same house as I do ... with her brother ... an officer."

"Well?"

Shatov stammered again.

"It's not worth talking about ..." he muttered, and relapsed into determined silence. He positively flushed with determination.

"Of course one can expect nothing else from you," said Varvara Petrovna indignantly. It was clear to her now that they all knew something and, at the same time, that they were all scared, that they were evading her questions, and anxious to keep something from her.

The footman came in and brought her, on a little silver tray, the cup of coffee she had so specially ordered, but at a sign from her moved with it at once towards Marya Timofyevna.

"You were very cold just now, my dear; make haste and drink it and get warm."

"Merci."

Marya Timofyevna took the cup and at once went off into a giggle at having said *merci* to the footman. But meeting Varvara Petrovna's reproving eyes, she was overcome with shyness and put the cup on the table.

"Auntie, surely you're not angry?" she faltered with a sort of flippant playfulness.

“Wh-a-a-t?” Varvara Petrovna started, and drew herself up in her chair. “I’m not your aunt. What are you thinking of?”

Marya Timofyevna, not expecting such an angry outburst, began trembling all over in little convulsive shudders, as though she were in a fit, and sank back in her chair.

“I … I … thought that was the proper way,” she faltered, gazing open-eyed at Varvara Petrovna. “Liza called you that.”

“What Liza?”

“Why, this young lady here,” said Marya Timofyevna, pointing with her finger.

“So she’s Liza already?”

“You called her that yourself just now,” said Marya Timofyevna growing a little bolder. “And I dreamed of a beauty like that,” she added, laughing, as it were accidentally.

Varvara Petrovna reflected, and grew calmer, she even smiled faintly at Marya Timofyevna’s last words; the latter, catching her smile, got up from her chair, and limping, went timidly towards her.

“Take it. I forgot to give it back. Don’t be angry with my rudeness.”

She took from her shoulders the black shawl that Varvara Petrovna had wrapped round her.

“Put it on again at once, and you can keep it always. Go and sit down, drink your coffee, and please don’t be afraid of me, my dear, don’t worry yourself. I am beginning to understand you.”

“Chère amie …” Stepan Trofimovitch ventured again.

“Ach, Stepan Trofimovitch, it’s bewildering enough without you. You might at least spare me…. Please ring that bell there, near you, to the maid’s room.”

A silence followed. Her eyes strayed irritably and suspiciously over all our faces. Agasha, her favourite maid, came in.

“Bring me my check shawl, the one I bought in Geneva. What’s Darya Pavlovna doing?”

“She’s not very well, madam.”

“Go and ask her to come here. Say that I want her particularly, even if she’s not well.”

At that instant there was again, as before, an unusual noise of steps and voices in the next room, and suddenly Praskovya Ivanovna, panting and “distracted,” appeared in the doorway. She was leaning on the arm of Mavriky Nikolaevitch.

“Ach, heavens, I could scarcely drag myself here. Liza, you mad girl, how you treat your mother!” she squeaked, concentrating in that squeak, as weak and irritable people are wont to do, all her accumulated irritability. “Varvara Petrovna, I’ve come for my daughter!”

Varvara Petrovna looked at her from under her brows, half rose to meet her, and scarcely concealing her vexation brought out: “Good morning, Praskovya Ivanovna, please be seated, I knew you would come!”

II

There could be nothing surprising to Praskovya Ivanovna in such a reception. Varvara Petrovna had from childhood upwards treated her old school friend tyrannically, and under a show of friendship almost contemptuously. And this was an exceptional occasion too. During the last few days there had almost been a complete rupture between the two households, as I have mentioned incidentally already. The reason of this rupture was still a mystery to Varvara Petrovna, which made it all the more offensive; but the chief cause of offence was that Praskovya Ivanovna had succeeded in taking up an extraordinarily supercilious attitude towards Varvara Petrovna. Varvara Petrovna was wounded of course, and meanwhile some strange rumours had reached her which also irritated her extremely, especially by their vagueness. Varvara Petrovna was of a direct and proudly frank character, somewhat slap-dash in her methods, indeed, if the expression is permissible. There was nothing she detested so much as secret and mysterious insinuations, she always preferred war in the open. Anyway, the two ladies had not met for five days. The last visit had been paid by Varvara Petrovna, who had come back from “that Drozdov woman” offended and perplexed. I can say with certainty that Praskovya Ivanovna had come on this occasion with the naïve conviction that Varvara Petrovna would, for some reason, be sure to stand in awe of her. This was evident from the very expression of her face. Evidently too, Varvara Petrovna was always possessed by a demon of haughty pride whenever she had the least ground for suspecting that she was for some reason supposed to be humiliated. Like many weak people, who for a long time allow themselves to be insulted without resenting it, Praskovya Ivanovna showed an extraordinary violence in her attack at the first favourable opportunity. It is true that she was not well, and always became more irritable in illness. I must add finally, that our presence in the drawing-room could hardly be much check to the two ladies who had been friends from childhood, if a

quarrel had broken out between them. We were looked upon as friends of the family, and almost as their subjects. I made that reflection with some alarm at the time. Stepan Trofimovitch, who had not sat down since the entrance of Varvara Petrovna, sank helplessly into an arm-chair on hearing Praskovya Ivanovna's squeal, and tried to catch my eye with a look of despair. Shatov turned sharply in his chair, and growled something to himself. I believe he meant to get up and go away. Liza rose from her chair but sank back again at once without even paying befitting attention to her mother's squeal—not from "waywardness," but obviously because she was entirely absorbed by some other overwhelming impression. She was looking absent-mindedly into the air, no longer noticing even Marya Timofyevna.

III

"Ach, here!" Praskovya Ivanovna indicated an easy chair near the table and sank heavily into it with the assistance of Mavriky Nikolaevitch. "I wouldn't have sat down in your house, my lady, if it weren't for my legs," she added in a breaking voice.

Varvara Petrovna raised her head a little, and with an expression of suffering pressed the fingers of her right hand to her right temple, evidently in acute pain *(tic douloureux)*.

"Why so, Praskovya Ivanovna; why wouldn't you sit down in my house? I possessed your late husband's sincere friendship all his life; and you and I used to play with our dolls at school together as girls."

Praskovya Ivanovna waved her hands.

"I knew that was coming! You always begin about the school when you want to reproach me—that's your way. But to my thinking that's only fine talk. I can't stand the school you're always talking about."

"You've come in rather a bad temper, I'm afraid; how are your legs? Here they're bringing you some coffee, please have some, drink it and don't be cross."

"Varvara Petrovna, you treat me as though I were a child. I won't have any coffee, so there!"

And she pettishly waved away the footman who was bringing her coffee. (All the others refused coffee too except Mavriky Nikolaevitch and me. Stepan Trofimovitch took it, but put it aside on the table. Though Marya Timofyevna was very eager to have another cup and even put out her hand to take it, on second thoughts she refused it ceremoniously, and was obviously pleased with herself for doing so.)

Varvara Petrovna gave a wry smile.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Praskovya Ivanovna, my friend, you must have taken some fancy into your head again, and that’s why you’ve come. You’ve simply lived on fancies all your life. You flew into a fury at the mere mention of our school; but do you remember how you came and persuaded all the class that a hussar called Shablykin had proposed to you, and how Mme. Lefebure proved on the spot you were lying. Yet you weren’t lying, you were simply imagining it all to amuse yourself. Come, tell me, what is it now? What are you fancying now; what is it vexes you?”

“And you fell in love with the priest who used to teach us scripture at school—so much for you, since you’ve such a spiteful memory. Ha ha ha!”

She laughed viciously and went off into a fit of coughing.

“Ah, you’ve not forgotten the priest then …” said Varvara Petrovna, looking at her vindictively.

Her face turned green. Praskovya Ivanovna suddenly assumed a dignified air.

“I’m in no laughing mood now, madam. Why have you drawn my daughter into your scandals in the face of the whole town? That’s what I’ve come about.”

“My scandals?” Varvara Petrovna drew herself up menacingly.

“Maman, I entreat you too, to restrain yourself,” Lizaveta Nikolaevna brought out suddenly.

“What’s that you say?” The maman was on the point of breaking into a squeal again, but catching her daughter’s flashing eye, she subsided suddenly.

“How could you talk about scandal, maman?” cried Liza, flushing red. “I came of my own accord with Yulia Mihailovna’s permission, because I wanted to learn this unhappy woman’s story and to be of use to her.”

“This unhappy woman’s story!” Praskovya Ivanovna drawled with a spiteful laugh. “Is it your place to mix yourself up with such ‘stories.’ Ach, enough of your tyrannising!” She turned furiously to Varvara Petrovna. “I don’t know whether it’s true or not, they say you keep the whole town in order, but it seems your turn has come at last.”

Varvara Petrovna sat straight as an arrow ready to fly from the bow. For ten seconds she looked sternly and immovably at Praskovya Ivanovna.

“Well, Praskovya, you must thank God that all here present are our friends,” she said at last with ominous composure. “You’ve said a great deal better unsaid.”

“But I’m not so much afraid of what the world will say, my lady, as some people. It’s you who, under a show of pride, are trembling at what people will say. And as for all here being your friends, it’s better for you than if strangers had been listening.”

“Have you grown wiser during this last week?”

“It’s not that I’ve grown wiser, but simply that the truth has come out this week.”

“What truth has come out this week? Listen, Praskovya Ivanovna, don’t irritate me. Explain to me this minute, I beg you as a favour, what truth has come out and what do you mean by that?”

“Why there it is, sitting before you!” and Praskovya Ivanovna suddenly pointed at Marya Timofyevna with that desperate determination which takes no heed of consequences, if only it can make an impression at the moment. Marya Timofyevna, who had watched her all the time with light-hearted curiosity, laughed exultingly at the sight of the wrathful guest’s finger pointed impetuously at her, and wriggled gleefully in her easy chair.

“God Almighty have mercy on us, they’ve all gone crazy!” exclaimed Varvara Petrovna, and turning pale she sank back in her chair.

She turned so pale that it caused some commotion. Stepan Trofimovitch was the first to rush up to her. I drew near also; even Liza got up from her seat, though she did not come forward. But the most alarmed of all was Praskovya Ivanovna herself. She uttered a scream, got up as far as she could and almost wailed in a lachrymose voice:

“Varvara Petrovna, dear, forgive me for my wicked foolishness! Give her some water, somebody.”

“Don’t whimper, please, Praskovya Ivanovna, and leave me alone, gentlemen, please, I don’t want any water!” Varvara Petrovna pronounced in a firm though low voice, with blanched lips.

“Varvara Petrovna, my dear,” Praskovya Ivanovna went on, a little reassured, “though I am to blame for my reckless words, what’s upset me more than anything are these anonymous letters that some low creatures keep bombarding me with; they might write to you, since it concerns you, but I’ve a daughter!”

Varvara Petrovna looked at her in silence, with wide-open eyes, listening with wonder. At that moment a side-door in the corner opened noiselessly, and Darya Pavlovna made her appearance. She stood still and looked round. She was struck by our perturbation. Probably she did not at first distinguish Marya Timofyevna, of whose

presence she had not been informed. Stepan Trofimovitch was the first to notice her; he made a rapid movement, turned red, and for some reason proclaimed in a loud voice: “Darya Pavlovna!” so that all eyes turned on the new-comer.

“Oh, is this your Darya Pavlovna!” cried Marya Timofyevna. “Well, Shatushka, your sister’s not like you. How can my fellow call such a charmer the serf-wench Dasha?”

Meanwhile Darya Pavlovna had gone up to Varvara Petrovna, but struck by Marya Timofyevna’s exclamation she turned quickly and stopped just before her chair, looking at the imbecile with a long fixed gaze.

“Sit down, Dasha,” Varvara Petrovna brought out with terrifying composure. “Nearer, that’s right. You can see this woman, sitting down. Do you know her?”

“I have never seen her,” Dasha answered quietly, and after a pause she added at once:

“She must be the invalid sister of Captain Lebyadkin.”

“And it’s the first time I’ve set eyes on you, my love, though I’ve been interested and wanted to know you a long time, for I see how well-bred you are in every movement you make,” Marya Timofyevna cried enthusiastically. “And though my footman swears at you, can such a well-educated charming person as you really have stolen money from him? For you are sweet, sweet, sweet, I tell you that from myself!” she concluded, enthusiastically waving her hand.

“Can you make anything of it?” Varvara Petrovna asked with proud dignity.

“I understand it....”

“Have you heard about the money?”

“No doubt it’s the money that I undertook at Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch’s request to hand over to her brother, Captain Lebyadkin.”

A silence followed.

“Did Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch himself ask you to do so?”

“He was very anxious to send that money, three hundred roubles, to Mr. Lebyadkin. And as he didn’t know his address, but only knew that he was to be in our town, he charged me to give it to Mr. Lebyadkin if he came.”

“What is the money ... lost? What was this woman speaking about just now?”

“That I don’t know. I’ve heard before that Mr. Lebyadkin says I didn’t give him all the money, but I don’t understand his words. There were three hundred roubles and I sent him three hundred roubles.”

Darya Pavlovna had almost completely regained her composure. And it was difficult, I may mention, as a rule, to astonish the girl or ruffle her calm for long—whatever she might be feeling. She brought out all her answers now without haste, replied immediately to every question with accuracy, quietly, smoothly, and without a trace of the sudden emotion she had shown at first, or the slightest embarrassment which might have suggested a consciousness of guilt. Varvara Petrovna’s eyes were fastened upon her all the time she was speaking. Varvara Petrovna thought for a minute:

“If,” she pronounced at last firmly, evidently addressing all present, though she only looked at Dasha, “if Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch did not appeal even to me but asked you to do this for him, he must have had his reasons for doing so. I don’t consider I have any right to inquire into them, if they are kept secret from me. But the very fact of your having taken part in the matter reassures me on that score, be sure of that, Darya, in any case. But you see, my dear, you may, through ignorance of the world, have quite innocently done something imprudent; and you did so when you undertook to have dealings with a low character. The rumours spread by this rascal show what a mistake you made. But I will find out about him, and as it is my task to protect you, I shall know how to defend you. But now all this must be put a stop to.”

“The best thing to do,” said Marya Timofyevna, popping up from her chair, “is to send him to the footmen’s room when he comes. Let him sit on the benches there and play cards with them while we sit here and drink coffee. We might send him a cup of coffee too, but I have a great contempt for him.”

And she wagged her head expressively.

“We must put a stop to this,” Varvara Petrovna repeated, listening attentively to Marya Timofyevna. “Ring, Stepan Trofimovitch, I beg you.”

Stepan Trofimovitch rang, and suddenly stepped forward, all excitement.

“If ... if ...” he faltered feverishly, flushing, breaking off and stuttering, “if I too have heard the most revolting story, or rather slander, it was with utter indignation ... *enfin c’est un homme perdu, et quelque chose comme un forçat evadé*....”

He broke down and could not go on. Varvara Petrovna, screwing up her eyes, looked him up and down.

The ceremonious butler Alexey Yegorytch came in.

“The carriage,” Varvara Petrovna ordered. “And you, Alexey Yegorytch, get ready to escort Miss Lebyadkin home; she will give you the address herself.”

