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M. GORKY

SELECTED WORKS

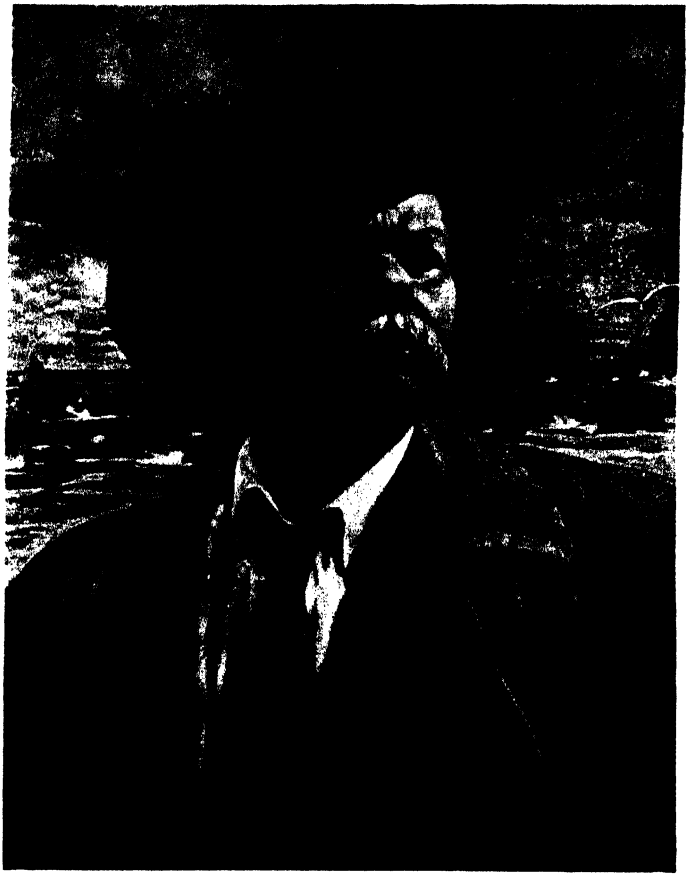
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Childhood

DEDICATED TO MY SON

I

ON THE FLOOR beneath the window of a small, dusky room lay my father, remarkably long and all dressed in white; the toes of his bare feet were strangely widespread, and the fingers of his gentle hands, now quietly crossed on his breast, were likewise distorted. The dark discs of copper coins closed his laughing eyes, his kind face had become livid, and I was terrified by the glint of his set teeth.

My mother, in a red skirt but little else, was kneeling beside him, combing back his soft hair with the black comb I had used as a saw to cut through the rind of watermelons. She kept muttering something in a deep, hoarse voice; her grey eyes were swollen and seemed melting into large tears.

My hand was being held by my grandmother—a roundish woman with a large head, enormous eyes, and a funny, fleshy nose. She was all soft and dark and fascinating. She too was weeping, but in a peculiar way that formed a pleasant accompaniment to my mother. She trembled all over and kept pushing me towards my father, but I hung back, hiding behind her skirts. I was afraid and uncomfortable.

I had never before seen grownups cry and did not understand the words my grandmother kept saying to me:

"Go take your leave of your daddy. You'll never see him again. He's died, my darling, before his time, before his hour...."

I had just recovered from a serious illness, during which my father—I remember that very well—had come and played with me merrily. But suddenly he disappeared and his place was taken by this strange woman who was my grandmother.

"Did you have to walk far to get here?" I asked her.

"I didn't walk, I rode. You don't walk on the water, you fig," she answered. "I came down from the Lower,* higher up."

This sounded very funny and mixed up: higher up in our house lived some bearded, painted Persians, while in the cellar lived an old yellow-skinned Kalmyk who sold sheepskins. You could descend by sliding down the banister, or by somersaulting if you fell off—I knew this well enough. But where did the water come in? She was all wrong and crazily mixed up.

"Why do you call me a fig?"

"Because you're so big," was her laughing retort.

She had a kind, bright, lilting manner of speech. From the very first day I had become great friends with her, and now I was anxious that we both get out of this room.

My mother upset me. Her tears and wailing filled me with unwonted alarms. I had never seen her like this before: ordinarily she was a stern woman, who wasted no words. She was clean and smooth and large as a mare; she had a firm body and exceedingly strong hands. But now she was unpleasantly swollen and dishevelled. Her clothes were torn, and her hair, usually piled into such a neat, bright cap on top of her head, was flowing over her bare shoulders and into her eyes, with one braid swinging into my father's sleeping face. I had been standing in the room for some time, but not once had she so much as glanced at me, absorbed as she was in combing my father's hair and weeping.

The soldier who was on duty glanced into the room, along with some dark-faced *muzhiks*.

"Hurry and lay him out," cried the soldier irritably.

The window was hung with a dark shawl which blew out like a sail. Once when my father had taken me for a ride in a sailboat there had come an unexpected crash of thunder. My father had laughed, pressed me between his knees, and cried:

"That's all right, don't be afraid, son!"

Suddenly my mother sprang up heavily, then fell on her back, her hair streaming over the floor, her sightless face livid, her teeth clenched like those of my father.

"Lock the door—take Alexei out," she gasped in an awful voice.

* "The Lower" is the English translation of "Nizhni"—short form of "Nizhni-Novgorod."—*Trans.*

My grandmother pushed me aside as she rushed toward the door.

"Don't be afraid, good people!" she cried. "Don't touch her! Go away, for the love of Christ! It's not the cholera! It's the birth pains beginning! Take pity, good people!"

I hid behind a trunk in a dark corner, from where I could watch my mother writhing on the floor, moaning and grinding her teeth, while my grandmother crawled about, murmuring tenderly and happily:

"In the name of the Father and the Son! Try to bear it, Varyusha!* Holy Mother of God, merciful patron. . . ."

I was terrified. They kept moving about on the floor near my father, groaning and crying and bumping into him, but he lay there motionless, seeming to laugh at them. This kept up for a long time. Several times my mother struggled to her feet, only to fall back again; my grandmother bounced in and out of the room like a great black ball; suddenly a baby cried in the darkness.

"Thank God," breathed my grandmother. "A boy!"

She lighted a candle.

I must have fallen asleep in the corner, for I remember nothing else.

My next vivid recollection is of a deserted spot in a cemetery on a rainy day; I was standing on a slippery mound of earth gazing down the hole into which they were lowering my father's coffin. The bottom of the hole was filled with water and frogs—two of them had jumped onto the yellow lid of the coffin.

The only people at the grave were the dripping guard on duty, two grumpy *muzhiks* with spades, my grandmother and I. All of us were bathed in a fine spray of rain.

"Dig it in," said the guard, moving away.

My grandmother wept, covering her face with the ends of her shawl. The *muzhiks* bent over and threw the first spadefuls of dirt into the hole. The water splashed and the frogs began to leap against the walls of the grave, but the clumps of earth beat them back.

"Get away, Alyosha," said my grandmother, taking me by the shoulder. I slipped out of her grasp, because I did not want to go away.

* The suffixes -sha, -yusha, -oshka, -ochka, added to proper names convey a feeling of intimacy and affection, e.g.: Varya—Varyusha, Alexei—Alyosha, Pavel—Pasha.—*Trans.*

"Oh Lord," she sighed, in a tone which left some doubt as to whether she was complaining about me or the Lord. For a long time she stood there silent, with lowered head; even when the grave was entirely filled in she kept on standing there.

The *muzhiks* packed the earth with the backs of their spades; a wind rose and drove the rain away. Grandmother took me by the hand and led me to a distant church standing among a forest of dark crosses.

"Why don't you cry?" she asked me when we were outside the cemetery. "You ought to cry."

"I don't feel like it," I said.

"Well, if you don't feel like it, you needn't," she answered quietly.

It was most surprising that she should have told me to cry. I rarely cried, and then only when my feelings were hurt—never from bodily pain. My father had always laughed at my tears, but my mother had shouted:

"Don't dare cry!"

After that we rode in a droshky down a wide, muddy street between dark red houses.

"Won't the frogs get out?" I asked.

"No they won't, God bless them," she answered.

Neither my mother nor father had ever spoken the name of God so frequently and with such familiarity.

A few days later my mother and grandmother and I were riding in the small cabin of a boat. My infant brother Maxim had died and was lying on the table in the corner wrapped in white tied with red tape.

I sat on top of our trunks and bundles, looking out of the bulging window that reminded me of the eye of a horse. Murky, foaming water kept running down the glass. Sometimes it would wash completely over it. Then I would involuntarily jump down to the floor.

"Don't be afraid," said my grandmother, lifting me up in her soft arms and putting me back on the bundles.

A moist grey fog hung over the water; every once in a while a dark strip of land somewhere in the distance would emerge from the fog, only to dissolve again. Everything about us was shaking. Only

my mother stood firm and motionless, leaning against the wall with her hands behind her head, her eyes tightly closed. Her face was dark and grim and sightless. She never spoke a word, and seemed somehow new and different. Even the dress she was wearing was unfamiliar to me.

Every once in a while my grandmother would say to her softly:

"If you'd only be having a bite to eat, Varyusha—just a wee bite. . . ."

But my mother remained silent and motionless.

Grandmother spoke to me in a whisper; she spoke a bit louder to my mother, but timidly and cautiously, and very rarely. It seemed to me that she was afraid of my mother. I could understand this, and it drew me all the closer to my grandmother.

"Saratov," said my mother in an unexpectedly loud, harsh voice. "Where's the sailor?"

Even her words were strange and unfamiliar—"Saratov," "the sailor." . . .

Into the cabin came a broad-shouldered, grey-haired man dressed in blue and carrying a little box. Grandmother took it from him and began to place the body of my brother in it. When she had finished she carried it to the door on outstretched arms, but she was so fat she could not get through without turning sidewise, so she stood there nonplussed, looking very funny.

"Oh, mother!" cried my own mother impatiently, taking the coffin out of her hands. Then they both disappeared and I remained in the cabin with the man in blue.

"So your brother's gone and left us," he said, bending over me.

"Who are you?"

"A sailor."

"And who's Saratov?"

"A city. Look out the window. There it is."

The land was moving past the window, dark and lumpy and wreathed in mist, reminding me of a large hunk of bread just cut from the loaf.

"Where did grandmother go?"

"To bury her grandson."

"Will they put him in the ground?"

"Of course they will."

I told the sailor how they had dug in live frogs when they buried my father. He lifted me in his arms, hugged me tight and kissed me.

"Ah, sonny, it's not much you understand yet!" he said. "It's not the frogs are to be pitied—the devil with them—it's your mother. Just look what grief's done to her!"

There was suddenly a great shrieking and blowing up above, but I knew it was the steamboat and was not afraid. The sailor put me down hurriedly and rushed out, saying as he went:

"Have to be off!"

I also wanted to be off. I went out of the cabin. There was nobody in the dark, narrow passage. Not far from the door I could see the glitter of brass on the stairs. I looked up and caught sight of people with baggage and bundles in their hands. It was clear that everyone was leaving the boat, which meant that I too must leave.

But when I reached the deck in the midst of all the *muzhiks* at the gangplank, people began shouting at me:

"Who are you? Who do you belong to?"