“Mr. Lebyadkin has been waiting for her for some time downstairs, and has been begging me to announce him.”

“That’s impossible, Varvara Petrovna!” and Mavriky Nikolaevitch, who had sat all the time in unbroken silence, suddenly came forward in alarm. “If I may speak, he is not a man who can be admitted into society. He … he … he’s an impossible person, Varvara Petrovna!”

“Wait a moment,” said Varvara Petrovna to Alexey Yegorytch, and he disappeared at once.

“C’est un homme malhonnête et je crois même que c’est un forçat evadé ou quelque chose dans ce genre,” Stepan Trofimovitch muttered again, and again he flushed red and broke off.

“Liza, it’s time we were going,” announced Praskovya Ivanovna disdainfully, getting up from her seat. She seemed sorry that in her alarm she had called herself a fool. While Darya Pavlovna was speaking, she listened, pressing her lips superciliously. But what struck me most was the expression of Lizaveta Nikolaevna from the moment Darya Pavlovna had come in. There was a gleam of hatred and hardly disguised contempt in her eyes.

“Wait one minute, Praskovya Ivanovna, I beg you.” Varvara Petrovna detained her, still with the same exaggerated composure. “Kindly sit down. I intend to speak out, and your legs are bad. That’s right, thank you. I lost my temper just now and uttered some impatient words. Be so good as to forgive me. I behaved foolishly and I’m the first to regret it, because I like fairness in everything. Losing your temper too, of course, you spoke of certain anonymous letters. Every anonymous communication is deserving of contempt, just because it’s not signed. If you think differently I’m sorry for you. In any case, if I were in your place, I would not pry into such dirty corners, I would not soil my hands with it. But you have soiled yours. However, since you have begun on the subject yourself, I must tell you that six days ago I too received a clownish anonymous letter. In it some rascal informs me that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch has gone out of his mind, and that I have reason to fear some lame woman, who ‘is destined to play a great part in my life.’ I remember the expression. Reflecting and being aware that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch has very numerous enemies, I promptly sent for a man living here, one of his secret enemies, and the most vindictive and contemptible of them, and from my conversation with him I gathered what was the despicable source of the

anonymous letter. If you too, my poor Praskovya Ivanovna, have been worried by similar letters on my account, and as you say 'bombarded' with them, I am, of course, the first to regret having been the innocent cause of it. That's all I wanted to tell you by way of explanation. I'm very sorry to see that you are so tired and so upset. Besides, I have quite made up my mind to see that suspicious personage of whom Mavriky Nikolaevitch said just now, a little inappropriately, that it was impossible to receive him. Liza in particular need have nothing to do with it. Come to me, Liza, my dear, let me kiss you again."

Liza crossed the room and stood in silence before Varvara Petrovna. The latter kissed her, took her hands, and, holding her at arm's-length, looked at her with feeling, then made the sign of the cross over her and kissed her again.

"Well, good-bye, Liza" (there was almost the sound of tears in Varvara Petrovna's voice), "believe that I shall never cease to love you whatever fate has in store for you. God be with you. I have always blessed His Holy Will...."

She would have added something more, but restrained herself and broke off. Liza was walking back to her place, still in the same silence, as it were plunged in thought, but she suddenly stopped before her mother.

"I am not going yet, mother. I'll stay a little longer at auntie's," she brought out in a low voice, but there was a note of iron determination in those quiet words.

"My goodness! What now?" wailed Praskovya Ivanovna, clasping her hands helplessly. But Liza did not answer, and seemed indeed not to hear her; she sat down in the same corner and fell to gazing into space again as before.

There was a look of pride and triumph in Varvara Petrovna's face.

"Mavriky Nikolaevitch, I have a great favour to ask of you. Be so kind as to go and take a look at that person downstairs, and if there is any possibility of admitting him, bring him up here."

Mavriky Nikolaevitch bowed and went out. A moment later he brought in Mr. Lebyadkin.

IV

I have said something of this gentleman's outward appearance. He was a tall, curly-haired, thick-set fellow about forty with a purplish, rather bloated and flabby face, with cheeks that quivered at every movement of his head, with little bloodshot eyes that were sometimes rather crafty, with moustaches and side-whiskers, and with an

incipient double chin, fleshy and rather unpleasant-looking. But what was most striking about him was the fact that he appeared now wearing a dress-coat and clean linen.

“There are people on whom clean linen is almost unseemly,” as Liputin had once said when Stepan Trofimovitch reproached him in jest for being untidy. The captain had perfectly new black gloves too, of which he held the right one in his hand, while the left, tightly stretched and unbuttoned, covered part of the huge fleshy fist in which he held a brand-new, glossy round hat, probably worn for the first time that day. It appeared therefore that “the garb of love,” of which he had shouted to Shatov the day before, really did exist. All this, that is, the dress-coat and clean linen, had been procured by Liputin’s advice with some mysterious object in view (as I found out later). There was no doubt that his coming now (in a hired carriage) was at the instigation and with the assistance of someone else; it would never have dawned on him, nor could he by himself have succeeded in dressing, getting ready and making up his mind in three-quarters of an hour, even if the scene in the porch of the cathedral had reached his ears at once. He was not drunk, but was in the dull, heavy, dazed condition of a man suddenly awakened after many days of drinking. It seemed as though he would be drunk again if one were to put one’s hands on his shoulders and rock him to and fro once or twice. He was hurrying into the drawing-room but stumbled over a rug near the doorway. Marya Timofyevna was helpless with laughter. He looked savagely at her and suddenly took a few rapid steps towards Varvara Petrovna.

“I have come, madam ...” he blared out like a trumpet-blast.

“Be so good, sir, as to take a seat there, on that chair,” said Varvara Petrovna, drawing herself up. “I shall hear you as well from there, and it will be more convenient for me to look at you from here.”

The captain stopped short, looking blankly before him. He turned, however, and sat down on the seat indicated close to the door. An extreme lack of self-confidence and at the same time insolence, and a sort of incessant irritability, were apparent in the expression of his face. He was horribly scared, that was evident, but his self-conceit was wounded, and it might be surmised that his mortified vanity might on occasion lead him to any effrontery, in spite of his cowardice. He was evidently uneasy at every movement of his clumsy person. We all know that when such gentlemen are brought by some marvellous chance into society, they find their worst ordeal in their own hands, and the impossibility of disposing them becomingly, of which they are conscious at every moment. The captain sat rigid in his chair, with his hat and gloves in his hands and his eyes fixed with a senseless stare on the stern face of Varvara

Petrovna. He would have liked, perhaps, to have looked about more freely, but he could not bring himself to do so yet. Marya Timofyevna, apparently thinking his appearance very funny, laughed again, but he did not stir. Varvara Petrovna ruthlessly kept him in this position for a long time, a whole minute, staring at him without mercy.

“In the first place allow me to learn your name from yourself,” Varvara Petrovna pronounced in measured and impressive tones.

“Captain Lebyadkin,” thundered the captain. “I have come, madam ...” He made a movement again.

“Allow me!” Varvara Petrovna checked him again. “Is this unfortunate person who interests me so much really your sister?”

“My sister, madam, who has escaped from control, for she is in a certain condition....”

He suddenly faltered and turned crimson. “Don’t misunderstand me, madam,” he said, terribly confused. “Her own brother’s not going to throw mud at her ... in a certain condition doesn’t mean in such a condition ... in the sense of an injured reputation ... in the last stage ...” he suddenly broke off.

“Sir!” said Varvara Petrovna, raising her head.

“In this condition!” he concluded suddenly, tapping the middle of his forehead with his finger.

A pause followed.

“And has she suffered in this way for long?” asked Varvara Petrovna, with a slight drawl.

“Madam, I have come to thank you for the generosity you showed in the porch, in a Russian, brotherly way.”

“Brotherly?”

“I mean, not brotherly, but simply in the sense that I am my sister’s brother; and believe me, madam,” he went on more hurriedly, turning crimson again, “I am not so uneducated as I may appear at first sight in your drawing-room. My sister and I are nothing, madam, compared with the luxury we observe here. Having enemies who slander us, besides. But on the question of reputation Lebyadkin is proud, madam ... and ... and ... and I’ve come to repay with thanks.... Here is money, madam!”

At this point he pulled out a pocket-book, drew out of it a bundle of notes, and began turning them over with trembling fingers in a perfect fury of impatience. It was evident

that he was in haste to explain something, and indeed it was quite necessary to do so. But probably feeling himself that his fluster with the money made him look even more foolish, he lost the last traces of self-possession. The money refused to be counted. His fingers fumbled helplessly, and to complete his shame a green note escaped from the pocket-book, and fluttered in zigzags on to the carpet.

“Twenty roubles, madam.” He leapt up suddenly with the roll of notes in his hand, his face perspiring with discomfort. Noticing the note which had dropped on the floor, he was bending down to pick it up, but for some reason overcome by shame, he dismissed it with a wave.

“For your servants, madam; for the footman who picks it up. Let them remember my sister!”

“I cannot allow that,” Varvara Petrovna brought out hurriedly, even with some alarm.

“In that case ...”

He bent down, picked it up, flushing crimson, and suddenly going up to Varvara Petrovna held out the notes he had counted.

“What’s this?” she cried, really alarmed at last, and positively shrinking back in her chair.

Mavriky Nikolaevitch, Stepan Trofimovitch, and I all stepped forward.

“Don’t be alarmed, don’t be alarmed; I’m not mad, by God, I’m not mad,” the captain kept asseverating excitedly.

“Yes, sir, you’re out of your senses.”

“Madam, she’s not at all as you suppose. I am an insignificant link. Oh, madam, wealthy are your mansions, but poor is the dwelling of Marya Anonyma, my sister, whose maiden name was Lebyadkin, but whom we’ll call Anonyma for the time, only for *the time,* madam, for God Himself will not suffer it forever. Madam, you gave her ten roubles and she took it, because it was from *you,* madam! Do you hear, madam? From no one else in the world would this Marya Anonyma take it, or her grandfather, the officer killed in the Caucasus before the very eyes of Yermolov, would turn in his grave. But from you, madam, from you she will take anything. But with one hand she takes it, and with the other she holds out to you twenty roubles by way of subscription to one of the benevolent committees in Petersburg and Moscow, of which you are a member ... for you published yourself, madam, in the *Moscow News,* that you are ready to receive subscriptions in our town, and that any one may subscribe....”

The captain suddenly broke off; he breathed hard as though after some difficult achievement. All he said about the benevolent society had probably been prepared beforehand, perhaps under Liputin's supervision. He perspired more than ever; drops literally trickled down his temples. Varvara Petrovna looked searchingly at him.

"The subscription list," she said severely, "is always downstairs in charge of my porter. There you can enter your subscriptions if you wish to. And so I beg you to put your notes away and not to wave them in the air. That's right. I beg you also to go back to your seat. That's right. I am very sorry, sir, that I made a mistake about your sister, and gave her something as though she were poor when she is so rich. There's only one thing I don't understand, why she can only take from me, and no one else. You so insisted upon that that I should like a full explanation."

"Madam, that is a secret that may be buried only in the grave!" answered the captain.

"Why?" Varvara Petrovna asked, not quite so firmly.

"Madam, madam ..."

He relapsed into gloomy silence, looking on the floor, laying his right hand on his heart. Varvara Petrovna waited, not taking her eyes off him.

"Madam!" he roared suddenly. "Will you allow me to ask you one question? Only one, but frankly, directly, like a Russian, from the heart?"

"Kindly do so."

"Have you ever suffered madam, in your life?"

"You simply mean to say that you have been or are being ill-treated by someone."

"Madam, madam!" He jumped up again, probably unconscious of doing so, and struck himself on the breast. "Here in this bosom so much has accumulated, so much that God Himself will be amazed when it is revealed at the Day of Judgment."

"H'm! A strong expression!"

"Madam, I speak perhaps irritably...."

"Don't be uneasy. I know myself when to stop you."

"May I ask you another question, madam?"

"Ask another question."

"Can one die simply from the generosity of one's feelings?"

“I don’t know, as I’ve never asked myself such a question.”

“You don’t know! You’ve never asked yourself such a question,” he said with pathetic irony. “Well, if that’s it, if that’s it …

“Be still, despairing heart!”

And he struck himself furiously on the chest. He was by now walking about the room again.

It is typical of such people to be utterly incapable of keeping their desires to themselves; they have, on the contrary, an irresistible impulse to display them in all their unseemliness as soon as they arise. When such a gentleman gets into a circle in which he is not at home he usually begins timidly,—but you have only to give him an inch and he will at once rush into impertinence. The captain was already excited. He walked about waving his arms and not listening to questions, talked about himself very, very quickly, so that sometimes his tongue would not obey him, and without finishing one phrase he passed to another. It is true he was probably not quite sober. Moreover, Lizaveta Nikolaevna was sitting there too, and though he did not once glance at her, her presence seemed to over-excite him terribly; that, however, is only my supposition. There must have been some reason which led Varvara Petrovna to resolve to listen to such a man in spite of her repugnance. Praskovya Ivanovna was simply shaking with terror, though, I believe she really did not quite understand what it was about. Stepan Trofimovitch was trembling too, but that was, on the contrary, because he was disposed to understand everything, and exaggerate it. Mavriky Nikolaevitch stood in the attitude of one ready to defend all present; Liza was pale, and she gazed fixedly with wide-open eyes at the wild captain. Shatov sat in the same position as before, but, what was strangest of all, Marya Timofyevna had not only ceased laughing, but had become terribly sad. She leaned her right elbow on the table, and with a prolonged, mournful gaze watched her brother declaiming. Darya Pavlovna alone seemed to me calm.

“All that is nonsensical allegory,” said Varvara Petrovna, getting angry at last. “You haven’t answered my question, why? I insist on an answer.”

“I haven’t answered, why? You insist on an answer, why?” repeated the captain, winking. “That little word ‘why’ has run through all the universe from the first day of creation, and all nature cries every minute to it’s Creator, ‘why?’ And for seven thousand years it has had no answer, and must Captain Lebyadkin alone answer? And is that justice, madam?”

“That’s all nonsense and not to the point!” cried Varvara Petrovna, getting angry and losing patience. “That’s allegory; besides, you express yourself too sensationally, sir, which I consider impertinence.”

“Madam,” the captain went on, not hearing, “I should have liked perhaps to be called Ernest, yet I am forced to bear the vulgar name Ignat—why is that do you suppose? I should have liked to be called Prince de Monbart, yet I am only Lebyadkin, derived from a swan.* Why is that? I am a poet, madam, a poet in soul, and might be getting a thousand roubles at a time from a publisher, yet I am forced to live in a pig pail. Why? Why, madam? To my mind Russia is a freak of nature and nothing else.”

* *From lebyed, a swan*.

“Can you really say nothing more definite?”

“I can read you the poem, ‘The Cockroach,’ madam.”

“Wha-a-t?”

“Madam, I’m not mad yet! I shall be mad, no doubt I shall be, but I’m not so yet. Madam, a friend of mine—a most honourable man—has written a Krylov’s fable, called ‘The Cockroach.’ May I read it?”

“You want to read some fable of Krylov’s?”

“No, it’s not a fable of Krylov’s I want to read. It’s my fable, my own composition. Believe me, madam, without offence I’m not so uneducated and depraved as not to understand that Russia can boast of a great fable-writer, Krylov, to whom the Minister of Education has raised a monument in the Summer Gardens for the diversion of the young. Here, madam, you ask me why? The answer is at the end of this fable, in letters of fire.”

“Read your fable.”

“Lived a cockroach in the world

Such was his condition,

In a glass he chanced to fall

Full of fly-perdition.”

“Heavens! What does it mean?” cried Varvara Petrovna.

“That’s when flies get into a glass in the summer-time,” the captain explained hurriedly with the irritable impatience of an author interrupted in reading. “Then it is perdition to

the flies, any fool can understand. Don't interrupt, don't interrupt. You'll see, you'll see....” He kept waving his arms.

“But he squeezed against the flies,

They woke up and cursed him,

Raised to Jove their angry cries;

‘The glass is full to bursting!’

In the middle of the din

Came along Nikifor,

Fine old man, and looking in ...

I haven't quite finished it. But no matter, I'll tell it in words,” the captain rattled on. “Nikifor takes the glass, and in spite of their outcry empties away the whole stew, flies, and beetles and all, into the pig pail, which ought to have been done long ago. But observe, madam, observe, the cockroach doesn't complain. That's the answer to your question, why?” he cried triumphantly. “‘The cockroach does not complain.' As for Nikifor he typifies nature,” he added, speaking rapidly and walking complacently about the room.

Varvara Petrovna was terribly angry.

“And allow me to ask you about that money said to have been received from Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, and not to have been given to you, about which you dared to accuse a person belonging to my household.”

“It's a slander!” roared Lebyadkin, flinging up his right hand tragically.

“No, it's not a slander.”

“Madam, there are circumstances that force one to endure family disgrace rather than proclaim the truth aloud. Lebyadkin will not blab, madam!”

He seemed dazed; he was carried away; he felt his importance; he certainly had some fancy in his mind. By now he wanted to insult some one, to do something nasty to show his power.

“Ring, please, Stepan Trofimovitch,” Varvara Petrovna asked him.

“Lebyadkin's cunning, madam,” he said, winking with his evil smile; “he's cunning, but he too has a weak spot, he too at times is in the portals of passions, and these portals

are the old military hussars' bottle, celebrated by Denis Davydov. So when he is in those portals, madam, he may happen to send a letter in verse, a most magnificent letter—but which afterwards he would have wished to take back, with the tears of all his life; for the feeling of the beautiful is destroyed. But the bird has flown, you won't catch it by the tail. In those portals now, madam, Lebyadkin may have spoken about an honourable young lady, in the honourable indignation of a soul revolted by wrongs, and his slanderers have taken advantage of it. But Lebyadkin is cunning, madam! And in vain a malignant wolf sits over him every minute, filling his glass and waiting for the end. Lebyadkin won't blab. And at the bottom of the bottle he always finds instead Lebyadkin's cunning. But enough, oh, enough, madam! Your splendid halls might belong to the noblest in the land, but the cockroach will not complain. Observe that, observe that he does not complain, and recognise his noble spirit!"

At that instant a bell rang downstairs from the porter's room, and almost at the same moment Alexey Yegorytch appeared in response to Stepan Trofimovitch's ring, which he had somewhat delayed answering. The correct old servant was unusually excited.

"Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch has graciously arrived this moment and is coming here," he pronounced, in reply to Varvara Petrovna's questioning glance. I particularly remember her at that moment; at first she turned pale, but suddenly her eyes flashed. She drew herself up in her chair with an air of extraordinary determination. Every one was astounded indeed. The utterly unexpected arrival of Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, who was not expected for another month, was not only strange from its unexpectedness but from its fateful coincidence with the present moment. Even the captain remained standing like a post in the middle of the room with his mouth wide open, staring at the door with a fearfully stupid expression.

And, behold, from the next room—a very large and long apartment—came the sound of swiftly approaching footsteps, little, exceedingly rapid steps; someone seemed to be running, and that someone suddenly flew into the drawing-room, not Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, but a young man who was a complete stranger to all.

V

I will permit myself to halt here to sketch in a few hurried strokes this person who had so suddenly arrived on the scene.

He was a young man of twenty-seven or thereabouts, a little above the medium height, with rather long, lank, flaxen hair, and with faintly defined, irregular moustache and beard. He was dressed neatly, and in the fashion, though not like a dandy. At the first glance he looked round-shouldered and awkward, but yet he was not round-

shouldered, and his manner was easy. He seemed a queer fish, and yet later on we all thought his manners good, and his conversation always to the point.

No one would have said that he was ugly, and yet no one would have liked his face. His head was elongated at the back, and looked flattened at the sides, so that his face seemed pointed, his forehead was high and narrow, but his features were small; his eyes were keen, his nose was small and sharp, his lips were long and thin. The expression of his face suggested ill-health, but this was misleading. He had a wrinkle on each cheek which gave him the look of a man who had just recovered from a serious illness. Yet he was perfectly well and strong, and had never been ill.

He walked and moved very hurriedly, yet never seemed in a hurry to be off. It seemed as though nothing could disconcert him; in every circumstance and in every sort of society he remained the same. He had a great deal of conceit, but was utterly unaware of it himself.

He talked quickly, hurriedly, but at the same time with assurance, and was never at a loss for a word. In spite of his hurried manner his ideas were in perfect order, distinct and definite—and this was particularly striking. His articulation was wonderfully clear. His words pattered out like smooth, big grains, always well chosen, and at your service. At first this attracted one, but afterwards it became repulsive, just because of this over-distinct articulation, this string of ever-ready words. One somehow began to imagine that he must have a tongue of special shape, somehow exceptionally long and thin, extremely red with a very sharp everlastingly active little tip.

Well, this was the young man who darted now into the drawing-room, and really, I believe to this day, that he began to talk in the next room, and came in speaking. He was standing before Varvara Petrovna in a trice.

"... Only fancy, Varvara Petrovna," he pattered on, "I came in expecting to find he'd been here for the last quarter of an hour; he arrived an hour and a half ago; we met at Kirillov's: he set off half an hour ago meaning to come straight here, and told me to come here too, a quarter of an hour later...."

"But who? Who told you to come here?" Varvara Petrovna inquired.

"Why, Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch! Surely this isn't the first you've heard of it! But his luggage must have been here a long while, anyway. How is it you weren't told? Then I'm the first to bring the news. One might send out to look for him; he's sure to be here himself directly though. And I fancy, at the moment that just fits in with some of his expectations, and is far as I can judge, at least, some of his calculations."

At this point he turned his eyes about the room and fixed them with special attention on the captain.

“Ach, Lizaveta Nikolaevna, how glad I am to meet you at the very first step, delighted to shake hands with you.” He flew up to Liza, who was smiling gaily, to take her proffered hand, “and I observe that my honoured friend Praskovya Ivanovna has not forgotten her ‘professor,’ and actually isn’t cross with him, as she always used to be in Switzerland. But how are your legs, here, Praskovya Ivanovna, and were the Swiss doctors right when at the consultation they prescribed your native air? What? Fomentations? That ought to do good. But how sorry I was, Varvara Petrovna” (he turned rapidly to her) “that I didn’t arrive in time to meet you abroad, and offer my respects to you in person; I had so much to tell you too. I did send word to my old man here, but I fancy that he did as he always does ...”

“Petrusha!” cried Stepan Trofimovitch, instantly roused from his stupefaction. He clasped his hands and flew to his son. “*Pierre, mon enfant!* Why, I didn’t know you!” He pressed him in his arms and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Come, be quiet, be quiet, no flourishes, that’s enough, that’s enough, please,” Petrusha muttered hurriedly, trying to extricate himself from his embrace.

“I’ve always sinned against you, always!”

“Well, that’s enough. We can talk of that later. I knew you’d carry on. Come, be a little more sober, please.”

“But it’s ten years since I’ve seen you.”

“The less reason for demonstrations.”

“Mon enfant!...”

“Come, I believe in your affection, I believe in it, take your arms away. You see, you’re disturbing other people.... Ah, here’s Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch; keep quiet, please.”

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was already in the room; he came in very quietly and stood still for an instant in the doorway, quietly scrutinising the company.

I was struck by the first sight of him just as I had been four years before, when I saw him for the first time. I had not forgotten him in the least. But I think there are some countenances which always seem to exhibit something new which one has not noticed before, every time one meets them, though one may have seen them a hundred times already. Apparently he was exactly the same as he had been four years before. He was as elegant, as dignified, he moved with the same air of consequence

as before, indeed he looked almost as young. His faint smile had just the same official graciousness and complacency. His eyes had the same stern, thoughtful and, as it were, preoccupied look. In fact, it seemed as though we had only parted the day before. But one thing struck me. In old days, though he had been considered handsome, his face was “like a mask,” as some of our sharp-tongued ladies had expressed it. Now—now, I don’t know why he impressed me at once as absolutely, incontestably beautiful, so that no one could have said that his face was like a mask. Wasn’t it perhaps that he was a little paler and seemed rather thinner than before? Or was there, perhaps, the light of some new idea in his eyes?

“Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch!” cried Varvara Petrovna, drawing herself up but not rising from her chair. “Stop a minute!” She checked his advance with a peremptory gesture.

But to explain the awful question which immediately followed that gesture and exclamation—a question which I should have imagined to be impossible even in Varvara Petrovna, I must ask the reader to remember what that lady’s temperament had always been, and the extraordinary impulsiveness she showed at some critical moments. I beg him to consider also, that in spite of the exceptional strength of her spirit and the very considerable amount of common sense and practical, so to say business, tact she possessed, there were moments in her life in which she abandoned herself altogether, entirely and, if it’s permissible to say so, absolutely without restraint. I beg him to take into consideration also that the present moment might really be for her one of those in which all the essence of life, of all the past and all the present, perhaps, too, all the future, is concentrated, as it were, focused. I must briefly recall, too, the anonymous letter of which she had spoken to Praskovya Ivanovna with so much irritation, though I think she said nothing of the latter part of it. Yet it perhaps contained the explanation of the possibility of the terrible question with which she suddenly addressed her son.

“Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch,” she repeated, rapping out her words in a resolute voice in which there was a ring of menacing challenge, “I beg you to tell me at once, without moving from that place; is it true that this unhappy cripple—here she is, here, look at her—is it true that she is … your lawful wife?”

I remember that moment only too well; he did not wink an eyelash but looked intently at his mother. Not the faintest change in his face followed. At last he smiled, a sort of indulgent smile, and without answering a word went quietly up to his mother, took her hand, raised it respectfully to his lips and kissed it. And so great was his invariable and irresistible ascendancy over his mother that even now she could not bring herself to

pull away her hand. She only gazed at him, her whole figure one concentrated question, seeming to betray that she could not bear the suspense another moment.

But he was still silent. When he had kissed her hand, he scanned the whole room once more, and moving, as before, without haste went towards Marya Timofyevna. It is very difficult to describe people's countenances at certain moments. I remember, for instance, that Marya Timofyevna, breathless with fear, rose to her feet to meet him and clasped her hands before her, as though beseeching him. And at the same time I remember the frantic ecstasy which almost distorted her face—an ecstasy almost too great for any human being to bear. Perhaps both were there, both the terror and the ecstasy. But I remember moving quickly towards her (I was standing not far off), for I fancied she was going to faint.

"You should not be here," Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch said to her in a caressing and melodious voice; and there was the light of an extraordinary tenderness in his eyes. He stood before her in the most respectful attitude, and every gesture showed sincere respect for her. The poor girl faltered impulsively in a half-whisper.

"But may I ... kneel down ... to you now?"

"No, you can't do that."

He smiled at her magnificently, so that she too laughed joyfully at once. In the same melodious voice, coaxing her tenderly as though she were a child, he went on gravely.

"Only think that you are a girl, and that though I'm your devoted friend I'm an outsider, not your husband, nor your father, nor your betrothed. Give me your arm and let us go; I will take you to the carriage, and if you will let me I will see you all the way home."

She listened, and bent her head as though meditating.

"Let's go," she said with a sigh, giving him her hand.

But at that point a slight mischance befell her. She must have turned carelessly, resting on her lame leg, which was shorter than the other. She fell sideways into the chair, and if the chair had not been there would have fallen on to the floor. He instantly seized and supported her, and holding her arm firmly in his, led her carefully and sympathetically to the door. She was evidently mortified at having fallen; she was overwhelmed, blushed, and was terribly abashed. Looking dumbly on the ground, limping painfully, she hobbled after him, almost hanging on his arm. So they went out. Liza, I saw, suddenly jumped up from her chair for some reason as they were going out, and she followed them with intent eyes till they reached the door. Then she sat

down again in silence, but there was a nervous twitching in her face, as though she had touched a viper.

While this scene was taking place between Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch and Marya Timofyevna every one was speechless with amazement; one could have heard a fly; but as soon as they had gone out, every one began suddenly talking.

VI

It was very little of it talk, however; it was mostly exclamation. I've forgotten a little the order in which things happened, for a scene of confusion followed. Stepan Trofimovitch uttered some exclamation in French, clasping his hands, but Varvara Petrovna had no thought for him. Even Mavriky Nikolaevitch muttered some rapid, jerky comment. But Pyotr Stepanovitch was the most excited of all. He was trying desperately with bold gesticulations to persuade Varvara Petrovna of something, but it was a long time before I could make out what it was. He appealed to Praskovya Ivanovna, and Lizaveta Nikolaevna too, even, in his excitement, addressed a passing shout to his father—in fact he seemed all over the room at once. Varvara Petrovna, flushing all over, sprang up from her seat and cried to Praskovya Ivanovna:

"Did you hear what he said to her here just now, did you hear it?"

But the latter was incapable of replying. She could only mutter something and wave her hand. The poor woman had troubles of her own to think about. She kept turning her head towards Liza and was watching her with unaccountable terror, but she didn't even dare to think of getting up and going away until her daughter should get up. In the meantime the captain wanted to slip away. That I noticed. There was no doubt that he had been in a great panic from the instant that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had made his appearance; but Pyotr Stepanovitch took him by the arm and would not let him go.

"It is necessary, quite necessary," he pattered on to Varvara Petrovna, still trying to persuade her. He stood facing her, as she was sitting down again in her easy chair, and, I remember, was listening to him eagerly; he had succeeded in securing her attention.

"It is necessary. You can see for yourself, Varvara Petrovna, that there is a misunderstanding here, and much that is strange on the surface, and yet the thing's as clear as daylight, and as simple as my finger. I quite understand that no one has authorised me to tell the story, and I dare say I look ridiculous putting myself forward. But in the first place, Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch attaches no sort of significance to the matter himself, and, besides, there are incidents of which it is difficult for a man to make up his mind to give an explanation himself. And so it's absolutely necessary that

it should be undertaken by a third person, for whom it's easier to put some delicate points into words. Believe me, Varvara Petrovna, that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch is not at all to blame for not immediately answering your question just now with a full explanation, it's all a trivial affair. I've known him since his Petersburg days. Besides, the whole story only does honour to Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, if one must make use of that vague word 'honour.'"

"You mean to say that you were a witness of some incident which gave rise ... to this misunderstanding?" asked Varvara Petrovna.