"I don't know."

For a long time they pushed me and shoved me and felt me. At last the grey-haired sailor appeared and said:

"He's from Astrakhan—came out of his cabin...."

He picked me up and ran back to the cabin, where he put me up on the bundles and shook his finger at me.

"I'll give it to you!" he threatened as he went out.

Gradually the bustle overhead quieted down, the steamer stopped trembling, the splashing of the water ceased. A wet wall blocked the window of the cabin; it became dark and stuffy, and the bundles seemed to swell up and crowd me out. What if they had left me here on this empty steamer for good?

I went to the door. It was shut tight and I was unable to turn the brass knob. I took a bottle of milk and swung it at the knob with all my force. The bottle smashed and the milk flowed over my feet and into my boots.

Crushed by my failure, I lay down on the bundles and cried myself to sleep.

When I woke up the steamer was once more trembling, the water splashing, and the window of the cabin was shining like the sun. My grandmother was sitting beside me combing her hair and frowning

as she muttered something to herself. She had an amazing quantity of blue-black hair which fell thickly over her shoulders, breast and knees, sweeping down to the floor. With one hand she lifted it off the floor and held it tight, while with the other she forced a coarse wooden comb through the heavy strands; her mouth was screwed up, her dark eyes flashed with anger, and her face looked little and amusing in that mass of hair.

She seemed in a bad mood today, but when I asked her why she had such long hair, her voice was as soft and friendly as it had been the day before.

"Most likely a visitation from the Lord—'Here, spend your days combing this accursed mane!' In my youth I vaunted it; in my age I curse it. But get back to sleep, child. It's early yet—the sun's scarce up."

"I don't want to sleep any more."

"Well don't, if you're not wanting to," she agreed, braiding her hair and glancing at the divan where my mother lay on her back straight as an arrow. "How did you be breaking that bottle yesterday? Speak soft."

She had a peculiar way of singing her words that made it easy for me to remember them—words as vivid and luscious as flowers. When she smiled, the irises of her dark eyes expanded and shone with an inexpressible light; her smile revealed strong white teeth, and in spite of the numerous wrinkles on her swarthy cheeks, her whole face seemed young and bright. It was spoiled only by her fleshy, red-tipped nose with its flaring nostrils. She took snuff from a black, silver-embossed box. Everything about her was dark, but through her eyes one glimpsed the warm, cheerful, unquenchable light which illumined her from within. She was stout, and so bent as to be almost hunchbacked, but she moved about with the ease and agility of a large cat. And she was just as soft as that affectionate animal.

It seemed that until her arrival I had been sleeping, hidden away in the darkness. But she came and woke me up and led me out into the light. She spun all my surroundings into a single, unbroken thread, then wove it into multicoloured lace; she immediately became my friend for life, the one who was nearest and dearest to me, and the one I most understood. Her selfless love of life enriched me and gave me the strength to cope with my hard future.

Steamboats moved slowly forty years ago. It took us a long time to reach Nizhni-Novgorod, and I well remember those first days, drenched with beauty.

The weather was fine, and from morning to night I was up on deck with my grandmother, floating there beneath the bright sky, between the banks of the Volga embroidered with the golden silk of autumn. The rust-coloured boat with a barge in tow moved lazily against the current, nosing its way with a gentle slapping of paddles through the grey-blue water. The barge was grey and resembled a water bug. The sun stole imperceptibly above the Volga; every hour brought something new—everything about us changed. The green hills were folds in the rich raiment of the earth. Towns and villages seemed made of gingerbread as they passed in the distance; golden autumn leaves floated on the water.

"Just see how wonderful it is!" my grandmother kept exclaiming as she moved from one side of the deck to the other, her face radiant, her eyes dilated with joy.

Often she would stand looking at the shore quite oblivious of my presence, her hands crossed on her breast, her lips curved in a smile, her eyes filled with tears. Then I would tug at her dark, flowered skirt.

"Eh?" she would say, pulling herself together. "Like as if I was asleep and having a dream."

"What are you crying about?"

"That's from happiness, my lad, from feebleness, my darling," she would say with a smile. "It's an old one I am now, with more than three-score summers behind. . . ."

Then she would take a pinch of snuff and begin to tell me fantastic stories about saints and animals and kind robbers, and dark powers.

She told her tales in a quiet, mysterious voice, her face close to mine, gazing into my eyes with dilated pupils as though she were pouring into my heart a stream of strength to support me. She sang, rather than spoke, and the further she went, the more rhythmic became her style. It was an inexpressible joy to listen to her, and when she had finished a tale I would cry:

"Go on!"

"And then it was like this: under the stove sat the hearth gob-

lin, a splinter of noodle in his paw. Rocking he sat, and moaning: Oh, little mice, little mice! Oh, I shall die, little mice!"

She grabbed up her own foot and sat rocking back and forth with her face all screwed up as though she were the sufferer.

Sailors gathered round—good-natured, bearded men—and they laughed as they listened, and praised her and also asked for more.

"Go on, granny, tell us another!"

And then they would say:

"Come along and have supper with us."

At supper they would treat her to vodka and me to watermelon and cantaloupe; that was all done on the sly, for there was a man on board who forbade the eating of fruit. If he caught anyone with fruit he would grab it away and toss it into the river. He was dressed like a guard, with brass buttons down his uniform, and was always drunk. People hid from him.

My mother rarely came up on deck and in general avoided us. She remained as silent as ever. To this day I remember her tall, handsome figure, her grim, dark face crowned by fair braids—all of her powerfulness and her hardness, seen as though through a fog, or a bright cloud. And across the years comes the unfriendly gleam of her grey eyes, as enormous as those of my grandmother.

One day she said sternly:

"You make a laughingstock of yourself, ma."

"Let the folks be laughing, if they like," replied my grandmother good-naturedly. "It's a world of good it'll be doing them!"

I remember my grandmother's childlike joy on catching sight of Nizhni. "Look, look how fine it is!" she cried as she grabbed me by the hand and pushed me toward the rail. "There's your Nizhni for you! What a beauty! Look at the domes of the churches—as if they were flying!" She turned to my mother almost in tears. "Take a look, Varyusha! You've most forgot it, I reckon. Drink in the joy of it!"

Mother smiled gloomily.

The steamer came to a halt opposite the lovely city. It stopped in the middle of the river, which was crowded with ships and bristling with hundreds of masts. A large boat filled with people approached our steamer and hooked on to the lowered gangplank, up which the people climbed to our deck. At the head of them rushed

a lean little old man in a long black coat. He had green eyes, a hooked nose, and a beard red as gold.

"Father!" called my mother in a loud voice, throwing herself into his arms. He seized her head in his little red hands and began stroking her cheeks and squealing excitedly.

"Eh, eh, you silly! Ha! So here you are! Ah-h, tsck, tsck, tsck!"

Grandmother hugged and kissed everybody all at once, whirling about like a propeller.

"Here, quick," she said, pushing me toward the people. "This is Uncle Mikhailo; this is Yakov, here's Aunt Natalya; and these boys are cousins—both named Sasha; and cousin Katerina; all our tribe—just look how many!"

"How are you, mother?" my grandfather asked her.

They kissed each other three times.

Then my grandfather snatched me out of the crowd and said, with his hand on my head:

"And who might you be?"

"I'm from Astrakhan, out of the cabin."

"What's that he's saying?" asked my grandfather, turning to my mother. But then he pushed me along without waiting for an answer. "Got his father's cheekbones," he observed. "Get down into the boat."

We rode to shore and climbed up the cobbled road between two high embankments covered with yellow, trampled grass.

My grandfather walked up ahead with my mother. He came only to her shoulder and took quick little steps, while she glanced down on him from above and seemed to float through the air. Behind them walked my uncles without speaking: Mikhail, with black, straight hair and a body as thin as my grandfather's; Yakov, with blond, curly hair. Then came some fat women in bright-coloured dresses, and about six children, all of them older than me and very quiet. I walked with my grandmother and little Aunt Natalya. She was pale and blue-eyed and had an enormous belly. Every once in a while she would stop to catch her breath and murmur:

"Oh, I can't go another step."

"Why did they have to bring you along?" muttered my grandmother angrily. "A stupid tribe!"

I did not like either the children or the grownups and felt like

a stranger among them. Even my grandmother seemed to have faded and become distant.

I especially disliked my grandfather, immediately sensing an enemy. He roused in me a wary curiosity, and I paid him particular attention.

We reached the end of the climb. Built against the right embankment at the very top stood a low, one-storied house from which the street took its beginning. It was painted a dirty pink and had bulging windows with the roof pulled down low over them. It seemed large when I viewed it from outside, but inside the rooms were little and dark and crowded. Irritable people kept milling through them, like on the steamer just before docking; children flocked about like thievish sparrows, and the entire house was permeated with an acrid, unfamiliar odour.

I found myself out in the yard, which was no more pleasant. Vats filled with thick, coloured water stood about everywhere, while huge cloths were strung up on lines to dry. From a low, ramshackled shed in one corner came the glow of a wood fire in a stove; something was boiling and bubbling and an invisible person was pronouncing strange words in a loud voice:

"Santalin—magenta—sulphuric acid. . . ."

II

This was the beginning of a swift, eventful, and inexpressibly strange life. I remember it like a sombre tale told by a good genius who was yet painfully realistic. Now, as I recall the past, I sometimes have difficulty in believing that it was really like that; I am inclined to refute and protest many of the facts, so dark and cruel was the life of this "stupid tribe."

But the truth is beyond all commiseration, and it is not about myself I am writing, but about the stifling and horrifying surroundings in which the ordinary Russian lived and still lives.

My grandfather's house was filled with hot vapours of hostility —the hostility of each toward all. The older people were completely poisoned by it, and even the children were contaminated. Later I learned from my grandmother's stories that my mother had arrived

just at a time when her brothers were demanding that their father divide his property among them. The unexpected return of my mother made this demand more urgent. They were afraid she would ask for the dowry which my grandfather had withheld because she had married "self-willed," without his approval. My uncles claimed that this dowry should be divided between them. For some time they had been carrying on a bitter argument as to which of them should open up a shop in the city, and which in the settlement of Kunavino, on the other side of the Oka River.

Soon after our arrival a quarrel broke out in the kitchen while we were having dinner. My uncles suddenly jumped up and leaned across the table, yelling and shouting in my grandfather's face, baring their teeth and shaking themselves like dogs. My grandfather struck the table with his spoon, turned red in the face, and shrieked hoarsely:

"I'll turn you out to beg in the streets!"

With a painful grimace, my grandmother said:

"Give them everything, father. Go ahead and give it them, and have some peace."

"Tut, you conniver!" he cried with flashing eyes. It seemed strange that anyone as small as he could shout so deafeningly.

My mother rose and walked slowly to the window, where she stood with her back to all of them.

Suddenly Uncle Mikhail gave his brother a smashing blow in the face. The latter let out a howl, grabbed his brother, and the two of them went rolling across the floor, panting and grunting and swearing.