"I witnessed it, and took part in it," Pyotr Stepanovitch hastened to declare.

"If you'll give me your word that this will not wound Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's delicacy in regard to his feeling for me, from whom he ne-e-ver conceals anything ... and if you are convinced also that your doing this will be agreeable to him ..."

"Certainly it will be agreeable, and for that reason I consider it a particularly agreeable duty. I am convinced that he would beg me to do it himself."

The intrusive desire of this gentleman, who seemed to have dropped on us from heaven to tell stories about other people's affairs, was rather strange and inconsistent with ordinary usage.

But he had caught Varvara Petrovna by touching on too painful a spot. I did not know the man's character at that time, and still less his designs.

"I am listening," Varvara Petrovna announced with a reserved and cautious manner. She was rather painfully aware of her condescension.

"It's a short story; in fact if you like it's not a story at all," he rattled on, "though a novelist might work it up into a novel in an idle hour. It's rather an interesting little incident, Praskovya Ivanovna, and I am sure that Lizaveta Nikolaevna will be interested to hear it, because there are a great many things in it that are odd if not wonderful. Five years ago, in Petersburg, Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch made the acquaintance of this gentleman, this very Mr. Lebyadkin who's standing here with his mouth open, anxious, I think, to slip away at once. Excuse me, Varvara Petrovna. I don't advise you to make your escape though, you discharged clerk in the former commissariat department; you see, I remember you very well. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch and I know very well what you've been up to here, and, don't forget, you'll have to answer for it. I ask your pardon once more, Varvara Petrovna. In those days Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch used to call this gentleman his Falstaff; that must be," he explained suddenly, "some old burlesque character, at whom every one laughs,

and who is willing to let every one laugh at him, if only they'll pay him for it. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was leading at that time in Petersburg a life, so to say, of mockery. I can't find another word to describe it, because he is not a man who falls into disillusionment, and he disdained to be occupied with work at that time. I'm only speaking of that period, Varvara Petrovna. Lebyadkin had a sister, the woman who was sitting here just now. The brother and sister hadn't a corner* of their own, but were always quartering themselves on different people. He used to hang about the arcades in the Gostiny Dvor, always wearing his old uniform, and would stop the more respectable-looking passers-by, and everything he got from them he'd spend in drink. His sister lived like the birds of heaven. She'd help people in their 'corners,' and do jobs for them on occasion. It was a regular Bedlam. I'll pass over the description of this life in 'corners,' a life to which Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had taken,"

* *In the poorer quarters of Russian towns a single room is often*

let out to several families, each of which occupies a "corner."

"at that time, from eccentricity. I'm only talking of that period, Varvara Petrovna; as for 'eccentricity,' that's his own expression. He does not conceal much from me. Mlle. Lebyadkin, who was thrown in the way of meeting Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch very often, at one time, was fascinated by his appearance. He was, so to say, a diamond set in the dirty background of her life. I am a poor hand at describing feelings, so I'll pass them over; but some of that dirty lot took to jeering at her once, and it made her sad. They always had laughed at her, but she did not seem to notice it before. She wasn't quite right in her head even then, but very different from what she is now. There's reason to believe that in her childhood she received something like an education through the kindness of a benevolent lady. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had never taken the slightest notice of her. He used to spend his time chiefly in playing preference with a greasy old pack of cards for stakes of a quarter-farthing with clerks. But once, when she was being ill-treated, he went up (without inquiring into the cause) and seized one of the clerks by the collar and flung him out of a second-floor window. It was not a case of chivalrous indignation at the sight of injured innocence; the whole operation took place in the midst of roars of laughter, and the one who laughed loudest was Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch himself. As it all ended without harm, they were reconciled and began drinking punch. But the injured innocent herself did not forget it. Of course it ended in her becoming completely crazy. I repeat I'm a poor hand at describing feelings. But a delusion was the chief feature in this case. And Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch aggravated that delusion as though he did it on purpose. Instead of laughing at her he began all at once treating Mlle. Lebyadkin with sudden respect. Kirillov, who was there (a very original man, Varvara Petrovna, and very abrupt, you'll

see him perhaps one day, for he's here now), well, this Kirillov who, as a rule, is perfectly silent, suddenly got hot, and said to Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, I remember, that he treated the girl as though she were a marquise, and that that was doing for her altogether. I must add that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had rather a respect for this Kirillov. What do you suppose was the answer he gave him: 'You imagine, Mr. Kirillov, that I am laughing at her. Get rid of that idea, I really do respect her, for she's better than any of us.' And, do you know, he said it in such a serious tone. Meanwhile, he hadn't really said a word to her for two or three months, except 'good morning' and 'good-bye.' I remember, for I was there, that she came at last to the point of looking on him almost as her betrothed who dared not 'elope with her,' simply because he had many enemies and family difficulties, or something of the sort. There was a great deal of laughter about it. It ended in Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's making provision for her when he had to come here, and I believe he arranged to pay a considerable sum, three hundred roubles a year, if not more, as a pension for her. In short it was all a caprice, a fancy of a man prematurely weary on his side, perhaps—it may even have been, as Kirillov says, a new experiment of a blasé man, with the object of finding out what you can bring a crazy cripple to." (You picked out on purpose, he said, the lowest creature, a cripple, forever covered with disgrace and blows, knowing, too, that this creature was dying of comic love for you, and set to work to mystify her completely on purpose, simply to see what would come of it.) "Though, how is a man so particularly to blame for the fancies of a crazy woman, to whom he had hardly uttered two sentences the whole time. There are things, Varvara Petrovna, of which it is not only impossible to speak sensibly, but it's even nonsensical to begin speaking of them at all. Well, eccentricity then, let it stand at that. Anyway, there's nothing worse to be said than that; and yet now they've made this scandal out of it.... I am to some extent aware, Varvara Petrovna, of what is happening here."

The speaker suddenly broke off and was turning to Lebyadkin. But Varvara Petrovna checked him. She was in a state of extreme exaltation.

"Have you finished?" she asked.

"Not yet; to complete my story I should have to ask this gentleman one or two questions if you'll allow me ... you'll see the point in a minute, Varvara Petrovna."

"Enough, afterwards, leave it for the moment I beg you. Oh, I was quite right to let you speak!"

"And note this, Varvara Petrovna," Pyotr Stepanovitch said hastily. "Could Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch have explained all this just now in answer to your question, which was perhaps too peremptory?"

“Oh, yes, it was.”

“And wasn’t I right in saying that in some cases it’s much easier for a third person to explain things than for the person interested?”

“Yes, yes ... but in one thing you were mistaken, and, I see with regret, are still mistaken.”

“Really, what’s that?”

“You see.... But won’t you sit down, Pyotr Stepanovitch?”

“Oh, as you please. I am tired indeed. Thank you.” He instantly moved up an easy chair and turned it so that he had Varvara Petrovna on one side and Praskovya Ivanovna at the table on the other, while he faced Lebyadkin, from whom he did not take his eyes for one minute.

“You are mistaken in calling this eccentricity....”

“Oh, if it’s only that....”

“No, no, no, wait a little,” said Varvara Petrovna, who was obviously about to say a good deal and to speak with enthusiasm. As soon as Pyotr Stepanovitch noticed it, he was all attention.

“No, it was something higher than eccentricity, and I assure you, something sacred even! A proud man who has suffered humiliation early in life and reached the stage of ‘mockery’ as you so subtly called it—Prince Harry, in fact, to use the capital nickname Stepan Trofimovitch gave him then, which would have been perfectly correct if it were not that he is more like Hamlet, to my thinking at least.”

“Et vous avez raison,” Stepan Trofimovitch pronounced, impressively and with feeling.

“Thank you, Stepan Trofimovitch. I thank you particularly too for your unvarying faith in Nicolas, in the loftiness of his soul and of his destiny. That faith you have even strengthened in me when I was losing heart.”

“Chère, chère.” Stepan Trofimovitch was stepping forward, when he checked himself, reflecting that it was dangerous to interrupt.

“And if Nicolas had always had at his side” (Varvara Petrovna almost shouted) “a gentle Horatio, great in his humility—another excellent expression of yours, Stepan Trofimovitch—he might long ago have been saved from the sad and ‘sudden demon of irony,’ which has tormented him all his life. (‘The demon of irony’ was a wonderful expression of yours again, Stepan Trofimovitch.) But Nicolas has never had an Horatio

or an Ophelia. He had no one but his mother, and what can a mother do alone, and in such circumstances? Do you know, Pyotr Stepanovitch, it's perfectly comprehensible to me now that a being like Nicolas could be found even in such filthy haunts as you have described. I can so clearly picture now that 'mockery' of life. (A wonderfully subtle expression of yours!) That insatiable thirst of contrast, that gloomy background against which he stands out like a diamond, to use your comparison again, Pyotr Stepanovitch. And then he meets there a creature ill-treated by every one, crippled, half insane, and at the same time perhaps filled with noble feelings."

"H'm.... Yes, perhaps."

"And after that you don't understand that he's not laughing at her like every one. Oh, you people! You can't understand his defending her from insult, treating her with respect 'like a marquise' (this Kirillov must have an exceptionally deep understanding of men, though he didn't understand Nicolas). It was just this contrast, if you like, that led to the trouble. If the unhappy creature had been in different surroundings, perhaps she would never have been brought to entertain such a frantic delusion. Only a woman can understand it, Pyotr Stepanovitch, only a woman. How sorry I am that you ... not that you're not a woman, but that you can't be one just for the moment so as to understand."

"You mean in the sense that the worse things are the better it is. I understand, I understand, Varvara Petrovna. It's rather as it is in religion; the harder life is for a man or the more crushed and poor the people are, the more obstinately they dream of compensation in heaven; and if a hundred thousand priests are at work at it too, inflaming their delusion, and speculating on it, then ... I understand you, Varvara Petrovna, I assure you."

"That's not quite it; but tell me, ought Nicolas to have laughed at her and have treated her as the other clerks, in order to extinguish the delusion in this unhappy organism." (Why Varvara Petrovna used the word organism I couldn't understand.) "Can you really refuse to recognise the lofty compassion, the noble tremor of the whole organism with which Nicolas answered Kirillov: 'I do not laugh at her.' A noble, sacred answer!"

"Sublime," muttered Stepan Trofimovitch.

"And observe, too, that he is by no means so rich as you suppose. The money is mine and not his, and he would take next to nothing from me then."

"I understand, I understand all that, Varvara Petrovna," said Pyotr Stepanovitch, with a movement of some impatience.

“Oh, it’s my character! I recognise myself in Nicolas. I recognise that youthfulness, that liability to violent, tempestuous impulses. And if we ever come to be friends, Pyotr Stepanovitch, and, for my part, I sincerely hope we may, especially as I am so deeply indebted to you, then, perhaps you’ll understand....”

“Oh, I assure you, I hope for it too,” Pyotr Stepanovitch muttered jerkily.

“You’ll understand then the impulse which leads one in the blindness of generous feeling to take up a man who is unworthy of one in every respect, a man who utterly fails to understand one, who is ready to torture one at every opportunity and, in contradiction to everything, to exalt such a man into a sort of ideal, into a dream. To concentrate in him all one’s hopes, to bow down before him; to love him all one’s life, absolutely without knowing why—perhaps just because he was unworthy of it.... Oh, how I’ve suffered all my life, Pyotr Stepanovitch!”

Stepan Trofimovitch, with a look of suffering on his face, began trying to catch my eye, but I turned away in time.

“... And only lately, only lately—oh, how unjust I’ve been to Nicolas! ... You would not believe how they have been worrying me on all sides, all, all, enemies, and rascals, and friends, friends perhaps more than enemies. When the first contemptible anonymous letter was sent to me, Pyotr Stepanovitch, you’ll hardly believe it, but I had not strength enough to treat all this wickedness with contempt.... I shall never, never forgive myself for my weakness.”

“I had heard something of anonymous letters here already,” said Pyotr Stepanovitch, growing suddenly more lively, “and I’ll find out the writers of them, you may be sure.”

“But you can’t imagine the intrigues that have been got up here. They have even been pestering our poor Praskovya Ivanovna, and what reason can they have for worrying her? I was quite unfair to you to-day perhaps, my dear Praskovya Ivanovna,” she added in a generous impulse of kindliness, though not without a certain triumphant irony.

“Don’t say any more, my dear,” the other lady muttered reluctantly. “To my thinking we’d better make an end of all this; too much has been said.”

And again she looked timidly towards Liza, but the latter was looking at Pyotr Stepanovitch.

“And I intend now to adopt this poor unhappy creature, this insane woman who has lost everything and kept only her heart,” Varvara Petrovna exclaimed suddenly. “It’s a sacred duty I intend to carry out. I take her under my protection from this day.”

“And that will be a very good thing in one way,” Pyotr Stepanovitch cried, growing quite eager again. “Excuse me, I did not finish just now. It’s just the care of her I want to speak of. Would you believe it, that as soon as Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had gone (I’m beginning from where I left off, Varvara Petrovna), this gentleman here, this Mr. Lebyadkin, instantly imagined he had the right to dispose of the whole pension that was provided for his sister. And he did dispose of it. I don’t know exactly how it had been arranged by Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch at that time. But a year later, when he learned from abroad what had happened, he was obliged to make other arrangements. Again, I don’t know the details; he’ll tell you them himself. I only know that the interesting young person was placed somewhere in a remote nunnery, in very comfortable surroundings, but under friendly superintendence—you understand? But what do you think Mr. Lebyadkin made up his mind to do? He exerted himself to the utmost, to begin with, to find where his source of income, that is his sister, was hidden. Only lately he attained his object, took her from the nunnery, asserting some claim to her, and brought her straight here. Here he doesn’t feed her properly, beats her, and bullies her. As soon as by some means he gets a considerable sum from Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, he does nothing but get drunk, and instead of gratitude ends by impudently defying Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, making senseless demands, threatening him with proceedings if the pension is not paid straight into his hands. So he takes what is a voluntary gift from Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch as a tax—can you imagine it? Mr. Lebyadkin, is that all true that I have said just now?”

The captain, who had till that moment stood in silence looking down, took two rapid steps forward and turned crimson.

“Pyotr Stepanovitch, you’ve treated me cruelly,” he brought out abruptly.

“Why cruelly? How? But allow us to discuss the question of cruelty or gentleness later on. Now answer my first question; is it true all that I have said or not? If you consider it’s false you are at liberty to give your own version at once.”

“I … you know yourself, Pyotr Stepanovitch,” the captain muttered, but he could not go on and relapsed into silence. It must be observed that Pyotr Stepanovitch was sitting in an easy chair with one leg crossed over the other, while the captain stood before him in the most respectful attitude.

Lebyadkin’s hesitation seemed to annoy Pyotr Stepanovitch; a spasm of anger distorted his face.

“Then you have a statement you want to make?” he said, looking subtly at the captain. “Kindly speak. We’re waiting for you.”

“You know yourself Pyotr Stepanovitch, that I can’t say anything.”

“No, I don’t know it. It’s the first time I’ve heard it. Why can’t you speak?”

The captain was silent, with his eyes on the ground.

“Allow me to go, Pyotr Stepanovitch,” he brought out resolutely.