The children began to cry; my pregnant Aunt Natalya let out a despairing wail; mother seized her in both arms and led her away; Yevgenia, the jolly, pock-marked nanny, chased the children out of the kitchen; chairs crashed; apprentice Tsiganok straddled Uncle Mikhail's back, while Grigori Ivanovich, a mangy, bearded master-workman in dark glasses, calmly tied his hands with a towel.

My uncle scraped his thin black beard across the floor and let out horrible hoarse sounds.

"Brothers, ha! Blood brothers! Phooh, what people!" cried my grandfather as he ran around the table.

At the very beginning of the argument I had been frightened up

onto the stove, from where I watched my grandmother wash the blood from Uncle Yakov's battered face. He wept and stamped his feet, while she said despairingly:

"Come to your senses, you accursed ones! What a wild tribe!"

My grandfather shouted at her as he pulled at his torn shirt:

"So these are the brutes you brought into the world, you old witch!"

When Uncle Yakov went out, she cowered into a corner.

"Holy Mother of God," she wailed, "please to give my children some sense!

My grandfather stood with his eyes glued to the table where everything was spilled and overturned.

"Better keep your eye on those sons of yours, mother," he said quietly, "or they'll be doing away with Varvara...."

"God knows what you're saying! Here, take off your shirt so's I can be mending it." She took his face in her hands and kissed him on the forehead, while he, so much shorter, buried his head on her shoulder.

"Looks like I better divide up, mother."

"Yes, father."

They spoke together for a long time. At first their conversation was amiable, but soon grandfather began clawing the floor like a cock before a fight and shaking his finger at my grandmother.

"I know you all right; you think more of them than you do of me," he complained in a loud whisper. "But that Mikhail of yours is a hypocrite, and that Yakov an infidel! They'll squander all I own—they'll swill it all down!"

With a clumsy movement of my shoulder, I knocked down a flatiron which went clattering off the stove and landed in the slop bucket. My grandfather sprang up, yanked me towards him, and stared into my face as though he were seeing me for the first time.

"Who put you up there on the stove? Your mother?"

"I climbed up myself."

"You're lying."

"No I'm not. I was scared."

He pushed me and gave me a whack over the forehead.

"The image of your father! Get out!"

I was only too glad to get out of that kitchen.

I could see very well that my grandfather kept following me with his sharp green eyes, and I was afraid of him. I remember that I was always trying to hide from those searing eyes. It seemed to me that he was mean; he addressed everyone in a tone that was offensive and sarcastic, taking delight in teasing and provoking people.

"Phooh, what people!" he was fond of saying, and the sound of that long-drawn-out "oo," always made me feel chilled and forlorn.

During the tea hour in the evening, when my grandfather and uncles and the workmen left the shop and came wearily into the kitchen, their hands stained with dye and raw with acid, their hair tied back with tape, making them resemble the dark icons in the corner of the kitchen—during that dangerous hour my grandfather sat opposite me and made his other grandchildren envious by speaking to me more often than to them. There was something very right about him, very smooth and neatly chiselled. In spite of the fact that his embroidered satin vest was old and worn, his cotton shirt wrinkled, his pants patched at the knees, he gave the impression of being cleaner, better dressed and better looking than his sons, who wore suit coats, starched cuffs, and silk neckerchiefs.

A few days after our arrival he set me to learning my prayers. All the other children were older and had already been taught to read and write by the deacon of the Uspensky Cathedral, a church whose golden domes could be seen from the windows of our house.

I was taught by my quiet, timorous Aunt Natalya, who had the face of a child and such transparent eyes that it seemed possible to look straight through them to the back of her head.

I loved to sit and stare at her without blinking. This made her uneasy, and she would narrow her eyes, twist her head, and ask in a voice that was almost a whisper:

"Do say this, please, 'Our father who art....'"

"What does it mean, 'who art'?"

"Don't ask," she would reply, glancing furtively about. "It only makes it worse if you ask. Simply repeat after me, 'Our father....' Well?"

I could not understand why asking would only make it worse.

The words "who art" took on a secret meaning, and I purposely distorted them:

"Who heart," "Whose heart...."

But my white-faced aunt, who seemed to be slowly melting away, would patiently correct me.

"No, just say it simply, like this—'who art.'..."

But neither she herself nor the words she spoke were simple. This annoyed me and made it difficult to remember the prayer.

One day my grandfather checked up on my activities.

"Well, Alexei," he said. "What you been doing today? Playing? See that from the lump on your forehead. Don't have to be very smart to get a lump on your forehead, but what about learning 'Our Father'?"

"He has a bad memory," whispered my aunt.

My grandfather laughed and raised his red eyebrows.

"If that's the case, have to give him a licking. Your father ever lick you?" he asked, turning to me.

I did not understand what he was talking about, so I remained silent.

"Maxim never beat the child and forbade me to," answered my mother.

"How's that?"

"He said that beatings never taught anybody anything."

"He was a fool, that Maxim, may his soul rest in peace!" answered my grandfather testily.

His words offended me, and he noticed this.

"What you pouting about? Better watch your step! Sasha's going to get a nice little ripping up on Saturday on account of that thimble," he said, smoothing back his red and silver hair.

"How will you do it?" I asked.

Everybody laughed, and my grandfather replied:

"Just wait and you'll find out."

I hid in the corner and began to figure it out: to rip meant to take apart the clothes brought to be dyed, but to lick and to beat apparently meant the same thing. People beat horses and dogs and cats, and in Astrakhan the soldiers beat the Persians—I had seen that with my own eyes. But I had never seen anyone beat little children. To be sure, my uncles sometimes gave their children a whack

over the forehead or the back of the head, but the victims seemed not to mind, simply rubbing the sore spot a bit and then forgetting it. Sometimes I would ask them if it hurt.

"Not the least little," they would answer bravely.

I knew about the famous incident with the thimble. Between tea-time and supper, my uncles and the master-workman would sew together pieces of dyed cloth into one length and attach the cardboard tags. As a joke on the half-blind Grigori, Uncle Mikhail told his nine-year-old nephew to heat the workman's thimble over the candle. Sasha held the thimble over the flame with a pair of tongs until it was red hot, then he placed it near Grigori and hid behind the stove. But at that moment my grandfather came in, sat down to work, and picked up the hot thimble.

I remember running into the kitchen to see what all the noise was about and finding my grandfather jumping comically about, holding his ear with his burnt fingers and shouting:

"Who did this, you harum-scarums?"

Uncle Mikhail was bending over the table pushing the thimble about with his finger and blowing on it; Grigori was sewing imperturbably, the shadows licking across his huge bald pate; Uncle Yakov came running in and slipped behind the stove to hide his laughter; my grandmother began to grate a raw potato for a poultice.

"It's Yakov's Sasha did it," said Uncle Mikhail all of a sudden.

"That's a lie," cried Yakov, jumping out from behind the stove.

From somewhere in the corner his son began to bawl.

"Don't believe him, papa!" he called. "He told me to do it!"

My uncles began to quarrel. Immediately my grandfather calmed down, placed the poultice on his finger, and went out without a word, taking me with him.

Everyone said that Uncle Mikhail was to blame. It was only natural that during tea I should ask if he was to be ripped and beaten.

"He ought to be," muttered my grandfather, glancing askance at me.

Uncle Mikhail pounded the table with his hand and shouted at my mother:

"If you don't take that puppy of yours in hand, Varvara, I'll screw his head off!"

"You just try laying a finger on him!" answered my mother.

Everyone was silent.

She had the knack of throwing people back with a few short words that were utterly squelching.

I could see that everyone was afraid of my mother; even my grandfather addressed her in a different tone—quieter than the one he used with others. This pleased me.

"My mother's the strongest of all!" I would boast to my cousins.

They never denied it.

But what happened on the next Saturday shook my opinion of my mother.

By Saturday I too had managed to get into trouble.

I was fascinated by the way the grownups changed the colour of cloth. They would take something yellow, dip it in black water, and the material would come out dark blue—"indigo." Or they would rinse something grey in reddish water and it would come out dark red—"mulberry." All very simple, but incomprehensible.

I nursed a secret longing to try my hand at dyeing, and I confided this to Yakov's Sasha, a polite, serious boy who was always trailing the grownups, offering them his services. Everyone but my grandfather praised him for being smart and obliging.

"Phooh, the little toady!" the old man would say, glancing contemptuously at the boy.

Yakov's Sasha was dark and skinny, with bulging eyes, like a crab. He spoke in a hushed, hurried voice, half swallowing his words and glancing furtively about as though he were planning to run off and hide. Usually his brown eyes were immobile, but when he was excited the very eyeballs seemed to tremble.

I did not like him. I liked Mikhail's Sasha much better, in spite of the fact that he was inconspicuous and something of a dolt. He was quiet and had his mother's sad eyes and winning smile. His teeth were very ugly—they protruded from his mouth and grew in a double row in his upper jaw. This kept him busy: he had his fingers constantly in his mouth trying to loosen and yank out the teeth in the

back row; he meekly permitted anyone who wished to feel them. But I could find nothing else of interest about him. He was always alone in the over-crowded house, sitting off by himself in some dark corner or spending his evenings at the window. It was pleasant to say nothing when you were with him—to sit close beside him at the window and say nothing for a whole hour, watching the daws wheel and plane about the Uspensky Cathedral, whose golden domes stood out in fine relief against the red glow of the sunset. The birds would soar and plunge, then suddenly spread a black net across the fading sky and disappear, leaving a vast emptiness behind them. When you watch something like this you have no desire to speak, for your breast is full of an aching pleasure.

Uncle Yakov's Sasha, on the other hand, could speak at length and impressively about anything, like a grownup. When he found out that I was anxious to learn the dyeing trade, he advised me to take the Sunday tablecloth out of the sideboard and dye it dark blue.

"White things take the colour better than any others, I'm sure of that," he said very seriously.

I dragged out the heavy tablecloth and ran into the yard with it, but scarcely had I dipped one end of it into the vat containing "indigo" than Tsiganok threw himself upon me, grabbed the tablecloth out of my hands, wrung it in his enormous paws, and shouted to my cousin who was watching from the shed:

"Run for your grandmother!"

He turned to me and shook his tousled head ominously.

"You'll get it for this all right," he said.

My grandmother hurried out. She gasped when she saw the mischief, and even wept a few tears as she scolded me in her funny way:

"Oh you Permyak, you, with your cabbage ears! You ought to get picked up and flopped down somewheres on the other side!"

Then she began to plead with Tsiganok:

"Don't you be telling his grandfather, Vanya! I'll hide it away and maybe it'll pass over somehow. . . ."

"You needn't worry about me, but you better see that Sasha don't go squealing," replied Vanya anxiously, wiping his wet hands on his stained apron.

"I'll give him a coin to close his mouth," said my grandmother as she led me into the house.

On Saturday, just before vespers, somebody took me into the kitchen. It was dark and quiet there. I remember that the doors into the entranceway and the other rooms were tightly closed, that the autumn evening lurked grey and misty beyond the windows where the rain was murmuring. On a bench in front of the black mouth of the stove sat Tsiganok, unwontedly sullen; my grandfather was standing at a tub in the corner pulling long birch wands out of the water, measuring them, stacking them together, and flicking them through the air with a great swish. My grandmother was standing somewhere in the shadow, loudly sniffing tobacco and muttering:

"Enjoys it, the brute...."