“No, not till you answer my question: is it all true that I’ve said?”

“It is true,” Lebyadkin brought out in a hollow voice, looking at his tormentor. Drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

“Is it *all* true?”

“It’s all true.”

“Have you nothing to add or to observe? If you think that we’ve been unjust, say so; protest, state your grievance aloud.”

“No, I think nothing.”

“Did you threaten Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch lately?”

“It was ... it was more drink than anything, Pyotr Stepanovitch.” He suddenly raised his head. “If family honour and undeserved disgrace cry out among men then—then is a man to blame?” he roared suddenly, forgetting himself as before.

“Are you sober now, Mr. Lebyadkin?”

Pyotr Stepanovitch looked at him penetratingly.

“I am ... sober.”

“What do you mean by family honour and undeserved disgrace?”

“I didn’t mean anybody, anybody at all. I meant myself,” the captain said, collapsing again.

“You seem to be very much offended by what I’ve said about you and your conduct? You are very irritable, Mr. Lebyadkin. But let me tell you I’ve hardly begun yet what I’ve got to say about your conduct, in its real sense. I’ll begin to discuss your conduct in its real sense. I shall begin, that may very well happen, but so far I’ve not begun, in a real sense.”

Lebyadkin started and stared wildly at Pyotr Stepanovitch.

“Pyotr Stepanovitch, I am just beginning to wake up.”

“H’m! And it’s I who have waked you up?”

“Yes, it’s you who have waked me, Pyotr Stepanovitch; and I’ve been asleep for the last four years with a storm-cloud hanging over me. May I withdraw at last, Pyotr Stepanovitch?”

“Now you may, unless Varvara Petrovna thinks it necessary ...”

But the latter dismissed him with a wave of her hand.

The captain bowed, took two steps towards the door, stopped suddenly, laid his hand on his heart, tried to say something, did not say it, and was moving quickly away. But in the doorway he came face to face with Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch; the latter stood aside. The captain shrank into himself, as it were, before him, and stood as though frozen to the spot, his eyes fixed upon him like a rabbit before a boa-constrictor. After a little pause Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch waved him aside with a slight motion of his hand, and walked into the drawing-room.

VII

He was cheerful and serene. Perhaps something very pleasant had happened to him, of which we knew nothing as yet; but he seemed particularly contented.

“Do you forgive me, Nicolas?” Varvara Petrovna hastened to say, and got up suddenly to meet him.

But Nicolas positively laughed.

“Just as I thought,” he said, good-humouredly and jestingly. “I see you know all about it already. When I had gone from here I reflected in the carriage that I ought at least to have told you the story instead of going off like that. But when I remembered that Pyotr Stepanovitch was still here, I thought no more of it.”

As he spoke he took a cursory look round.

“Pyotr Stepanovitch told us an old Petersburg episode in the life of a queer fellow,” Varvara Petrovna rejoined enthusiastically—“a mad and capricious fellow, though always lofty in his feelings, always chivalrous and noble....”

“Chivalrous? You don’t mean to say it’s come to that,” laughed Nicolas. “However, I’m very grateful to Pyotr Stepanovitch for being in such a hurry this time.” He exchanged a rapid glance with the latter. “You must know, maman, that Pyotr Stepanovitch is the universal peacemaker; that’s his part in life, his weakness, his hobby, and I particularly recommend him to you from that point of view. I can guess what a yarn he’s been

spinning. He's a great hand at spinning them; he has a perfect record-office in his head. He's such a realist, you know, that he can't tell a lie, and prefers truthfulness to effect ... except, of course, in special cases when effect is more important than truth." (As he said this he was still looking about him.) "So, you see clearly, maman, that it's not for you to ask my forgiveness, and if there's any craziness about this affair it's my fault, and it proves that, when all's said and done, I really am mad.... I must keep up my character here...."

Then he tenderly embraced his mother.

"In any case the subject has been fully discussed and is done with," he added, and there was a rather dry and resolute note in his voice. Varvara Petrovna understood that note, but her exaltation was not damped, quite the contrary.

"I didn't expect you for another month, Nicolas!"

"I will explain everything to you, maman, of course, but now ..."

And he went towards Praskovya Ivanovna.

But she scarcely turned her head towards him, though she had been completely overwhelmed by his first appearance. Now she had fresh anxieties to think of; at the moment the captain had stumbled upon Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch as he was going out, Liza had suddenly begun laughing—at first quietly and intermittently, but her laughter grew more and more violent, louder and more conspicuous. She flushed crimson, in striking contrast with her gloomy expression just before.

While Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was talking to Varvara Petrovna, she had twice beckoned to Mavriky Nikolaevitch as though she wanted to whisper something to him; but as soon as the young man bent down to her, she instantly burst into laughter; so that it seemed as though it was at poor Mavriky Nikolaevitch that she was laughing. She evidently tried to control herself, however, and put her handkerchief to her lips. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch turned to greet her with a most innocent and open-hearted air.

"Please excuse me," she responded, speaking quickly. "You ... you've seen Mavriky Nikolaevitch of course.... My goodness, how inexcusably tall you are, Mavriky Nikolaevitch!"

And laughter again, Mavriky Nikolaevitch was tall, but by no means inexcusably so.

"Have ... you been here long?" she muttered, restraining herself again, genuinely embarrassed though her eyes were shining.

“More than two hours,” answered Nicolas, looking at her intently. I may remark that he was exceptionally reserved and courteous, but that apart from his courtesy his expression was utterly indifferent, even listless.

“And where are you going to stay?”

“Here.”

Varvara Petrovna, too, was watching Liza, but she was suddenly struck by an idea.

“Where have you been all this time, Nicolas, more than two hours?” she said, going up to him. “The train comes in at ten o’clock.”

“I first took Pyotr Stepanovitch to Kirillov’s. I came across Pyotr Stepanovitch at Matveyev (three stations away), and we travelled together.”

“I had been waiting at Matveyev since sunrise,” put in Pyotr Stepanovitch. “The last carriages of our train ran off the rails in the night, and we nearly had our legs broken.”

“Your legs broken!” cried Liza. “Maman, maman, you and I meant to go to Matveyev last week, we should have broken our legs too!”

“Heaven have mercy on us!” cried Praskovya Ivanovna, crossing herself.

“Maman, maman, dear maman, you mustn’t be frightened if I break both my legs. It may so easily happen to me; you say yourself that I ride so recklessly every day. Mavriky Nikolaevitch, will you go about with me when I’m lame?” She began giggling again. “If it does happen I won’t let anyone take me about but you, you can reckon on that.... Well, suppose I break only one leg. Come, be polite, say you’ll think it a pleasure.”

“A pleasure to be crippled?” said Mavriky Nikolaevitch, frowning gravely.

“But then you’ll lead me about, only you and no one else.”

“Even then it’ll be you leading me about, Lizaveta Nikolaevna,” murmured Mavriky Nikolaevitch, even more gravely.

“Why, he’s trying to make a joke!” cried Liza, almost in dismay. “Mavriky Nikolaevitch, don’t you ever dare take to that! But what an egoist you are! I am certain that, to your credit, you’re slandering yourself. It will be quite the contrary; from morning till night you’ll assure me that I have become more charming for having lost my leg. There’s one insurmountable difficulty—you’re so fearfully tall, and when I’ve lost my leg I shall be so very tiny. How will you be able to take me on your arm; we shall look a strange couple!”

And she laughed hysterically. Her jests and insinuations were feeble, but she was not capable of considering the effect she was producing.

“Hysterics!” Pyotr Stepanovitch whispered to me. “A glass of water, make haste!”

He was right. A minute later every one was fussing about, water was brought. Liza embraced her mother, kissed her warmly, wept on her shoulder, then drawing back and looking her in the face she fell to laughing again. The mother too began whimpering. Varvara Petrovna made haste to carry them both off to her own rooms, going out by the same door by which Darya Pavlovna had come to us. But they were not away long, not more than four minutes.

I am trying to remember now every detail of these last moments of that memorable morning. I remember that when we were left without the ladies (except Darya Pavlovna, who had not moved from her seat), Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch made the round, greeting us all except Shatov, who still sat in his corner, his head more bowed than ever. Stepan Trofimovitch was beginning something very witty to Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, but the latter turned away hurriedly to Darya Pavlovna. But before he reached her, Pyotr Stepanovitch caught him and drew him away, almost violently, towards the window, where he whispered something quickly to him, apparently something very important to judge by the expression of his face and the gestures that accompanied the whisper. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch listened inattentively and listlessly with his official smile, and at last even impatiently, and seemed all the time on the point of breaking away. He moved away from the window just as the ladies came back. Varvara Petrovna made Liza sit down in the same seat as before, declaring that she must wait and rest another ten minutes; and that the fresh air would perhaps be too much for her nerves at once. She was looking after Liza with great devotion, and sat down beside her. Pyotr Stepanovitch, now disengaged, skipped up to them at once, and broke into a rapid and lively flow of conversation. At that point Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch at last went up to Darya Pavlovna with his leisurely step. Dasha began stirring uneasily at his approach, and jumped up quickly in evident embarrassment, flushing all over her face.

“I believe one may congratulate you … or is it too soon?” he brought out with a peculiar line in his face.

Dasha made him some answer, but it was difficult to catch it.

“Forgive my indiscretion,” he added, raising his voice, “but you know I was expressly informed. Did you know about it?”

“Yes, I know that you were expressly informed.”

“But I hope I have not done any harm by my congratulations,” he laughed. “And if Stepan Trofimovitch ...”

“What, what’s the congratulation about?” Pyotr Stepanovitch suddenly skipped up to them. “What are you being congratulated about, Darya Pavlovna? Bah! Surely that’s not it? Your blush proves I’ve guessed right. And indeed, what else does one congratulate our charming and virtuous young ladies on? And what congratulations make them blush most readily? Well, accept mine too, then, if I’ve guessed right! And pay up. Do you remember when we were in Switzerland you bet you’d never be married.... Oh, yes, apropos of Switzerland—what am I thinking about? Only fancy, that’s half what I came about, and I was almost forgetting it. Tell me,” he turned quickly to Stepan Trofimovitch, “when are you going to Switzerland?”

“I ... to Switzerland?” Stepan Trofimovitch replied, wondering and confused.

“What? Aren’t you going? Why you’re getting married, too, you wrote?”

“Pierre!” cried Stepan Trofimovitch.

“Well, why Pierre?... You see, if that’ll please you, I’ve flown here to announce that I’m not at all against it, since you were set on having my opinion as quickly as possible; and if, indeed,” he pattered on, “you want to ‘be saved,’ as you wrote, beseeching my help in the same letter, I am at your service again. Is it true that he is going to be married, Varvara Petrovna?” He turned quickly to her. “I hope I’m not being indiscreet; he writes himself that the whole town knows it and every one’s congratulating him, so that, to avoid it he only goes out at night. I’ve got his letters in my pocket. But would you believe it, Varvara Petrovna, I can’t make head or tail of it? Just tell me one thing, Stepan Trofimovitch, are you to be congratulated or are you to be ‘saved’? You wouldn’t believe it; in one line he’s despairing and in the next he’s most joyful. To begin with he begs my forgiveness; well, of course, that’s their way ... though it must be said; fancy, the man’s only seen me twice in his life and then by accident. And suddenly now, when he’s going to be married for the third time, he imagines that this is a breach of some sort of parental duty to me, and entreats me a thousand miles away not to be angry and to allow him to. Please don’t be hurt, Stepan Trofimovitch. It’s characteristic of your generation, I take a broad view of it, and don’t blame you. And let’s admit it does you honour and all the rest. But the point is again that I don’t see the point of it. There’s something about some sort of ‘sins in Switzerland.’ ‘I’m getting married,’ he says, ‘for my sins or on account of the ‘sins’ of another,’ or whatever it is—‘sins’ anyway. ‘The girl,’ says he, ‘is a pearl and a diamond,’ and, well, of course, he’s ‘unworthy of her’; it’s their way of talking; but on account of some sins or circumstances ‘he is obliged to lead her to the altar, and go to Switzerland, and

therefore abandon everything and fly to save me.' Do you understand anything of all that? However ... however, I notice from the expression of your faces"—(he turned about with the letter in his hand looking with an innocent smile into the faces of the company)—"that, as usual, I seem to have put my foot in it through my stupid way of being open, or, as Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch says, 'being in a hurry.' I thought, of course, that we were all friends here, that is, your friends, Stepan Trofimovitch, your friends. I am really a stranger, and I see ... and I see that you all know something, and that just that something I don't know." He still went on looking about him.

"So Stepan Trofimovitch wrote to you that he was getting married for the 'sins of another committed in Switzerland,' and that you were to fly here 'to save him,' in those very words?" said Varvara Petrovna, addressing him suddenly. Her face was yellow and distorted, and her lips were twitching.

"Well, you see, if there's anything I've not understood," said Pyotr Stepanovitch, as though in alarm, talking more quickly than ever, "it's his fault, of course, for writing like that. Here's the letter. You know, Varvara Petrovna, his letters are endless and incessant, and, you know, for the last two or three months there has been letter upon letter, till, I must own, at last I sometimes didn't read them through. Forgive me, Stepan Trofimovitch, for my foolish confession, but you must admit, please, that, though you addressed them to me, you wrote them more for posterity, so that you really can't mind.... Come, come, don't be offended; we're friends, anyway. But this letter, Varvara Petrovna, this letter, I did read through. These 'sins'—these 'sins of another'—are probably some little sins of our own, and I don't mind betting very innocent ones, though they have suddenly made us take a fancy to work up a terrible story, with a glamour of the heroic about it; and it's just for the sake of that glamour we've got it up. You see there's something a little lame about our accounts—it must be confessed, in the end. We've a great weakness for cards, you know.... But this is unnecessary, quite unnecessary, I'm sorry, I chatter too much. But upon my word, Varvara Petrovna, he gave me a fright, and I really was half prepared to save him. He really made me feel ashamed. Did he expect me to hold a knife to his throat, or what? Am I such a merciless creditor? He writes something here of a dowry.... But are you really going to get married, Stepan Trofimovitch? That would be just like you, to say a lot for the sake of talking. Ach, Varvara Petrovna, I'm sure you must be blaming me now, and just for my way of talking too...."

"On the contrary, on the contrary, I see that you are driven out of all patience, and, no doubt you have had good reason," Varvara Petrovna answered spitefully. She had listened with spiteful enjoyment to all the "candid outbursts" of Pyotr Stepanovitch,

who was obviously playing a part (what part I did not know then, but it was unmistakable, and over-acted indeed).

“On the contrary,” she went on, “I’m only too grateful to you for speaking; but for you I might not have known of it. My eyes are opened for the first time for twenty years. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, you said just now that you had been expressly informed; surely Stepan Trofimovitch hasn’t written to you in the same style?”

“I did get a very harmless and ... and ... very generous letter from him....”

“You hesitate, you pick out your words. That’s enough! Stepan Trofimovitch, I request a great favour from you.” She suddenly turned to him with flashing eyes. “Kindly leave us at once, and never set foot in my house again.”