Yakov's Sasha was sitting on a chair in the middle of the kitchen digging his fists into his eyes and wailing like an old beggarman:

"Forgive me, for the love of Christ...."

Uncle Mikhail's Sasha and his sister stood next to each other behind the table, stiff as posts.

"I'll forgive you after you've had your deserts," answered my grandfather, running a long, wet wand through his fist. "Well, take down your pants."

He spoke calmly, and neither the sound of his voice nor the movements of the boy on the squeaking chair, nor the shuffling of my grandmother's feet, violated the unforgettable silence of that shadowy kitchen beneath the low, smoke-grimed ceiling.

Sasha got up, unfastened his pants, dropped them to his knees, and stumbled toward the bench, all bent over. It was awful to watch him—my own knees started trembling.

But it was even worse when he meekly lay face down on the bench and Vanya tied him under the armpits and around the neck with a long towel, then bent over and held him by the ankles.

"Alexei!" called my grandfather. "Come closer! Well, who am I talking to? This is what is meant by a ripping—have a good look! One!..."

With a short swing of his arm he brought the wand down on Sasha's bare body. The boy yelped.

"Don't pretend," said my grandfather. "That didn't hurt! But this one will!"

He gave him a lash that immediately brought a flush to the skin and left a nasty red welt. My cousin gave a long howl.

"Don't like it?" asked my grandfather, rhythmically moving his arm up and down. "Not to your taste? Here's your thimble for you!"

Whenever he raised his arm something inside my breast was lifted along with it, and whenever he dropped his arm it was as if I too had fallen.

Sasha wailed in a high, thin voice that was horrid to hear.

"I won't do it again. Didn't I tell you about the tablecloth? It was me who told. . . ."

"Telling tales won't clear you. The tattletale gets the first lashing. Now it's your turn for the tablecloth!"

My grandmother threw herself at me and snatched me up.

"You'll not be touching Alexei! I'll not let you, you brute!"

She began to kick at the door.

"Varvara! Varvara!" she shouted.

My grandfather rushed over, knocked her off her feet, grabbed me and hauled me to the bench. I struggled in his arms, pulled his red beard, and bit his finger. He roared and squeezed me and finally threw me down on the bench so that I struck my face. I remember his crying wildly:

"Tie him down! I'll kill him!"

And I remember my mother's white face and her enormous eyes. She kept running back and forth in front of the bench.

"Stop it, father! Let him go!" she gasped.

My grandfather beat me until I lost consciousness. For several days after that I was ill and lay face down on a wide, hot bed in a little room with one window in it and a little red light which was kept constantly burning in the icon corner.

The days of my illness were important days of my life. During that time I seemed to suddenly grow older and develop a new quality—that of being deeply concerned about all people. It was as though the skin had been torn off my heart, making it unbearably sensitive to every injury, my own or another's.

First of all, I was shocked by the quarrel which took place between my mother and grandmother. In this tiny room my big, black grandmother swooped down upon my mother, forcing her into the icon corner and hissing:

"Why didn't you snatch him away, eh?"

"I was frightened."

"A big creature like you! For shame, Varvara! Old as I be, I had no fear! For very shame!"

"Leave me alone, ma! I'm sick of it!"

"You're not a-loving of him! Not a-pitying of the poor little orphan!"

"I'm an orphan myself—for all my life!" said my mother in a loud, pained voice.

Then they both began to cry, sitting on the trunk in the corner.

"If it wasn't for Alexei I'd go away—somewhere far away!" said my mother. "I can't go on living in this hell. I can't, ma! I haven't the strength!"

"Ah, child of my flesh, my own heart!" whispered my grandmother.

Now I knew: my mother was not strong after all; she, like all the others, was afraid of my grandfather. And I was responsible for keeping her here in this house where she could not bear to live. This thought was depressing. Actually my mother disappeared soon after that. She went visiting somewhere.

One day my grandfather came to see me, all of a sudden, as though he had dropped down from the ceiling. He sat on the edge of the bed and felt my head with fingers cold as ice.

"How do you do, young man.... Gó ahead and answer me—don't hold a grudge. Well, what?"

I felt like kicking him, but it hurt to move. His hair seemed redder than ever; he kept nodding his head uneasily while his bright eyes roved over the walls. Out of his pocket he took a gingerbread goat, two candy trumpets, an apple, and some raisins, and placed them on the pillow next to my nose.

"See, I've brought you some presents."

He bent down and kissed me on the forehead; then he began talking, stroking my forehead the while with his rough little hand stained a bright yellow, especially around his crooked, bird-like nails.

"Gave you a little more than your share this time, sonny. I was so mad—you bit me and scratched me and—well, I just lost my temper. But it's not so bad that you got an overdose this time—we'll count it to your credit next time. You just remember one thing—

when your own folks do the beating, it's no offence—just a good lesson! But don't let others touch you—only your own folks—they don't count. Think I didn't take my share in my day? In your worst dreams you couldn't imagine the way they beat me, Alyosha! They beat me so hard it must have made the Lord God weep to watch them. And what came of it? Just look at me now—me, the orphan, son of a beggarwoman—head of a whole workshop, ordering people around."

He pressed toward me with his lean, well-built body, and began to tell me about his childhood, skilfully piling his hard words one on top of the other.

His green eyes flashed and his hair bristled with gold as he trumpeted into my face:

"You came here on a steamer. The steam brought you here, but when I was young it was my own strength I pitted against the Volga, pulling the barges. The barge in the water—me on the bank, barefoot, over the sharp stones and the boulders, keeping it up from sunrise to nightfall, the sun streaming down till it made your head feel like an iron pot with something boiling inside, and you all bent over like a hairpin—your bones creaking—going on and on, not seeing where, the sweat streaming into your eyes, your heart moaning, your lips groaning—ah yes, Alyosha, you have nothing to complain about! On and on you go until you fall out of the harness, your face buried in the earth and you glad of it, for at least it means the strength has passed clean out of you, to the last drop. And there you lay 'til it's time to pass on or pass out, and little difference it makes which. That's how we lived in the eyes of God, in the eyes of our blessed Lord Christ Jesus! . . . Three times I measured the length of Mother Volga in such wise: from Simbirsk to Rybinsk, from Saratov to here, and from Astrakhan to Makaryev, to the fair—trails covering many thousands of versts! But in the fourth year I was promoted to bailer—the boss could see I was more than the ordinary run!"

As he spoke, he seemed to grow before my eyes like a cloud, changing from a lean little old man into a hero of fabulous strength—one who singlehanded hauled a huge grey barge against the current of the great river.

Sometimes he would jump off the bed and demonstrate how the

*burlaks** walked in their harness and how they bailed out the water; he would sing unfamiliar songs in a bass voice, then once more spring youthfully back onto the bed, a wondrous creature who went on talking in a voice which grew ever deeper and more convincing.

"But in spite of it all, Alexei, when we'd come to a halt on a summer's evening, in Zhiguli, and build a campfire at the foot of a green hill—oh, those were the times, Alexei! While the porridge was boiling, some *burlak* would start up a soulful song for his heart's ease, and the rest of us would join in—oh, but it'd make your very flesh creep to hear us, and the Volga herself seemed to gather speed, like a horse, rearing and charging to the very heavens! Then all our troubles were swept away like dust before the wind; in our singing we'd forget even the porridge until it went sizzling over into the fire, and then it was a beating over the head the cook would get—'have your song, but don't forget your job!' "

Several times people came to the door and called him, but I would always plead:

"Don't go yet!"

He would laugh and wave his hand.

"Let them wait," he would call.

He went on telling me tales until evening, and when he bid me an affectionate farewell and left, I knew that grandfather was neither mean nor terrifying. It was painful to remember that it was he who had beaten me so cruelly, yet I could not forget it.

My grandfather's visit opened the door to everyone else, and from morning to night someone was sitting at my bedside, trying in every way to amuse me. I remember that these attempts were not always successful. My grandmother came more often than anyone else; she even slept with me. But the one who left the deepest impression on my mind was Tsiganok. He came in the evening—a stocky, broad-shouldered fellow with a huge head covered with dark, curly hair. He was all dressed up in his Sunday clothes, consisting of a honey-coloured silk shirt, wide plush trousers, and squeaky boots that wrinkled about his ankles like an accordion. His hair shone, his slanting eyes flashed merrily from under heavy brows, his white teeth gleamed from under the black line of his young mous-

* Haulers of barges.—*Trans.*

tache, and his shirt glowed, softly reflecting the red light of the icon lamp.

"Take a look," he said, pulling up the sleeve of his shirt to reveal a network of red scars on his bare arm. "See how swollen it is? But it was even worse; they've almost healed.

"I could see your grandad was crazy with fury, like to beat you to death, so I put my arm under the whip in the hope it would break. Then your grandad would have to get a new one, giving your granny or your mother a chance to snatch you away. But it didn't break—too well soaked. But still I spared you some of the lashes—you can see for yourself how many. I'm a slick one, I am!"

He gave a soft, silky laugh.

"I felt so sorry for you I couldn't breathe," he added, glancing once more at his swollen arm. "I could see it would turn out bad, but there he kept on, swinging away. . . ."

He snorted like a horse and tossed his head and began to pass remarks about my grandfather with a childlike simplicity that immediately won my sympathies.

I told him that I loved him very much, and he answered with this same unforgettable simplicity:

"I love you too. That's why I took this pain on myself—for love of you. Think I'd have done it for anyone else? Spit on them—that's what!"

Then, with many furtive glances at the door, he began to teach me a lesson.

"Next time they give you a licking," he said, "see you don't tighten up, hear? It hurts twice as bad when you tighten up. Let your body go free, so's to be soft, like jelly! And don't hold your breath. Breathe for all you're worth and yell at the top of your lungs. You just remember this!"

"Why, will they beat me again?" I asked.

"What do you think?" answered Tsiganok calmly. "Of course they will! You'll get it lots of times yet!"

"What for?"

"Your grandfather will find what for, all right!"

And once more he began to teach me, with the greatest concern.

"If he begins striking straight, just swishing down and that's all, you can lay there soft, without moving. But if he brings it down

and then draws it across your body to pull the skin off, then roll toward him, in the direction of the wand, hear? That makes it easier!"

He winked a dark, slanting eye at me and said:

"When it comes to beatings, I know more than a policeman. You could make a pair of pants out of all the skin's been licked off me!"

As I looked into his merry face, I recalled the tales my grandmother had told me about Ivan-the-Prince, and Ivanushka-the-Fool.

III

When I got well, it became clear to me that Tsiganok occupied a privileged position in our household. My grandfather did not shout at him as often and as roughly as he did at his sons, and when he spoke of him in his absence he would narrow his eyes and shake his head:

"Golden fingers that Ivan's got, devil take him! Mark my words, it's no mean fellow growing up along of us!"

My uncles were also friendly with Tsiganok and never played tricks on him, as they did on the master-workman Grigori. Almost every evening they thought up some mean joke to play on the latter—they would heat the handles of his scissors, or put a tack on his chair, or place materials of different colours in the pile he was stitching, so that in his blindness he would sew them together into one length and be upbraided for it by my grandfather.