I must beg the reader to remember her recent “exaltation,” which had not yet passed. It’s true that Stepan Trofimovitch was terribly to blame! But what was a complete surprise to me then was the wonderful dignity of his bearing under his son’s “accusation,” which he had never thought of interrupting, and before Varvara Petrovna’s “denunciation.” How did he come by such spirit? I only found out one thing, that he had certainly been deeply wounded at his first meeting with Petrusha, by the way he had embraced him. It was a deep and genuine grief; at least in his eyes and to his heart. He had another grief at the same time, that is the poignant consciousness of having acted contemptibly. He admitted this to me afterwards with perfect openness. And you know real genuine sorrow will sometimes make even a phenomenally frivolous, unstable man solid and stoical; for a short time at any rate; what’s more, even fools are by genuine sorrow turned into wise men, also only for a short time of course; it is characteristic of sorrow. And if so, what might not happen with a man like Stepan Trofimovitch? It worked a complete transformation—though also only for a time, of course.

He bowed with dignity to Varvara Petrovna without uttering a word (there was nothing else left for him to do, indeed). He was on the point of going out without a word, but could not refrain from approaching Darya Pavlovna. She seemed to foresee that he would do so, for she began speaking of her own accord herself, in utter dismay, as though in haste to anticipate him.

“Please, Stepan Trofimovitch, for God’s sake, don’t say anything,” she began, speaking with haste and excitement, with a look of pain in her face, hurriedly stretching out her hands to him. “Be sure that I still respect you as much ... and think just as highly of you, and ... think well of me too, Stepan Trofimovitch, that will mean a great deal to me, a great deal....”

Stepan Trofimovitch made her a very, very low bow.

“It’s for you to decide, Darya Pavlovna; you know that you are perfectly free in the whole matter! You have been, and you are now, and you always will be,” Varvara Petrovna concluded impressively.

“Bah! Now I understand it all!” cried Pyotr Stepanovitch, slapping himself on the forehead. “But ... but what a position I am put in by all this! Darya Pavlovna, please forgive me!... What do you call your treatment of me, eh?” he said, addressing his father.

“Pierre, you might speak to me differently, mightn’t you, my boy,” Stepan Trofimovitch observed quite quietly.

“Don’t cry out, please,” said Pierre, with a wave of his hand. “Believe me, it’s all your sick old nerves, and crying out will do no good at all. You’d better tell me instead, why didn’t you warn me since you might have supposed I should speak out at the first chance?”

Stepan Trofimovitch looked searchingly at him.

“Pierre, you who know so much of what goes on here, can you really have known nothing of this business and have heard nothing about it?”

“What? What a set! So it’s not enough to be a child in your old age, you must be a spiteful child too! Varvara Petrovna, did you hear what he said?”

There was a general outcry; but then suddenly an incident took place which no one could have anticipated.

VIII

First of all I must mention that, for the last two or three minutes Lizaveta Nikolaevna had seemed to be possessed by a new impulse; she was whispering something hurriedly to her mother, and to Mavriky Nikolaevitch, who bent down to listen. Her face was agitated, but at the same time it had a look of resolution. At last she got up from her seat in evident haste to go away, and hurried her mother whom Mavriky Nikolaevitch began helping up from her low chair. But it seemed they were not destined to get away without seeing everything to the end.

Shatov, who had been forgotten by every one in his corner (not far from Lizaveta Nikolaevna), and who did not seem to know himself why he went on sitting there, got up from his chair, and walked, without haste, with resolute steps right across the room to Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, looking him straight in the face. The latter noticed him

approaching at some distance, and faintly smiled, but when Shatov was close to him he left off smiling.

When Shatov stood still facing him with his eyes fixed on him, and without uttering a word, every one suddenly noticed it and there was a general hush; Pyotr Stepanovitch was the last to cease speaking. Liza and her mother were standing in the middle of the room. So passed five seconds; the look of haughty astonishment was followed by one of anger on Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's face; he scowled....

And suddenly Shatov swung his long, heavy arm, and with all his might struck him a blow in the face. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch staggered violently.

Shatov struck the blow in a peculiar way, not at all after the conventional fashion (if one may use such an expression). It was not a slap with the palm of his hand, but a blow with the whole fist, and it was a big, heavy, bony fist covered with red hairs and freckles. If the blow had struck the nose, it would have broken it. But it hit him on the cheek, and struck the left corner of the lip and the upper teeth, from which blood streamed at once.

I believe there was a sudden scream, perhaps Varvara Petrovna screamed—that I don't remember, because there was a dead hush again; the whole scene did not last more than ten seconds, however.

Yet a very great deal happened in those seconds.

I must remind the reader again that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's was one of those natures that know nothing of fear. At a duel he could face the pistol of his opponent with indifference, and could take aim and kill with brutal coolness. If anyone had slapped him in the face, I should have expected him not to challenge his assailant to a duel, but to murder him on the spot. He was just one of those characters, and would have killed the man, knowing very well what he was doing, and without losing his self-control. I fancy, indeed, that he never was liable to those fits of blind rage which deprive a man of all power of reflection. Even when overcome with intense anger, as he sometimes was, he was always able to retain complete self-control, and therefore to realise that he would certainly be sent to penal servitude for murdering a man not in a duel; nevertheless, he'd have killed any one who insulted him, and without the faintest hesitation.

I have been studying Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch of late, and through special circumstances I know a great many facts about him now, at the time I write. I should compare him, perhaps, with some gentlemen of the past of whom legendary traditions are still perceived among us. We are told, for instance, about the Decabrist

L—n, that he was always seeking for danger, that he revelled in the sensation, and that it had become a craving of his nature; that in his youth he had rushed into duels for nothing; that in Siberia he used to go to kill bears with nothing but a knife; that in the Siberian forests he liked to meet with runaway convicts, who are, I may observe in passing, more formidable than bears. There is no doubt that these legendary gentlemen were capable of a feeling of fear, and even to an extreme degree, perhaps, or they would have been a great deal quieter, and a sense of danger would never have become a physical craving with them. But the conquest of fear was what fascinated them. The continual ecstasy of vanquishing and the consciousness that no one could vanquish them was what attracted them. The same L—n struggled with hunger for some time before he was sent into exile, and toiled to earn his daily bread simply because he did not care to comply with the requests of his rich father, which he considered unjust. So his conception of struggle was many-sided, and he did not prize stoicism and strength of character only in duels and bear-fights.

But many years have passed since those times, and the nervous, exhausted, complex character of the men of to-day is incompatible with the craving for those direct and unmixed sensations which were so sought after by some restlessly active gentlemen of the good old days. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch would, perhaps, have looked down on L—n, and have called him a boastful cock-a-hoop coward; it's true he wouldn't have expressed himself aloud. Stavrogin would have shot his opponent in a duel, and would have faced a bear if necessary, and would have defended himself from a brigand in the forest as successfully and as fearlessly as L—n, but it would be without the slightest thrill of enjoyment, languidly, listlessly, even with ennui and entirely from unpleasant necessity. In anger, of course, there has been a progress compared with L—n, even compared with Lermontov. There was perhaps more malignant anger in Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch than in both put together, but it was a calm, cold, if one may so say, *reasonable* anger, and therefore the most revolting and most terrible possible. I repeat again, I considered him then, and I still consider him (now that everything is over), a man who, if he received a slap in the face, or any equivalent insult, would be certain to kill his assailant at once, on the spot, without challenging him.

Yet, in the present case, what happened was something different and amazing.

He had scarcely regained his balance after being almost knocked over in this humiliating way, and the horrible, as it were, sodden, thud of the blow in the face had scarcely died away in the room when he seized Shatov by the shoulders with both hands, but at once, almost at the same instant, pulled both hands away and clasped them behind his back. He did not speak, but looked at Shatov, and turned as white as his shirt. But, strange to say, the light in his eyes seemed to die out. Ten seconds later

his eyes looked cold, and I'm sure I'm not lying—calm. Only he was terribly pale. Of course I don't know what was passing within the man, I saw only his exterior. It seems to me that if a man should snatch up a bar of red-hot iron and hold it tight in his hand to test his fortitude, and after struggling for ten seconds with insufferable pain end by overcoming it, such a man would, I fancy, go through something like what Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was enduring during those ten seconds.

Shatov was the first to drop his eyes, and evidently because he was unable to go on facing him; then he turned slowly and walked out of the room, but with a very different step. He withdrew quietly, with peculiar awkwardness, with his shoulders hunched, his head hanging as though he were inwardly pondering something. I believe he was whispering something. He made his way to the door carefully, without stumbling against anything or knocking anything over; he opened the door a very little way, and squeezed through almost sideways. As he went out his shock of hair standing on end at the back of his head was particularly noticeable.

Then first of all one fearful scream was heard. I saw Lizaveta Nikolaevna seize her mother by the shoulder and Mavriky Nikolaevitch by the arm and make two or three violent efforts to draw them out of the room. But she suddenly uttered a shriek, and fell full length on the floor, fainting. I can hear the thud of her head on the carpet to this day.

PART II

CHAPTER I. NIGHT

I

EIGHT DAYS HAD PASSED. Now that it is all over and I am writing a record of it, we know all about it; but at the time we knew nothing, and it was natural that many things should seem strange to us: Stepan Trofimovitch and I, anyway, shut ourselves up for the first part of the time, and looked on with dismay from a distance. I did, indeed, go about here and there, and, as before, brought him various items of news, without which he could not exist.

I need hardly say that there were rumours of the most varied kind going about the town in regard to the blow that Stavrogin had received, Lizaveta Nikolaevna's fainting fit, and all that happened on that Sunday. But what we wondered was, through whom the story had got about so quickly and so accurately. Not one of the persons present had any need to give away the secret of what had happened, or interest to serve by doing so.

The servants had not been present. Lebyadkin was the only one who might have chattered, not so much from spite, for he had gone out in great alarm (and fear of an enemy destroys spite against him), but simply from incontinence of speech. But Lebyadkin and his sister had disappeared next day, and nothing could be heard of them. There was no trace of them at Filipov's house, they had moved, no one knew where, and seemed to have vanished. Shatov, of whom I wanted to inquire about Marya Timofyevna, would not open his door, and I believe sat locked up in his room for the whole of those eight days, even discontinuing his work in the town. He would not see me. I went to see him on Tuesday and knocked at his door. I got no answer, but being convinced by unmistakable evidence that he was at home, I knocked a second time. Then, jumping up, apparently from his bed, he strode to the door and shouted at the top of his voice:

"Shatov is not at home!"

With that I went away.

Stepan Trofimovitch and I, not without dismay at the boldness of the supposition, though we tried to encourage one another, reached at last a conclusion: we made up our mind that the only person who could be responsible for spreading these rumours was Pyotr Stepanovitch, though he himself not long after assured his father that he had found the story on every one's lips, especially at the club, and that the governor and his wife were familiar with every detail of it. What is even more remarkable is that the next day, Monday evening, I met Liputin, and he knew every word that had been passed, so that he must have heard it first-hand. Many of the ladies (and some of the leading ones) were very inquisitive about the "mysterious cripple," as they called Marya Timofyevna. There were some, indeed, who were anxious to see her and make her acquaintance, so the intervention of the persons who had been in such haste to conceal the Lebyadkins was timely. But Lizaveta Nikolaevna's fainting certainly took the foremost place in the story, and "all society" was interested, if only because it directly concerned Yulia Mihailovna, as the kinswoman and patroness of the young lady. And what was there they didn't say! What increased the gossip was the mysterious position of affairs; both houses were obstinately closed; Lizaveta

Nikolaevna, so they said, was in bed with brain fever. The same thing was asserted of Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, with the revolting addition of a tooth knocked out and a swollen face. It was even whispered in corners that there would soon be murder among us, that Stavrogin was not the man to put up with such an insult, and that he would kill Shatov, but with the secrecy of a Corsican vendetta. People liked this idea, but the majority of our young people listened with contempt, and with an air of the most nonchalant indifference, which was, of course, assumed. The old hostility to Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch in the town was in general strikingly manifest. Even sober-minded people were eager to throw blame on him though they could not have said for what. It was whispered that he had ruined Lizaveta Nikolaevna's reputation, and that there had been an intrigue between them in Switzerland. Cautious people, of course, restrained themselves, but all listened with relish. There were other things said, though not in public, but in private, on rare occasions and almost in secret, extremely strange things, to which I only refer to warn my readers of them with a view to the later events of my story. Some people, with knitted brows, said, God knows on what foundation, that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had some special business in our province, that he had, through Count K., been brought into touch with exalted circles in Petersburg, that he was even, perhaps, in government service, and might almost be said to have been furnished with some sort of commission from someone. When very sober-minded and sensible people smiled at this rumour, observing very reasonably that a man always mixed up with scandals, and who was beginning his career among us with a swollen face did not look like a government official, they were told in a whisper that he was employed not in the official, but, so to say, the confidential service, and that in such cases it was essential to be as little like an official as possible. This remark produced a sensation; we knew that the Zemstvo of our province was the object of marked attention in the capital. I repeat, these were only flitting rumours that disappeared for a time when Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch first came among us. But I may observe that many of the rumours were partly due to a few brief but malicious words, vaguely and disconnectedly dropped at the club by a gentleman who had lately returned from Petersburg. This was a retired captain in the guards, Artemy Pavlovitch Gaganov. He was a very large landowner in our province and district, a man used to the society of Petersburg, and a son of the late Pavel Pavlovitch Gaganov, the venerable old man with whom Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had, over four years before, had the extraordinarily coarse and sudden encounter which I have described already in the beginning of my story.

It immediately became known to every one that Yulia Mihailovna had made a special call on Varvara Petrovna, and had been informed at the entrance: "Her honour was too

unwell to see visitors." It was known, too, that Yulia Mihailovna sent a message two days later to inquire after Varvara Petrovna's health. At last she began "defending" Varvara Petrovna everywhere, of course only in the loftiest sense, that is, in the vaguest possible way. She listened coldly and sternly to the hurried remarks made at first about the scene on Sunday, so that during the later days they were not renewed in her presence. So that the belief gained ground everywhere that Yulia Mihailovna knew not only the whole of the mysterious story but all its secret significance to the smallest detail, and not as an outsider, but as one taking part in it. I may observe, by the way, that she was already gradually beginning to gain that exalted influence among us for which she was so eager and which she was certainly struggling to win, and was already beginning to see herself "surrounded by a circle." A section of society recognised her practical sense and tact ... but of that later. Her patronage partly explained Pyotr Stepanovitch's rapid success in our society—a success with which Stepan Trofimovitch was particularly impressed at the time.