One evening after dinner, when Grigori had fallen asleep on the bunk in the kitchen, they painted his face magenta, and for a long time he went about looking comical and terrifying: his long red nose hung down like a tongue between the two dark discs of his spectacles, which gleamed dully against the background of his grey beard.

My uncles were inexhaustible in thinking up such tricks, but the workman took them without a word, only muttering to himself and taking the precaution of spitting copiously on his fingers before picking up the scissors, the iron, the tongs, or his thimble. This became a habit with him, so that even at the dinner table he would

wet his fingers before touching a knife or a fork, to the vast amusement of the children. When he was hurt, a wave of wrinkles would pass over his large face, strangely mounting to his forehead, lifting his brows, and disappearing somewhere on his bald pate.

I do not know what my grandfather thought of his sons' sport, but my grandmother would shake her fist at them and shout:

"You shameless devils; you fiends, you!"

Behind Tsiganok's back, my uncles would speak maliciously and sarcastically of him, criticizing his work and calling him a thief and a sluggard.

I asked my grandmother why this was.

"It's because each of them wants Vanya to be working for him when he has his own workshop," she answered. "So each belittles him afore the other, sly ones they be! But both are afraid Vanya will choose to stay here with your grandfather 'stead of going with them. And your grandfather has his own lights—he's like to go and open up a third workshop along of Vanya. That'd be bad for the uncles, see?"

She laughed quietly.

"Set God hisself a-laughing, the way they go on! And your grandfather sees their cunning, and teases them a-purpose: 'I'll be buying Vanya a recruit certificate,' says he, 'so's they won't take him to the army. Can't be sparing of him.' Now doesn't that make them mad, though! They don't want that, and grudge the money—the certificate costs a lot."

Once more I was living with my grandmother, as I had on the steamer. And every evening before I went to sleep she would tell me fairy tales, or stories from her own life which were as good as fairy tales. But when she spoke about the practical affairs of the family—about dividing up my grandfather's property, or about my grandfather's intention of buying a new house for himself—she spoke ironically and with detachment, as though she were a neighbour, and not the second eldest in the household.

From her I learned that Tsiganok was a foundling. On a rainy night in the early spring they had found him on the bench beside the gate of our house.

"There he lay wrapped up in a sheet," she said thoughtfully and mysteriously. "So frozen he couldn't make a peep."

"Why do people give their babies away?"

"When a mother has no milk and nothing to feed her babe, she finds out where a wee one has just been born and died, and takes her own and leaves it there."

There was a moment's pause while she combed her hair.

"It's all on account of poverty, Alyosha," she went on, sighing and looking up at the ceiling. "Some people do be so poor there's no words for it! And it's counted a disgrace should an unmarried girl have a baby! Your grandfather was for taking Vanya to the police, but I talked him out of it: let's keep him, says I, it's God as has sent him 'stead of our dead ones. Eighteen souls I brought into this world. A whole streetful had they lived—eighteen houses! You see they married me off afore I was fourteen years old, and my first baby came afore I was fifteen. But God had a love for the offspring of my flesh—one after another he took them to be his angels. And hurtful it was, and joyful!"

As she sat there on the edge of the bed in her nightgown, all covered with black hair, a huge shaggy figure, she resembled the she-bear which a bearded *muzhik* from the forests of Sergach had recently brought into our yard.

"Took the best ones, He did, and left me the worst," she chuckled, crossing her snow-white breast and shaking all over. "I was happy to get Vanya—it's such a love I have for wee ones like you! So I took him in and had him christened, and here he's lived and grown into a fine lad. First I called him the Beetle—account of his buzzing—he used to go crawling around, buzzing like a beetle. Love him, Alexei, he's a simple soul."

I did love Ivan, and was struck dumb by the wonder of him.

On Saturdays, when grandfather left for vespers after having thrashed the children who had sinned during the week, a life began in the kitchen that was indescribably amusing: Tsiganok would catch some black roaches from behind the stove, make a harness of thread, a paper sleigh, and drive the four black steeds up and down the table, which had been scraped a shining yellow.

"They've gone to fetch the archbishop!" he would cry excitedly as he steered them with a tiny stick.

He would stick a tiny piece of paper to the back of another roach and send it scurrying after the sleigh, explaining:

"They forgot their bag, so here's a monk taking it to them."

Then he would tie the legs of still another roach, so that it stumbled along, pushing itself with its head.

"The deacon leaving the saloon for vespers!" Vanya announced, clapping his hands in glee.

He would demonstrate his trained mice for us, making them stand and walk on their hind legs, with their long tails trailing behind them and their beady eyes blinking comically. He was very gentle with his mice, carrying them inside his coat, feeding them sugar from his own mouth, kissing them, and saying convincingly:

"The mouse is a very wise neighbour and very affectionate. The house goblin is fond of mice and is easy on anyone who feeds them."

Tsiganok could do tricks with cards and money. He would shout louder than any of the children, and indeed could scarcely be distinguished from them. One day in a card game with the children, he was left the "pig" several times running. He was very much offended, pouted and dropped out of the game. Later he complained to me snifflingly:

"It was all put up, I know! They winked at each other and passed cards under the table! Call that playing? I can cheat as well as them!"

He was nineteen years old, and bigger than the four of us put together.

I have an especially vivid impression of him on holiday evenings when my grandfather and Uncle Mikhail went visiting. Uncle Yakov, curlyheaded and dishevelled, would bring his guitar into the kitchen and grandmother would arrange refreshments. There was always an abundance of food, and vodka was poured from a green decanter with red flowers skilfully blown into the glass. Tsiganok whirled like a top in his Sunday clothes. Grigori would come sidling quietly in, his spectacles flashing darkly. Yevgenia would be there, our pock-marked, red-faced nanny, fat as a jug, with cunning little eyes and a deep bass voice. Sometimes the hairy deacon from the Uspensky Cathedral would come, in addition to some other dark, slimy people who resembled pikes and pickerels.

Everybody ate a lot and drank a lot and gave deep sighs. The children were treated to their share (which included a wineglass of sweet liqueur), and gradually a strange, wild hilarity developed.

Uncle Yakov lovingly tuned his guitar, and when this was done, invariably said one and the same thing:

"Well, I'm beginning!"

Shaking back his curls, he would bend over the instrument and stretch his neck like a goose. His round, carefree face assumed a dreamy expression, and an oily film dimmed his lively eyes as he softly plucked at the strings, playing a tune that drew you irresistibly to your feet.

His music demanded utter silence; it rushed like a rivulet from somewhere far away, seeping through walls and floors and rousing in the heart a sad, restless feeling. It made you feel sorry for yourself and everyone else. The grownups seemed to become children, and everyone sat motionless, in pensive silence.

Mikhail's Sasha listened with particular concentration. He would lean toward his uncle with his whole body, his eyes glued to the guitar, his mouth open, with saliva drooling from the corners. Sometimes he would become so absorbed that he slipped off his chair, and on such occasions he remained where he fell, on all fours, his eyes retaining the same fixed stare.

Everyone sat breathless under the charm of the music; only the samovar went on humming quietly, without disturbing us. The two small windows gazed out into the darkness of the autumn night; occasionally someone would knock softly on the panes. On the table wavered two yellow flames of candlelight; sharp as lances.

Uncle Yakov fell deeper and deeper into a trance; it seemed that he was fast asleep, with his teeth clenched. But his hands kept on living a life apart; the curved fingers of his right hand fluttered like a bird at the opening of the soundboard, while the fingers of his left rushed up and down the fingerboard.

When he had had a drink or two, he would begin to wail an endless song in an unpleasantly sibilant voice:

If Yakov was a little pup
His howls would wake the neighbours up—
O-o-o-o Dear Lord!
O-o-o-o I'm bored!
A nun comes walking down the street,
A crow goes cawing at her feet,

O-o-o-o I'm bored!
A cricket chirps behind the stove,
A frog is croaking in the grove,
O-o-o-o I'm bored!
A beggar hung up his pants to dry,
Another stole them, passing by—
O-o-o-o I'm bored!
So bored, oh Lord!

I could not bear this song, and when my uncle sang about the beggars, I wept in inconsolable grief.

Tsiganok listened to the music as attentively as anyone else, twisting his fingers in his mop of curly hair, staring into the corner and breathing noisily. Sometimes he would exclaim plaintively:

"Oh, if only I had a voice! Wouldn't I sing though!"

"Enough of tearing your heart out, Yakov!" my grandmother would say with a sigh. "Give us a dance, Vanya!"

Not always did they comply with her request, but sometimes the musician would lay his palm on the strings for a second, then clench his fist, and with a wide gesture, thrust something soundless and invisible onto the floor, shouting like a hoodlum:

"Enough of this dreariness! Onto your feet, Vanya!"

Vanya would get up, preen himself, straighten his yellow shirt, and mince into the centre of the room as though he were walking on glass.

"Make it faster, Yakov Vasilyevich," he would modestly request, blushing in embarrassment.

The guitar broke into a wild rhythm, heels began to beat time, dishes rattled on shelves and table, while Tsiganok whirled in the centre of the room, swooping like a bird, waving his wing-like arms, moving his feet so swiftly that the eye could not follow them. With a whoop he sat on his haunches and whirled like a golden top, lighting everything with the shine of silk, which glowed and flamed in its shiver and flow.

Tsiganok danced inexhaustibly, with utter self-oblivion, and it seemed that if the door were opened, he would dance out into the street, through the city, and away to some unknown land....

"Cut across!" shouted Uncle Yakov, beating time with his foot.

He gave a piercing whistle and shouted a couplet in his irritating voice:

If it wasn't for spoiling my shoes on the way,
I'd run from my wife this very day!

The people at the table caught the spirit. Sometimes they would shout or squeal as though seared by hot iron; the bearded master-workman kept tapping out the time on his bald head and muttering under his breath. Once he leaned toward me, his soft beard sweeping my shoulder, and whispered in my ear as though I were a grownup:

"If only your father was here, Alexei Maximovich! He'd light a different flame! A jolly fellow he was! Remember him?"

"No."

"Ha! Used to be he and your grandmother.... Here, wait a minute!"

Grigori rose to his feet—tall, emaciated, resembling the image of a saint—bowed to my grandmother, and said in an unusually deep voice:

"Akulina Ivanovna, be so good as to do a dance for us. Remember how you used to with Maxim Savvateyevich? Now do us the favour!"

"Goodness sakes, what are you saying, Grigori Ivanovich? Oh, my!" laughed my grandmother, shrinking away. "Me dance? Just to make people laugh, is that it?..."

But everyone began to urge her, and suddenly she got up like a young girl, adjusted her skirt, straightened her spine, threw back her heavy head, and glided off, crying:

"Let them laugh as wants to! Come on there, Yakov! Tune up!"

My uncle threw himself back and stretched his legs, half closing his eyes and playing a slower tune. Tsiganok stopped for a moment, then jumped up and began leaping about my grandmother as she glided silently over the floor as though floating in air, gracefully moving her arms, her brows raised and her dark eyes gazing into the distance. I thought she looked funny, and let out a snort, but Grigori shook his finger at me and all the grownups glanced at me in displeasure.

"Get away, Ivan!" called out Grigori with a laugh, and Tsiganok obediently moved off to one side and sat down, while nanny Yevgenia stuck out her Adam's apple and began to sing in a fine deep voice:

'Til Saturday the whole week through,
The maiden worked at making lace,
Weak and thin her fingers grew,
Ah, how pale and wan her face!

My grandmother seemed more to be telling a story than dancing. Now she would move slowly, thoughtfully, swaying from side to side and glancing about from under her raised arm, hesitating in her movements as she carefully felt her way. Then she would stop as though suddenly frightened, her face frowning and quivering. Suddenly her features would light up with a kind, friendly smile, and she would jump to one side as though making way for someone to pass, pushing others aside. Then she would stand listening with lowered head, a happy smile slowly lighting her face. All of a sudden she would burst into a dance, whirling about taller and straighter than she had ever been before, and so wildly attractive in this moment of resurrected youth that it was impossible to take one's eyes off her.

And all the while nanny Yevgenia kept blowing like a horn:

They danced from early mass on Sunday
To the breaking of the dawn.
All too soon the day was Monday—
And the holiday was gone.

When the dance was over, my grandmother took her place at the samovar. Everyone praised her, but she modestly protested.

"Enough, enough! You've never seen a real dancer," she said, as she arranged her disordered hair. "There was a girl, now, where I lived in Balakhna—I've forgot her name and whose she was—never would she dance, but some would cry with the joy of watching her! A heart's holiday it was just to look at her; you couldn't want for anything else! How I envied her, sinner that I was!"

"Singers and dancers are the salt of the earth," observed nanny Yevgenia severely, and began to sing something about King David.

"You ought to get a job dancing in a saloon," said Uncle Yakov

to Tsiganok, as he threw his arm over his shoulder. "You'd give people a treat all right!"

"I want to sing," complained Tsiganok. "If God would give me a voice, I'd sing without stopping for ten years, and then it wouldn't matter what happened to me—even if I became a monk!"

Everyone drank vodka, especially Grigori.

"Watch out, Grigori, or you'll go completely blind," warned my grandmother as she poured him glass after glass.

"What of it?" he answered. "I don't need eyes any more. I've seen everything."

He did not get drunk, but became more and more voluble, talking to me all the time about my father.

"He had a big heart, he did, my good friend Maxim Savvateyevich...."

Grandmother sighed and agreed with him:

"Ah yes, child of God that he was...."

I found all this vastly interesting and was held in a state of tense excitement. The atmosphere gave rise to a kind of quiet, untiring gloom, and the gloom and the joy lived together in the hearts of the people, inseparable, the one supplanting the other with an elusive, inexplicable swiftness.

Once Uncle Yakov, who was not particularly drunk, began to rip his shirt, tear at his curly hair and colourless moustache, at his nose and protruding lip.

"Why, oh why?" he wailed, the tears flowing. "Why should it be so?"

He struck himself on the cheek, on the brow, on the breast, sobbing the while:

"I'm wicked and worthless, a lost soul!"

"Aha! That's it!" roared Grigori.

"Enough, Yakov! The good Lord knows what to teach us," said my grandmother, also a bit tipsy, as she caught at her son's hands.

She became even better after having something to drink. Her smiling dark eyes poured a warm light over everyone, and she would say in a singsong voice as she fanned her flushed face with her handkerchief:

"Oh Lord, oh Lord, how good it all is! Just look how good it all is!"

That was her heart's cry, her life's slogan.

I was amazed by the tears and cries of my carefree uncle. I asked my grandmother why he wept and struck himself.

"You have to know everything!" she grumbled reluctantly, not at all in her usual manner. "Wait a while—it's too soon for you to be sticking your nose into such things."

That only whetted my curiosity. I went into the workshop and began questioning Ivan, but he also avoided answering me, only laughing quietly, glancing at the master-workman out of the corner of his eye and pushing me out of the shop.

"Enough! Get out of here, before I let you down into one of those vats and dye you a bright green," he shouted.

The master-workman was standing before a low, broad stove with three vats built into it. He was stirring the contents of one of them with a long black stick with which he would then lift up the cloth and watch the coloured water drain off. The bright fire was reflected in his leather apron, as varicoloured as the brocaded vestments of a priest. The dye water bubbled in the vats and a cloud of acrid smoke streamed through the door and across the wintry yard.

The master-workman glanced at me from under his glasses with red and filmy eyes; then he turned to Ivan.

"Can't you see I need some wood?" he said gruffly.

When Tsiganok ran out into the yard, Grigori sat down on a sack of santalin and beckoned me to him.

"Come here," he said.

He sat me on his knee, swept my cheek with his warm, soft beard, and told me things I shall never forget.

"Your uncle beat his wife to death, and his conscience gives him no peace, understand? It's right you should know everything—keep your eyes open or you'll have a hard time of it."

It was easy to talk to Grigori, like to my grandmother, but it was frightening. It seemed as though he could see through everything when he glanced out from under his dark glasses.

"And how did he beat her to death?" he went on unhurriedly. "Here's how—he'd get in bed with her, cover her with the quilt, head and all, thump and pound her night after night until she died. What for? Couldn't tell you, himself."

Ivan came in with a load of wood and squatted in front of the fire to warm his hands, but Grigori went on impressively without paying any attention to him.

"Maybe he beat her because she was better than him and he envied her. The Kashirins can't stand anything good, sonny. They envy it, but they can't take it to themselves, so they wipe it out. You ask your granny how they squeezed your father out of this life. She'll tell you everything—she can't stand lies—can't understand them. She's a kind of saint, your granny, even if she does take a drop now and then and likes her snuff. Kind of a holy woman. You keep in with her, sonny. . . ."

He pushed me away and I went out into the yard stunned and horrified. Vanya overtook me when I reached the entranceway.

"Don't be afraid of him, he's a good sort." he whispered in my ear. his hand on my head. "Look him straight in the eye—he likes people who do that."

Everything was strangely upsetting. I knew no other life, but I had a vague recollection that my mother and father had not lived like that; they had spoken other words, known other amusements, and had always sat and walked alongside of each other, close together. In the evenings they had sat at the window singing songs, laughing loud and long, so that the neighbours would gather to listen. I remember that the upraised faces of these neighbours had always reminded me of dirty dinner plates. Here, on the contrary, people rarely laughed, and when they did you could not be sure what they were laughing at. They were always shouting at each other, threatening each other, and whispering off in the corner. The children were silent and inconspicuous, beaten to earth like dust in the rain. I felt like a stranger in this house, and the life about me pricked me with a thousand needles, rousing my suspicions and forcing me to watch everything with strained attention.

My friendship with Ivan grew. From sunrise 'til late at night my grandmother was busy about the house, so I spent most of the day trotting at the heels of Tsiganok. He continued to protect me with his arm whenever my grandfather flogged me, and would show me his swollen fingers the next day with the complaint:

"No point in it. Don't help *you* any, and look what *I* get! That's the last time—hereafter you take what's coming to you!"

But the next time he would take the unearned punishment all over again.

"You said you wouldn't do it any more."

"Saying and doing are two different things—don't know myself how it happened."

Soon I learned something about Tsiganok that increased my interest and devotion.

Every Friday Tsiganok would hitch the sorrel gelding Sharap (a mischievous beast with a sweet tooth—my grandmother's favourite) to the broad sledge, dress himself in an enormous cap and a short sheepskin tightly girdled with a green sash, and go to market to buy the week's supply of food. Sometimes he would be gone for a long time. Then everyone would become nervous, and keep going to the window, breathing on the frosted glass to get a glimpse into the street.

"Coming yet?"

"Not yet."

My grandmother would worry the most.

"Ah me!" she would say to her sons and husband. "You'll be the death of a good man and a good horse! It's a conscience you want, you shameless creatures! Never satisfied with what you've got! A stupid tribe, a greedy lot! The Lord'll punish you yet!"

My grandfather would frown and mutter:

"Oh, all right. This is the last time. . . ."

Sometimes Tsiganok would return only at noon; then my grandfather and uncles would rush into the yard to meet him, while behind them would come my grandmother, furiously sniffing her snuff and waddling like a bear—for some reason she was always clumsy at such times. The children would come running out, and then would begin the joy of unloading the sledge, packed with fresh game, whole pigs, fish, and cuts of meat of every variety.

"Bought everything we ordered?" asked my grandfather eyeing the sledge with his sharp little eyes.

"Everything, just as ordered," answered Ivan merrily, jumping about the yard and rubbing his mittened hands to warm up.

"Stop rubbing your mittens like that—they cost money," shouted my grandfather sternly. "Bring back any change?"

"No."

My grandfather slowly walked about the sledge, muttering as he went:

"Looks like you've brought back an awful lot of stuff again. Sure you haven't bought some of it without money? See that don't happen in my house, hear?"

And he would hurry away with his face all screwed up.

Then my uncles would merrily make for the sledge and start guessing the weight of the fowls, fish, giblets, legs of veal, and chunks of meat.

"You made a fine choice, all right!" they would say, whistling and shouting in approbation.

My Uncle Mikhail went into particular ecstacies. He would hop around the sledge as though he were on springs, sniffing with the nose of a woodpecker, smacking his lips and blissfully narrowing his restless eyes. He was as lean as my grandfather, and resembled him, except that he was taller, and dark as a gypsy. He would thrust his frozen hands up his sleeves and ask:

"How much money did the old man give you?"

"Five rubles."

"And here's at least fifteen rubles' worth. How much did you spend?"

"Four rubles ten."

"In other words, ninety kopeks in your pocket, eh? Hear that, Yakov? That's one way to make money."

Uncle Yakov laughed softly as he stood there in the cold in his shirt sleeves, blinking at the frosty blue sky.

"How about standing us each to a half pint, Vanya?" he would drawl.

My grandmother unharnessed the horse.

"What is it, my love? What is it, my kitten?" she would murmur as she worked. "Wanting to play a bit? Go ahead. Go right ahead—the Lord don't object to a little playfulness."

The huge Sharap would toss his mane and scratch at her shoulder with his white teeth, snatching off her silk kerchief, glancing into her face with merry eyes, and neighing softly as he shook the hoarfrost off his lashes.

"Is it a piece of bread you're wanting?" she would ask as she

thrust a great hunk, well salted, between his teeth, holding her apron under his mouth and watching him chew.

"He's a beauty, that gelding, granny," Tsiganok would say, as playful as a young colt himself. "He's so smart!"

"Get away! Stop wagging your tail around here!" cried my grandmother with a stamp of her foot. "You know I have no use for you on such days!"

She explained to me that when Tsiganok went to market, he did less buying than he did stealing.

"Grandad gives him a fiver; he spends three—and steals ten rubles' worth," she said sullenly. "He loves to steal, the rascal! Tried it once—it worked—everybody here at home laughed and praised him, so he made a habit of it. Your grandad got so fed up on poverty when he was young, it has made him tight in his old age. He thinks more of money than of his own children. Only too glad to get something for nothing. As for Mikhail and Yakov—"

She dismissed them with a wave of her hand and became silent for a moment.