We possibly exaggerated it. To begin with, Pyotr Stepanovitch seemed to make acquaintance almost instantly with the whole town within the first four days of his arrival. He only arrived on Sunday; and on Tuesday I saw him in a carriage with Artemy Pavlovitch Gaganov, a man who was proud, irritable, and supercilious, in spite of his good breeding, and who was not easy to get on with. At the governor's, too, Pyotr Stepanovitch met with a warm welcome, so much so that he was at once on an intimate footing, like a young friend, treated, so to say, affectionately. He dined with Yulia Mihailovna almost every day. He had made her acquaintance in Switzerland, but there was certainly something curious about the rapidity of his success in the governor's house. In any case he was reputed, whether truly or not, to have been at one time a revolutionist abroad, he had had something to do with some publications and some congresses abroad, "which one can prove from the newspapers," to quote the malicious remark of Alyosha Telyatnikov, who had also been once a young friend affectionately treated in the house of the late governor, but was now, alas, a clerk on the retired list. But the fact was unmistakable: the former revolutionist, far from being hindered from returning to his beloved Fatherland, seemed almost to have been encouraged to do so, so perhaps there was nothing in it. Liputin whispered to me once that there were rumours that Pyotr Stepanovitch had once professed himself penitent, and on his return had been pardoned on mentioning certain names and so, perhaps, had succeeded in expiating his offence, by promising to be of use to the government in the future. I repeated these malignant phrases to Stepan Trofimovitch, and although the latter was in such a state that he was hardly capable of reflection, he pondered profoundly. It turned out later that Pyotr Stepanovitch had come to us with a very

influential letter of recommendation, that he had, at any rate, brought one to the governor's wife from a very important old lady in Petersburg, whose husband was one of the most distinguished old dignitaries in the capital. This old lady, who was Yulia Mihailovna's godmother, mentioned in her letter that Count K. knew Pyotr Stepanovitch very well through Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, made much of him, and thought him "a very excellent young man in spite of his former errors." Yulia Mihailovna set the greatest value on her relations with the "higher spheres," which were few and maintained with difficulty, and was, no doubt, pleased to get the old lady's letter, but still there was something peculiar about it. She even forced her husband upon a familiar footing with Pyotr Stepanovitch, so much so that Mr. von Lembke complained of it ... but of that, too, later. I may mention, too, that the great author was also favourably disposed to Pyotr Stepanovitch, and at once invited him to go and see him. Such alacrity on the part of a man so puffed up with conceit stung Stepan Trofimovitch more painfully than anything; but I put a different interpretation on it. In inviting a nihilist to see him, Mr. Karmazinov, no doubt, had in view his relations with the progressives of the younger generation in both capitals. The great author trembled nervously before the revolutionary youth of Russia, and imagining, in his ignorance, that the future lay in their hands, fawned upon them in a despicable way, chiefly because they paid no attention to him whatever.

II

Pyotr Stepanovitch ran round to see his father twice, but unfortunately I was absent on both occasions. He visited him for the first time only on Wednesday, that is, not till the fourth day after their first meeting, and then only on business. Their difficulties over the property were settled, by the way, without fuss or publicity. Varvara Petrovna took it all on herself, and paid all that was owing, taking over the land, of course, and only informed Stepan Trofimovitch that it was all settled and her butler, Alexey Yegorytch, was, by her authorisation, bringing him something to sign. This Stepan Trofimovitch did, in silence, with extreme dignity. Apropos of his dignity, I may mention that I hardly recognised my old friend during those days. He behaved as he had never done before; became amazingly taciturn and had not even written one letter to Varvara Petrovna since Sunday, which seemed to me almost a miracle. What's more, he had become quite calm. He had fastened upon a final and decisive idea which gave him tranquillity. That was evident. He had hit upon this idea, and sat still, expecting something. At first, however, he was ill, especially on Monday. He had an attack of his summer cholera. He could not remain all that time without news either; but as soon as I departed from the statement of facts, and began discussing the case in itself, and formulated any theory, he at once gesticulated to me to stop. But both his interviews

with his son had a distressing effect on him, though they did not shake his determination. After each interview he spent the whole day lying on the sofa with a handkerchief soaked in vinegar on his head. But he continued to remain calm in the deepest sense.

Sometimes, however, he did not hinder my speaking. Sometimes, too, it seemed to me that the mysterious determination he had taken seemed to be failing him and he appeared to be struggling with a new, seductive stream of ideas. That was only at moments, but I made a note of it. I suspected that he was longing to assert himself again, to come forth from his seclusion, to show fight, to struggle to the last.

"*Cher,* I could crush them!" broke from him on Thursday evening after his second interview with Pyotr Stepanovitch, when he lay stretched on the sofa with his head wrapped in a towel.

Till that moment he had not uttered one word all day.

"Fils, fils, cher," and so on, "I agree all those expressions are nonsense, kitchen talk, and so be it. I see it for myself. I never gave him food or drink, I sent him a tiny baby from Berlin to X province by post, and all that, I admit it.... 'You gave me neither food nor drink, and sent me by post,' he says, 'and what's more you've robbed me here.'"

"'But you unhappy boy,' I cried to him, 'my heart has been aching for you all my life; though I did send you by post.' *Il rit.*"

"But I admit it. I admit it, granted it was by post," he concluded, almost in delirium.

"Passons," he began again, five minutes later. "I don't understand Turgenev. That Bazarov of his is a fictitious figure, it does not exist anywhere. The fellows themselves were the first to disown him as unlike anyone. That Bazarov is a sort of indistinct mixture of Nozdryov and Byron, *c'est le mot.* Look at them attentively: they caper about and squeal with joy like puppies in the sun. They are happy, they are victorious! What is there of Byron in them!... and with that, such ordinariness! What a low-bred, irritable vanity! What an abject craving to *faire du bruit autour de son nom,* without noticing that *son nom*.... Oh, it's a caricature! 'Surely,' I cried to him, 'you don't want to offer yourself just as you are as a substitute for Christ?' *Il rit. Il rit beaucoup. Il rit trop.* He has a strange smile. His mother had not a smile like that. *Il rit toujours*."

Silence followed again.

"They are cunning; they were acting in collusion on Sunday," he blurted out suddenly....

“Oh, not a doubt of it,” I cried, pricking up my ears. “It was a got-up thing and it was too transparent, and so badly acted.”

“I don’t mean that. Do you know that it was all too transparent on purpose, that those … who had to, might understand it. Do you understand that?”

“I don’t understand.”

“*Tant mieux; passons*. I am very irritable to-day.”

“But why have you been arguing with him, Stepan Trofimovitch?” I asked him reproachfully.

“*Je voulais convertir*—you’ll laugh of course—*cette pauvre* auntie, *elle entendra de belles choses!* Oh, my dear boy, would you believe it. I felt like a patriot. I always recognised that I was a Russian, however … a genuine Russian must be like you and me. *Il y a là dedans quelque chose d’aveugle et de louche.*”

“Not a doubt of it,” I assented.

“My dear, the real truth always sounds improbable, do you know that? To make truth sound probable you must always mix in some falsehood with it. Men have always done so. Perhaps there’s something in it that passes our understanding. What do you think: is there something we don’t understand in that triumphant squeal? I should like to think there was. I should like to think so.”

I did not speak. He, too, was silent for a long time. “They say that French cleverness …” he babbled suddenly, as though in a fever … “that’s false, it always has been. Why libel French cleverness? It’s simply Russian indolence, our degrading impotence to produce ideas, our revolting parasitism in the rank of nations. *Ils sont tout simplement des paresseux,* and not French cleverness. Oh, the Russians ought to be extirpated for the good of humanity, like noxious parasites! We’ve been striving for something utterly, utterly different. I can make nothing of it. I have given up understanding. ‘Do you understand,’ I cried to him, ‘that if you have the guillotine in the foreground of your programme and are so enthusiastic about it too, it’s simply because nothing’s easier than cutting off heads, and nothing’s harder than to have an idea. *Vous êtes des paresseux! Votre drapeau est un guenille, une impuissance.* It’s those carts, or, what was it?… the rumble of the carts carrying bread to humanity being more important than the Sistine Madonna, or, what’s the saying?… *une bêtise dans ce genre.* Don’t you understand, don’t you understand,’ I said to him, ‘that unhappiness is just as necessary to man as happiness.’ *Il rit.* ‘All you do is to make a *bon mot,’* he said, ‘with your limbs snug on a velvet sofa.’ … (He used a coarser expression.) And this habit of

addressing a father so familiarly is very nice when father and son are on good terms, but what do you think of it when they are abusing one another?"

We were silent again for a minute.

"Cher," he concluded at last, getting up quickly, "do you know this is bound to end in something?"

"Of course," said I.

"*Vous ne comprenez pas. Passons.* But ... usually in our world things come to nothing, but this will end in something; it's bound to, it's bound to!"

He got up, and walked across the room in violent emotion, and coming back to the sofa sank on to it exhausted.

On Friday morning, Pyotr Stepanovitch went off somewhere in the neighbourhood, and remained away till Monday. I heard of his departure from Liputin, and in the course of conversation I learned that the Lebyadkins, brother and sister, had moved to the riverside quarter. "I moved them," he added, and, dropping the Lebyadkins, he suddenly announced to me that Lizaveta Nikolaevna was going to marry Mavriky Nikolaevitch, that, although it had not been announced, the engagement was a settled thing. Next day I met Lizaveta Nikolaevna out riding with Mavriky Nikolaevitch; she was out for the first time after her illness. She beamed at me from the distance, laughed, and nodded in a very friendly way. I told all this to Stepan Trofimovitch; he paid no attention, except to the news about the Lebyadkins.

And now, having described our enigmatic position throughout those eight days during which we knew nothing, I will pass on to the description of the succeeding incidents of my chronicle, writing, so to say, with full knowledge, and describing things as they became known afterwards, and are clearly seen to-day. I will begin with the eighth day after that Sunday, that is, the Monday evening—for in reality a "new scandal" began with that evening.

III

It was seven o'clock in the evening. Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was sitting alone in his study—the room he had been fond of in old days. It was lofty, carpeted with rugs, and contained somewhat heavy old-fashioned furniture. He was sitting on the sofa in the corner, dressed as though to go out, though he did not seem to be intending to do so. On the table before him stood a lamp with a shade. The sides and corners of the big room were left in shadow. His eyes looked dreamy and concentrated, not altogether tranquil; his face looked tired and had grown a little thinner. He really was ill with a

swollen face; but the story of a tooth having been knocked out was an exaggeration. One had been loosened, but it had grown into its place again: he had had a cut on the inner side of the upper lip, but that, too, had healed. The swelling on his face had lasted all the week simply because the invalid would not have a doctor, and instead of having the swelling lanced had waited for it to go down. He would not hear of a doctor, and would scarcely allow even his mother to come near him, and then only for a moment, once a day, and only at dusk, after it was dark and before lights had been brought in. He did not receive Pyotr Stepanovitch either, though the latter ran round to Varvara Petrovna's two or three times a day so long as he remained in the town. And now, at last, returning on the Monday morning after his three days' absence, Pyotr Stepanovitch made a circuit of the town, and, after dining at Yulia Mihailovna's, came at last in the evening to Varvara Petrovna, who was impatiently expecting him. The interdict had been removed, Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was "at home." Varvara Petrovna herself led the visitor to the door of the study; she had long looked forward to their meeting, and Pyotr Stepanovitch had promised to run to her and repeat what passed. She knocked timidly at Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's door, and getting no answer ventured to open the door a couple of inches.

"Nicolas, may I bring Pyotr Stepanovitch in to see you?" she asked, in a soft and restrained voice, trying to make out her son's face behind the lamp.

"You can—you can, of course you can," Pyotr Stepanovitch himself cried out, loudly and gaily. He opened the door with his hand and went in.

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had not heard the knock at the door, and only caught his mother's timid question, and had not had time to answer it. Before him, at that moment, there lay a letter he had just read over, which he was pondering deeply. He started, hearing Pyotr Stepanovitch's sudden outburst, and hurriedly put the letter under a paper-weight, but did not quite succeed; a corner of the letter and almost the whole envelope showed.

"I called out on purpose that you might be prepared," Pyotr Stepanovitch said hurriedly, with surprising naïveté, running up to the table, and instantly staring at the corner of the letter, which peeped out from beneath the paper-weight.

"And no doubt you had time to see how I hid the letter I had just received, under the paper-weight," said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch calmly, without moving from his place.

"A letter? Bless you and your letters, what are they to do with me?" cried the visitor. "But ... what does matter ..." he whispered again, turning to the door, which was by now closed, and nodding his head in that direction.

“She never listens,” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch observed coldly.

“What if she did overhear?” cried Pyotr Stepanovitch, raising his voice cheerfully, and settling down in an arm-chair. “I’ve nothing against that, only I’ve come here now to speak to you alone. Well, at last I’ve succeeded in getting at you. First of all, how are you? I see you’re getting on splendidly. To-morrow you’ll show yourself again—eh?”

“Perhaps.”

“Set their minds at rest. Set mine at rest at last.” He gesticulated violently with a jocose and amiable air. “If only you knew what nonsense I’ve had to talk to them. You know, though.” He laughed.

“I don’t know everything. I only heard from my mother that you’ve been … very active.”

“Oh, well, I’ve said nothing definite,” Pyotr Stepanovitch flared up at once, as though defending himself from an awful attack. “I simply trotted out Shatov’s wife; you know, that is, the rumours of your liaison in Paris, which accounted, of course, for what happened on Sunday. You’re not angry?”

“I’m sure you’ve done your best.”

“Oh, that’s just what I was afraid of. Though what does that mean, ‘done your best’? That’s a reproach, isn’t it? You always go straight for things, though…. What I was most afraid of, as I came here, was that you wouldn’t go straight for the point.”

“I don’t want to go straight for anything,” said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch with some irritation. But he laughed at once.

“I didn’t mean that, I didn’t mean that, don’t make a mistake,” cried Pyotr Stepanovitch, waving his hands, rattling his words out like peas, and at once relieved at his companion’s irritability. “I’m not going to worry you with *our* business, especially in your present position. I’ve only come about Sunday’s affair, and only to arrange the most necessary steps, because, you see, it’s impossible. I’ve come with the frankest explanations which I stand in more need of than you—so much for your vanity, but at the same time it’s true. I’ve come to be open with you from this time forward.”

“Then you have not been open with me before?”

“You know that yourself. I’ve been cunning with you many times … you smile; I’m very glad of that smile as a prelude to our explanation. I provoked that smile on purpose by using the word ‘cunning,’ so that you might get cross directly at my daring to think I could be cunning, so that I might have a chance of explaining myself at once. You see, you see how open I have become now! Well, do you care to listen?”

In the expression of Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch's face, which was contemptuously composed, and even ironical, in spite of his visitor's obvious desire to irritate him by the insolence of his premeditated and intentionally coarse naïvetés, there was, at last, a look of rather uneasy curiosity.

"Listen," said Pyotr Stepanovitch, wriggling more than ever, "when I set off to come here, I mean here in the large sense, to this town, ten days ago, I made up my mind, of course, to assume a character. It would have been best to have done without anything, to have kept one's own character, wouldn't it? There is no better dodge than one's own character, because no one believes in it. I meant, I must own, to assume the part of a fool, because it is easier to be a fool than to act one's own character; but as a fool is after all something extreme, and anything extreme excites curiosity, I ended by sticking to my own character. And what is my own character? The golden mean: neither wise nor foolish, rather stupid, and dropped from the moon, as sensible people say here, isn't that it?"

"Perhaps it is," said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, with a faint smile.