"It's a tangled lacemaking, Alyosha," she continued, glancing into her snuff box, "done by a blind old hag as got the pattern twisted. Little wonder you and me can't make head or tail out of it. But once they catch Vanya for stealing, they'll beat him to death...."

Again she was silent for a brief space, and when she went on, her voice was very soft.

"Ah me! Lots of rules we've got, but no truth to base them on...."

The next day I begged Tsiganok not to steal any more.

"They'll beat you to death...."

"They won't catch me—I'll get away: I'm a clever one, and my horse is a fast one," he said with a laugh which was soon eclipsed by a frown. "Oh I know it's all wrong to steal, and dangerous. I do it just for the fun of it. And I don't save up any money; those uncles of yours get it all out of me in the course of a week. But I don't care—let them have it. I get enough to eat."

Suddenly he picked me up and shook me gently.

"You're thin and light, but you got good bones. You'll grow up into a strong fellow. Listen, learn to play the guitar—ask your Uncle Yakov to teach you—no fooling! Only you're too young yet,

that's the trouble! A little chap, but got a temper! I don't think you like that grandad of yours, do you?"

"I don't know."

"I don't like any of these Kashirins except granny. Only the devil could like them!"

"And me?"

"You're not a Kashirin. You're a Peshkov. That's different blood, a different tribe."

Suddenly he squeezed me tightly and said with almost a groan:

"God, if only I could sing! Wouldn't I wring the hearts though! Well, get along, brother. Got to start working."

He let me down on the floor, put a handful of nails into his mouth, and began tacking some wet black material to a large square board.

Soon after that he was killed.

It happened like this: leaning against the fence of our yard, near the gate, lay a huge oaken cross ending in a thick pedestal. It had lain there for a long time. I remember noticing it when I first came to live in that house. At that time it was new and yellow; now it had become darkened by autumn rains and gave off the pungent odour of seasoned oak. It was badly in the way in our small, littered yard.

Uncle Yakov had bought it to place on his wife's grave, swearing to carry it to the cemetery on his own shoulders on the first anniversary of her death.

The anniversary fell on Saturday, at the beginning of winter. It was cold and windy and snow came flying off the roofs. My grandmother and grandfather and the other three grandchildren rode ahead to the cemetery for the ceremony. Everyone else went out into the yard. I was left at home as a punishment for some crime I had committed.

My uncles, dressed in identical black coats, lifted the head of the cross and placed one of its arms on Yakov's shoulder, the other on Mikhail's. With difficulty Grigori and a strange man lifted the heavy pedestal and placed it on Tsiganok's broad shoulders; he swayed and placed his feet wide apart to brace himself.

"Can you manage?" asked Grigori.

"Don't know. Pretty heavy."

"Open the gate, you blind devil," roared Uncle Mikhail.

"Shame on you, Vanya," said my Uncle Yakov. "We're both lighter than you."

But Grigori turned to Vanya as he opened the gate and admonished sternly:

"Take care not to strain yourself! Well, God be with you!"

"You mangy old fool!" shouted Uncle Mikhail from the street.

Everybody in the yard laughed and started talking in loud voices, as though they were pleased that the cross had been removed.

Grigori took me by the hand and led me into the workshop.

"Maybe your grandfather won't flog you today," he said. "Seems like he's in a good humour."

He sat me on top of a pile of wool ready to be dyed, gently wrapped it around me, and began to speak to me thoughtfully as he sniffed the steam coming from the vats:

"I've known your grandfather for thirty-seven years, sonny," he said. "I saw the beginning of this business, and now I'm witnessing the end of it. We used to be good friends—went into business together, thought it up together. He's a smart one, your grandfather! See, he made himself boss here—I wasn't able. But the Lord's smarter than any of us: one smile of His, and the wisest is left standing there blinking his eyes like a fool. You don't know the how and the why of things yet, but it's right you should know everything. The life of an orphan's not easy. Your father, Maxim Savvateyevich, was a trump if there ever was one—he understood everything. That's why your grandfather didn't like him and wouldn't have a thing to do with him...."

It was pleasant to sit and listen to his kind words and watch the red and gold fire playing in the stove, the milky cloud of steam rising from the vats and settling to freeze on the planks of the slanting ceiling. Through a ragged crack I glimpsed a blue ribbon of sky. The wind had died down, the sun was shining, and the yard seemed to have been sprinkled with ground glass. From the street came the crunching of sleigh runners; blue smoke curled from the chimneys of the houses, and light shadows flitted over the snow as though they too were telling their story.

The tall, bony Grigori, with his long beard and large ears,

looked like a kind wizard as he stood there hatless, stirring the boiling dyes and giving me instructions.

"Always look people straight in the eye; even a dog that's after you will stop in his tracks if you do that...."

His heavy glasses pressed on the bridge of his nose, causing the end to turn blue, like my grandmother's.

"What's that?" he said, stopping suddenly. He listened for a second, closed the draft in the stove with his foot, and bounded across the yard. I followed at his heels.

Tsiganok lay on his back in the middle of the kitchen floor; from the window streamed two broad shafts of light, one of which fell on his head and breast, the other on his feet. His forehead shone with a strange light; his brows were raised; his slanting eyes stared at the sooty ceiling; his dark lips twitched and emitted a pink froth; thin streams of blood oozed out of the corners of his mouth, down his neck and onto the floor, while blood ran freely from underneath him. Ivan's legs lay limp, and from the way his wide pants clung to the floor, it was clear that they were soaked. The floor had been scrubbed with sand until it shone bright in the sun. Rivulets of blood ran toward the doorway, lighted vividly where they crossed the shafts of sunlight.

Tsiganok lay motionless except for the fingers of his outstretched arms, which kept scratching at the floor, causing his dye-stained nails to glisten in the sunlight.

Nanny Yevgenia crouched beside Ivan to place a candle in his hand, but he could not grasp it; the candle fell, and its flame was extinguished in blood. The nurse picked it up, wiped it off, and once more tried to place it in his restless fingers. The kitchen seethed with suppressed excitement which blew me like a wind off the doorsill, but I clung tight to the jamb.

"He stumbled," said Uncle Yakov in a colourless voice, jerking his head. He himself had become faded and wrinkled, and he kept blinking his colourless eyes.

"He fell, and it crushed him—struck him in the back. It'd have smashed us too if we hadn't let go in time."

"Then it was you that smashed him," said Grigori hoarsely.

"Well, what do you think we...."

"You!"

The blood kept flowing; near the door it had already formed a pool which darkened and seemed to be rising. Tsiganok lay there making noises as though in his sleep, while the pink froth kept coming out of his mouth and his body kept melting away, growing flatter and flatter, levelling down to the floor as though merging with it.

"Mikhail took a horse and went to the church to fetch pa," whispered Uncle Yakov. "I dumped him in a droshky and hurried back here with him.... A good thing I didn't carry the pedestal myself, or look where I'd be now...."

Once more the nurse fixed the candle in Tsiganok's hand, dripping wax and tears into his palm.

"Stick the candle to the floor at his head, clumsy!" cried Grigori roughly.

"That's right."

"Take off his hat!"

The nurse pulled off his hat, and Ivan's head struck the floor with a dull thud. Now his head was turned, so that the blood flowed more freely from his mouth, but only from one corner. This went on for a frightfully long time. At first I had expected Tsiganok to have a rest, then sit up, spit disgustedly, and say in his usual manner:

"Phooh! This heat!"

That was what he always said on awaking from his after-dinner nap on Sundays. But instead of sitting up, he kept lying there and melting away. The sun had withdrawn; the shafts had shortened and now lay only on the window sills. His face and hands had grown dark, his fingers no longer moved, and the froth had stopped bubbling from his mouth. Three candles had been placed about his head, their golden flames lighting the blue-black mass of his hair, the pinched tip of his nose, and his blood-stained teeth, and throwing wavering patches of light over his swarthy cheeks.

Nanny knelt weeping beside him:

"Ah, you poor little pigeon! Such a joy you were!" she whispered.

It was cold and terrifying. I climbed under the table and hid there. Then my grandfather came lumbering into the kitchen in his racoon coat, followed by my grandmother in her greatcoat with little tails about the collar. With them came Uncle Mikhail, the children, and many strangers.

My grandfather threw his coat on the floor and shouted:

"The bastards! To do in a chap like this! Why, in five years he'd have been worth his weight in gold!"

The clothes on the floor cut off my view of Ivan, and in crawling to a better position I got in my grandfather's way; he kicked me aside as he shook his little red fist at my uncles.

"Wolves, that's what you are!"

Then he sank down on a bench, grasping it tightly with his fingers as he whimpered and muttered in a squeaky voice:

"Oh I know—you couldn't stomach him. Ah, Vanya, foolish boy! What can we do now? What can we do, I say? The horse is old, the harness sold.... Well, mother, looks like the Lord's had it in for us these last few years, eh? What do you say, mother?"

My grandmother had thrown herself down on the floor beside Ivan and was feeling his face, his head, his breast, breathing into his eyes, picking up his hands and rubbing them, knocking over all the candles. At last she rose heavily to her feet, a vast black figure, her black dress shining, her black eyes rolling fearfully as she said in a low voice:

"Out of here, you accursed ones!"

Everyone except my grandfather disappeared.

Tsiganok was buried unnoticeably, unobtrusively.

IV

I lay on a wide bed, with a heavy quilt folded round and round me, listening to my grandmother praying. She was on her knees, pressing her breast with one hand while with the other she occasionally crossed herself unhurriedly.

I could hear the crackling of the frost beyond the window. Greenish moonlight glanced through the lacy pattern of the frozen pane, illuminating with its phosphorescent light the kind face with its prominent nose and dark eyes. The silken headdress covering my grandmother's hair shone like metal, while her dark dress streamed from her shoulders in shifting folds that piled upon the floor about her.

When she had finished praying, she silently undressed, placing her clothes neatly on the trunk in the corner. Then she came to bed, and I pretended to be sound asleep.

"Stop making believe, you little rascal. You're not asleep," she said softly. "You're not now, are you pigeon-widgeon? Here, let's have a bit of that quilt."

Sensing what was to follow, I could not resist a smile; then she shouted:

"Aha! So it's sport you want to make of your old grandmother, is it?"

She took hold of the edge of the quilt and yanked it with such force and such skill that I went skyrocketing into the air, whirling around and landing back in the feather bed while she roared with laughter.

"Take that, you little pixy! Guess that'll hold you!"

Sometimes she would pray for such a long time that I would fall asleep and not hear her come to bed.

Days of trouble, quarrels and fighting, always ended in these long prayers; it was most interesting to listen to my grandmother giving the Lord all the details of what had happened. There she knelt, a mountainous form, beginning her prayers in a quick, unintelligible whisper which grew into a deep grumble:

"You know yourself, Lord, it's only natural everyone should want to better himself. Mikhail, now, being the oldest, is the one as should stay here in town—it's an offence to send him over the river to a new place as nobody's tried before and there's no telling how it'll turn out. But father has a preference for Yakov. Is it right for a father to love his children unequal? He's a stubborn one, the old man is. You'd do well to give him a drop of sense, Lord."