"Ah, you agree—I'm very glad; I knew beforehand that it was your own opinion.... You needn't trouble, I am not annoyed, and I didn't describe myself in that way to get a flattering contradiction from you—no, you're not stupid, you're clever.... Ah! you're smiling again!... I've blundered once more. You would not have said 'you're clever,' granted; I'll let it pass anyway. *Passons,* as papa says, and, in parenthesis, don't be vexed with my verbosity. By the way, I always say a lot, that is, use a great many words and talk very fast, and I never speak well. And why do I use so many words, and why do I never speak well? Because I don't know how to speak. People who can speak well, speak briefly. So that I am stupid, am I not? But as this gift of stupidity is natural to me, why shouldn't I make skilful use of it? And I do make use of it. It's true that as I came here, I did think, at first, of being silent. But you know silence is a great talent, and therefore incongruous for me, and secondly silence would be risky, anyway. So I made up my mind finally that it would be best to talk, but to talk stupidly—that is, to talk and talk and talk—to be in a tremendous hurry to explain things, and in the end to get muddled in my own explanations, so that my listener would walk away without hearing the end, with a shrug, or, better still, with a curse. You succeed straight off in persuading them of your simplicity, in boring them and in being incomprehensible—three advantages all at once! Do you suppose anybody will suspect you of mysterious designs after that? Why, every one of them would take it as a personal affront if anyone were to say I had secret designs. And I sometimes amuse them too, and that's priceless. Why, they're ready to forgive me everything now, just because the clever

fellow who used to publish manifestoes out there turns out to be stupider than themselves—that's so, isn't it? From your smile I see you approve."

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was not smiling at all, however.

On the contrary, he was listening with a frown and some impatience.

"Eh? What? I believe you said 'no matter.'"

Pyotr Stepanovitch rattled on. (Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch had said nothing at all.) "Of course, of course. I assure you I'm not here to compromise you by my company, by claiming you as my comrade. But do you know you're horribly captious to-day; I ran in to you with a light and open heart, and you seem to be laying up every word I say against me. I assure you I'm not going to begin about anything shocking to-day, I give you my word, and I agree beforehand to all your conditions."

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was obstinately silent.

"Eh? What? Did you say something? I see, I see that I've made a blunder again, it seems; you've not suggested conditions and you're not going to; I believe you, I believe you; well, you can set your mind at rest; I know, of course, that it's not worth while for me to suggest them, is it? I'll answer for you beforehand, and—just from stupidity, of course; stupidity again.... You're laughing? Eh? What?"

"Nothing," Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch laughed at last. "I just remembered that I really did call you stupid, but you weren't there then, so they must have repeated it.... I would ask you to make haste and come to the point."

"Why, but I am at the point! I am talking about Sunday," babbled Pyotr Stepanovitch. "Why, what was I on Sunday? What would you call it? Just fussy, mediocre stupidity, and in the stupidest way I took possession of the conversation by force. But they forgave me everything, first because I dropped from the moon, that seems to be settled here, now, by every one; and, secondly, because I told them a pretty little story, and got you all out of a scrape, didn't they, didn't they?"

"That is, you told your story so as to leave them in doubt and suggest some compact and collusion between us, when there was no collusion and I'd not asked you to do anything."

"Just so, just so!" Pyotr Stepanovitch caught him up, apparently delighted. "That's just what I did do, for I wanted you to see that I implied it; I exerted myself chiefly for your sake, for I caught you and wanted to compromise you, above all I wanted to find out how far you're afraid."

“It would be interesting to know why you are so open now?”

“Don’t be angry, don’t be angry, don’t glare at me.... You’re not, though. You wonder why I am so open? Why, just because it’s all changed now; of course, it’s over, buried under the sand. I’ve suddenly changed my ideas about you. The old way is closed; now I shall never compromise you in the old way, it will be in a new way now.”

“You’ve changed your tactics?”

“There are no tactics. Now it’s for you to decide in everything, that is, if you want to, say yes, and if you want to, say no. There you have my new tactics. And I won’t say a word about our cause till you bid me yourself. You laugh? Laugh away. I’m laughing myself. But I’m in earnest now, in earnest, in earnest, though a man who is in such a hurry is stupid, isn’t he? Never mind, I may be stupid, but I’m in earnest, in earnest.”

He really was speaking in earnest in quite a different tone, and with a peculiar excitement, so that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch looked at him with curiosity.

“You say you’ve changed your ideas about me?” he asked.

“I changed my ideas about you at the moment when you drew your hands back after Shatov’s attack, and, that’s enough, that’s enough, no questions, please, I’ll say nothing more now.”

He jumped up, waving his hands as though waving off questions. But as there were no questions, and he had no reason to go away, he sank into an arm-chair again, somewhat reassured.

“By the way, in parenthesis,” he rattled on at once, “some people here are babbling that you’ll kill him, and taking bets about it, so that Lembke positively thought of setting the police on, but Yulia Mihailovna forbade it.... But enough about that, quite enough, I only spoke of it to let you know. By the way, I moved the Lebyadkins the same day, you know; did you get my note with their address?”

“I received it at the time.”

“I didn’t do that by way of ‘stupidity.’ I did it genuinely, to serve you. If it was stupid, anyway, it was done in good faith.”

“Oh, all right, perhaps it was necessary....” said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch dreamily, “only don’t write any more letters to me, I beg you.”

“Impossible to avoid it. It was only one.”

“So Liputin knows?”

“Impossible to help it: but Liputin, you know yourself, dare not ... By the way, you ought to meet our fellows, that is, *the* fellows not *our* fellows, or you’ll be finding fault again. Don’t disturb yourself, not just now, but sometime. Just now it’s raining. I’ll let them know, they’ll meet together, and we’ll go in the evening. They’re waiting, with their mouths open like young crows in a nest, to see what present we’ve brought them. They’re a hot-headed lot. They’ve brought out leaflets, they’re on the point of quarrelling. Virginsky is a universal humanity man, Liputin is a Fourierist with a marked inclination for police work; a man, I assure you, who is precious from one point of view, though he requires strict supervision in all others; and, last of all, that fellow with the long ears, he’ll read an account of his own system. And do you know, they’re offended at my treating them casually, and throwing cold water over them, but we certainly must meet.”

“You’ve made me out some sort of chief?” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch dropped as carelessly as possible.

Pyotr Stepanovitch looked quickly at him.

“By the way,” he interposed, in haste to change the subject, as though he had not heard. “I’ve been here two or three times, you know, to see her excellency, Varvara Petrovna, and I have been obliged to say a great deal too.”

“So I imagine.”

“No, don’t imagine, I’ve simply told her that you won’t kill him, well, and other sweet things. And only fancy; the very next day she knew I’d moved Marya Timofyevna beyond the river. Was it you told her?”

“I never dreamed of it!”

“I knew it wasn’t you. Who else could it be? It’s interesting.”

“Liputin, of course.”

“N-no, not Liputin,” muttered Pyotr Stepanovitch, frowning; “I’ll find out who. It’s more like Shatov.... That’s nonsense though. Let’s leave that! Though it’s awfully important.... By the way, I kept expecting that your mother would suddenly burst out with the great question.... Ach! yes, she was horribly glum at first, but suddenly, when I came to-day, she was beaming all over, what does that mean?”

“It’s because I promised her to-day that within five days I’ll be engaged to Lizaveta Nikolaevna,” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch said with surprising openness.

“Oh!... Yes, of course,” faltered Pyotr Stepanovitch, seeming disconcerted. “There are rumours of her engagement, you know. It’s true, too. But you’re right, she’d run from under the wedding crown, you’ve only to call to her. You’re not angry at my saying so?”

“No, I’m not angry.”

“I notice it’s awfully hard to make you angry to-day, and I begin to be afraid of you. I’m awfully curious to know how you’ll appear to-morrow. I expect you’ve got a lot of things ready. You’re not angry at my saying so?”

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch made no answer at all, which completed Pyotr Stepanovitch’s irritation.

“By the way, did you say that in earnest to your mother, about Lizaveta Nikolaevna?” he asked.

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch looked coldly at him.

“Oh, I understand, it was only to soothe her, of course.”

“And if it were in earnest?” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch asked firmly.

“Oh, God bless you then, as they say in such cases. It won’t hinder the cause (you see, I don’t say ‘our,’ you don’t like the word ‘our’) and I ... well, I ... am at your service, as you know.”

“You think so?”

“I think nothing—nothing,” Pyotr Stepanovitch hurriedly declared, laughing, “because I know you consider what you’re about beforehand for yourself, and everything with you has been thought out. I only mean that I am seriously at your service, always and everywhere, and in every sort of circumstance, every sort really, do you understand that?”

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch yawned.

“I’ve bored you,” Pyotr Stepanovitch cried, jumping up suddenly, and snatching his perfectly new round hat as though he were going away. He remained and went on talking, however, though he stood up, sometimes pacing about the room and tapping himself on the knee with his hat at exciting parts of the conversation.

“I meant to amuse you with stories of the Lembkes, too,” he cried gaily.

“Afterwards, perhaps, not now. But how is Yulia Mihailovna?”

“What conventional manners all of you have! Her health is no more to you than the health of the grey cat, yet you ask after it. I approve of that. She’s quite well, and her respect for you amounts to a superstition, her immense anticipations of you amount to a superstition. She does not say a word about what happened on Sunday, and is convinced that you will overcome everything yourself by merely making your appearance. Upon my word! She fancies you can do anything. You’re an enigmatic and romantic figure now, more than ever you were—extremely advantageous position. It is incredible how eager every one is to see you. They were pretty hot when I went away, but now it is more so than ever. Thanks again for your letter. They are all afraid of Count K. Do you know they look upon you as a spy? I keep that up, you’re not angry?”

“It does not matter.”

“It does not matter; it’s essential in the long run. They have their ways of doing things here. I encourage it, of course; Yulia Mihailovna, in the first place, Gaganov too.... You laugh? But you know I have my policy; I babble away and suddenly I say something clever just as they are on the look-out for it. They crowd round me and I humbug away again. They’ve all given me up in despair by now: ‘he’s got brains but he’s dropped from the moon.’ Lembke invites me to enter the service so that I may be reformed. You know I treat him mockingly, that is, I compromise him and he simply stares. Yulia Mihailovna encourages it. Oh, by the way, Gaganov is in an awful rage with you. He said the nastiest things about you yesterday at Duhovo. I told him the whole truth on the spot, that is, of course, not the whole truth. I spent the whole day at Duhovo. It’s a splendid estate, a fine house.”

“Then is he at Duhovo now?” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch broke in suddenly, making a sudden start forward and almost leaping up from his seat.

“No, he drove me here this morning, we returned together,” said Pyotr Stepanovitch, appearing not to notice Stavrogin’s momentary excitement. “What’s this? I dropped a book.” He bent down to pick up the “keepsake” he had knocked down. “‘The Women of Balzac,’ with illustrations.” He opened it suddenly. “I haven’t read it. Lembke writes novels too.”

“Yes?” queried Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, as though beginning to be interested.

“In Russian, on the sly, of course, Yulia Mihailovna knows and allows it. He’s henpecked, but with good manners; it’s their system. Such strict form—such self-restraint! Something of the sort would be the thing for us.”

“You approve of government methods?”

“I should rather think so! It’s the one thing that’s natural and practicable in Russia…. I won’t … I won’t,” he cried out suddenly, “I’m not referring to that—not a word on delicate subjects. Good-bye, though, you look rather green.”

“I’m feverish.”

“I can well believe it; you should go to bed. By the way, there are Skoptsi here in the neighbourhood—they’re curious people … of that later, though. Ah, here’s another anecdote. There’s an infantry regiment here in the district. I was drinking last Friday evening with the officers. We’ve three friends among them, *vous comprenez?* They were discussing atheism and I need hardly say they made short work of God. They were squealing with delight. By the way, Shatov declares that if there’s to be a rising in Russia we must begin with atheism. Maybe it’s true. One grizzled old stager of a captain sat mum, not saying a word. All at once he stands up in the middle of the room and says aloud, as though speaking to himself: ‘If there’s no God, how can I be a captain then?’ He took up his cap and went out, flinging up his hands.”

“He expressed a rather sensible idea,” said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, yawning for the third time.

“Yes? I didn’t understand it; I meant to ask you about it. Well what else have I to tell you? The Shpigulin factory’s interesting; as you know, there are five hundred workmen in it, it’s a hotbed of cholera, it’s not been cleaned for fifteen years and the factory hands are swindled. The owners are millionaires. I assure you that some among the hands have an idea of the *Internationale*. What, you smile? You’ll see—only give me ever so little time! I’ve asked you to fix the time already and now I ask you again and then…. But I beg your pardon, I won’t, I won’t speak of that, don’t frown. There!” He turned back suddenly. “I quite forgot the chief thing. I was told just now that our box had come from Petersburg.”

“You mean …” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch looked at him, not understanding.

“Your box, your things, coats, trousers, and linen have come. Is it true?”

“Yes … they said something about it this morning.”

“Ach, then can’t I open it at once!…”

“Ask Alexey.”

“Well, to-morrow, then, will to-morrow do? You see my new jacket, dress-coat and three pairs of trousers are with your things, from Sharmer’s, by your recommendation, do you remember?”

“I hear you’re going in for being a gentleman here,” said Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch with a smile. “Is it true you’re going to take lessons at the riding school?”

Pyotr Stepanovitch smiled a wry smile. “I say,” he said suddenly, with excessive haste in a voice that quivered and faltered, “I say, Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch, let’s drop personalities once for all. Of course, you can despise me as much as you like if it amuses you—but we’d better dispense with personalities for a time, hadn’t we?”

“All right,” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch assented.

Pyotr Stepanovitch grinned, tapped his knee with his hat, shifted from one leg to the other, and recovered his former expression.

“Some people here positively look upon me as your rival with Lizaveta Nikolaevna, so I must think of my appearance, mustn’t I,” he laughed. “Who was it told you that though? H’m. It’s just eight o’clock; well I must be off. I promised to look in on Varvara Petrovna, but I shall make my escape. And you go to bed and you’ll be stronger to-morrow. It’s raining and dark, but I’ve a cab, it’s not over safe in the streets here at night.... Ach, by the way, there’s a run-away convict from Siberia, Fedka, wandering about the town and the neighbourhood. Only fancy, he used to be a serf of mine, and my papa sent him for a soldier fifteen years ago and took the money for him. He’s a very remarkable person.”

“You have been talking to him?” Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch scanned him.

“I have. He lets me know where he is. He’s ready for anything, anything, for money of course, but he has convictions, too, of a sort, of course. Oh yes, by the way, again, if you meant anything of that plan, you remember, about Lizaveta Nikolaevna, I tell you once again, I too am a fellow ready for anything of any kind you like, and absolutely at your service.... Hullo! are you reaching for your stick. Oh no ... only fancy ... I thought you were looking for your stick.”

Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch was looking for nothing and said nothing.

But he had risen to his feet very suddenly with a strange look in his face.

“If you want any help about Mr. Gaganov either,” Pyotr Stepanovitch blurted out suddenly, this time looking straight at the paper-weight, “of course I can arrange it all, and I’m certain you won’t be able to manage without me.”

He went out suddenly without waiting for an answer, but thrust his head in at the door once more. “I mention that,” he gabbled hurriedly, “because Shatov had no right either, you know, to risk his life last Sunday when he attacked you, had he? I should be

glad if you would make a note of that." He disappeared again without waiting for an answer.