She would glance at the dark icons with her huge, shining eyes as she went on giving advice to that God of hers.

"Send him a good dream, Lord, showing him how to divide with his sons."

She would cross herself and bow until her broad brow struck against the carpet, then, straightening up, go on speaking convincingly:

"And why not send a drop of joy to Varvara? What's she done to get in your bad graces, Lord? Why is she worse than the others? Who ever heard of such a young, strong woman living in such

misery? And then Grigori, Lord—mind his eyes—getting worse every day. Once he's blind, what's left for him but to go begging his bread, and would that be right?—him as has poured out all his strength in grandad's business.... But the old man'll give him no help.... Ah Lord, dear Lord...."

For a long time she would remain silent, with drooping head and hanging arms as though she had fallen asleep.

"What else?" she would say at last, wrinkling her brows. "Be merciful to all the faithful; and forgive me, accursed fool that I am, as you know only too well; it's a foolish mind leads me to sin and not a wicked heart."

Then she would give a deep sigh and say with loving satisfaction:

"But there's nothing you don't know, dear Lord; nothing you don't understand, blessed Father."

I was very fond of my grandmother's God, he seemed so near and dear to her. Often I would say:

"Tell me about God."

She had a special manner for speaking about Him; she would always sit down and close her eyes and speak in a soft voice, strangely drawing out her words; I can still remember how she would draw herself up, take a seat, throw a kerchief over her head, and begin to weave her fancies until I fell asleep:

"There the Lord sits on a hill, surrounded by the meadows of paradise; sits on a sapphire throne under the silver lindens, lindens that bloom all the year round, for there is no winter in paradise, and no autumn, so that the flowers bloom from year's end to year's end, bringing joy to the saints of heaven. And all around the Lord fly a multitude of angels—thick as snow, or a swarm of bees—or like a flock of white doves flying from heaven to earth and back again, telling the Lord about us creatures here below. And each of us has his own angel—yours and mine and grandad's—for the Lord is the same to all His creatures. Here, now, comes your angel and says to the Lord: 'Alexei went and stuck his tongue out at his grandfather.' So the Lord give His orders: 'Let the old man give him a beating,' says he. And so it is with everybody and everything, each rewarded according to his deserts—grief to some, joy to others. And it's all so fine that the angels flutter their wings in joy and keep sing-

ing, 'Praised be the Lord, the Lord on high!' While He just looks on with a smile, as much as to say, 'Well, go ahead my pretties, once it pleases you!'"

And my grandmother herself would smile and nod her head.

"Have you seen all that?"

"I haven't seen it, but I know it," she answered musingly.

Whenever she spoke about God and paradise and the angels, she became small and meek, her face lost the scars of age, and her moist eyes radiated a particularly warm light. I wound her heavy satiny braids around my neck and sat motionless, charmed by these tales which I could never get enough of.

"It's not given to mortals to look on the face of God—blind them it would. Only the saints can behold him with wide-open eyes. But angels I've seen. They become visible when your heart's been purged. Once I stood in the church at early mass, and there at the altar I could see two of them—like fog they were—see right through them, and bright as bright, with wings to the floor, all lacy and gauzy. They kept moving about the throne, helping old Father Ilya: when he'd raise his feeble old arms to pray there they'd be, a-holding up his elbows. So old and blind he was that he kept bumping into everything, and soon after that he died. I was so happy to see them I nearly fainted with joy; my heart ached nigh to bursting and the tears came streaming from my eyes—ah, what a delight it was! How splendid everything is with God up in heaven, Alyosha, my pigeon-widgeon! And how splendid it is down here on earth!"

"Even here in our house?"

"Yes, everywhere, praised be the Holy Virgin," replied my grandmother, crossing herself.

This was puzzling: certainly it was hard to agree that everything was well in our house, where relations were becoming more strained every day.

I remember once passing the open door of Uncle Mikhail's room and catching a glimpse of Aunt Natalya all in white, rushing about the room with her hands pressed to her breast, crying in a dreadful, low voice:

"Oh God, take me away from here, let me go...."

I understood her prayer, and I understood Grigori when he kept muttering:

"Soon as I'm blind I'll go off begging, and that'll be better than this!"

I hoped he would hurry and go blind so that I could become his guide and go off with him, to wander through the world begging our bread. I once spoke of this to him. He laughed into his beard and said:

"All right, we'll go together. And I'll cry through the streets so's all shall hear, 'This is the grandson of Vasili Kashirin, owner of the dye works!' That'll be funny, all right!"

I had noticed that often my Aunt Natalya's lips were swollen and there were black-and-blue marks on her yellow face.

"Does uncle beat her?" I asked my grandmother.

"On the sly, curse him!" she answered with a sigh. "Your grandfather doesn't allow it, so he does it at night. He's a mean one and she's got no backbone."

Then she would go on, warming to her story:

"But they don't beat nowadays the way they used to! Oh, sometimes they'll give it to you in the teeth or the ear or yank at your braid for a minute or two, but it used to be they'd torture you for hours! Once your grandfather beat me on the first day of Easter week from early mass to sundown—beat me—take a rest—then start all over again. With the horse reins or anything else at hand."

"What for?"

"Can't remember now. Once he beat me 'til I was half dead and then gave me nothing to eat for five days—I hardly managed to pull through that time. Or again. . . ."

I was struck dumb by such facts: my grandmother was twice the size of my grandfather, and I could not imagine his getting the better of her.

"Is he so much stronger than you?"

"Not stronger, but older. Besides which, he's my husband. It's him God's put in charge of me, and ordered me to bear it."

I used to love to watch her dust the icons and clean their mountings. Our icons were very elaborate: set with pearls and precious stones and inlaid with silver. She would handle them with deft fingers.

"What a sweet face!" she would murmur as she crossed herself and kissed them.

"All covered with dust and soot! Blessed Mother of God, omnipotent, shedding joy unspeakable! Just look here, how fine the drawing is, Alyosha, my pigeon-widgeon, such tiny figures, but each standing separate. This one's called 'Twelve Holidays,' with the Feodorovsky Virgin in the middle—such a dear kind lady! And this one—'Weep not, oh mother, beside my grave. . . .' "

Sometimes it seemed to me that she played with the icons as seriously and credulously as my cowed cousin Katerina played with her dolls.

Often she saw devils, both singly and in droves.

"One night in Lent I was walking past the Rudolf's house—everything bright with moonlight—and suddenly I saw something dark straddling the roof near the chimney. Big and shaggy it was, with its horns bent down into the chimney, a-sniffing and a-snorting, lashing its tail over the roof and shuffling its big feet. I made the sign of the cross and said, 'Christ shall rise again to the mortification of his enemies!' Straight away he gave a little squeak and slid down into the yard—mortified he was! Likely the Rudolfs were cooking something to break their fast and he sniffed it, gloating. . . ."

I laughed at the thought of the devil somersaulting down into the yard, and she laughed with me.

"Don't they like mischief though, just like little children! One night, getting on to midnight, I was doing the wash in the bathhouse. All of a sudden the door of the stove swung open and out they came—little ones, and littler ones—red ones, green ones, black ones—like roaches. I rushed to the door, but they wouldn't let me reach it. There I was, locked up with those devils, millions of them, filling the whole bathhouse—under my feet, up my legs, pinching, biting, stinging 'til I couldn't so much as make the sign of the cross to shoo them away. Soft and warm and furry they were, like little kittens, always up on their hind legs, a-turning and a-tumbling, bearing their little mice teeth, flashing their little green eyes, tossing their heads with the little knobs where the horns were coming through, twisting their little pigs' tails. . . . Lordy, what a time I had! Lost my senses, I did, and when I came to, the candle was most burnt up, the wash water all cold, and the wash scattered all over the floor. 'Phooh!' thinks I, 'the plague on you, devils that you be!' "

I closed my eyes and could see the door of the grey stone stove open, letting out a stream of tumbling imps who crowded the bath-house, blowing at the candle and sticking out their vixenish pink tongues. This too was amusing, but terrifying as well. My grandmother shook her head and was silent for a minute, until again she was seized by a flare of imagination:

"And I've seen folks with the curse on them, too; that was also during the night, in the winter, with a blizzard raging. I was crossing the Dukov gully, where remember I told you Yakov and Mikhailo wanted to drown your father through a hole in the ice of the pond. That's where I was going; I had just come down the path to the bottom of the gully when all of a sudden, such a whistling, such a screeching I heard! I looked up, and there's a troika of black horses galloping down on me with the coachman, a round little devil in a pointed red cap, standing up on the seat with his arms stretched out, driving them with chains instead of reins. And when the horses couldn't get through the gully they made straight for the pond in a cloud of snow. And those in the sleigh were also devils, whistling and shouting and waving their caps. Seven troikas went flying past me like fire-wagons, and the horses of all of them black as sable, and the people in all of them accursed of their fathers and mothers! Such people are good sport for the devil. The devils seek them out, riding them and driving them through the night for their merrymaking. Reckon it was a devil's wedding I saw that night. . . ."

Grandmother spoke with such simplicity and conviction that it was impossible not to believe her.

But best of all were the verses she recited about how the Holy Virgin walked the thorny path through this world, exhorting the "Robber-princess" Yengalycheva not to rob and flail Russians; verses about Alexei, the man of God, and about Ivan-the-Warrior; tales about Vasilisa-the-Wise, about Pope-the-Goat and the godly Godson; fearful legends about Marfa-the-Possadnitsa, about Baba Usta, the Robber Chief, about Maria, the Egyptian sinner, and about the grief of the Robber's Mother. Her stock of tales, legends, and verses was inexhaustible.

She was not afraid of people, including my grandfather, or devils, or any other dark power, but she was deathly afraid of roaches, and

sensed their presence even at a great distance. Sometime she would wake me up in the middle of the night, whispering:

"Alyosha darling, there's a roach crawling. Kill it, for the love of Christ!"

Only half awake, I would light the candle and crawl about on my hands and knees in search of the enemy; but my efforts were not always successful.

"There isn't any," I would say, but she would gasp from where she lay motionless, with her head covered by the quilt.

"Oh, yes there is! Keep hunting, I beg you! It's there, I know it is!"

And she was always right. Usually I would find the roach somewhere far away from the bed.

"Have you killed it? Ah, praise the Lord! And thank you, my love," she would say, throwing the quilt off her head with a happy smile.

But if I failed to find it, she would be unable to sleep, and I would feel her body trembling at the slightest rustle in the silence of the night and hear her whispering with bated breath:

"There it is at the door ... now it's under the trunk...."

"Why are you so afraid of roaches?"

"What are they good for anyway?" she would answer sensibly enough. "Only go crawling about, crawling about, the black devils! God gave the least of His creatures some purpose in life—the thousand-legger shows there's dampness in the house; the bedbug shows the walls are dirty; if you catch a louse on you, it means you'll be sick—that's all clear enough! But as for them—who can tell what they're for; what right have they to be alive?"

Once when she was on her knees carrying on an animated conversation with God, grandfather flung open the door and cried hoarsely:

"Well, mother, a visitation from the Lord, all right! The workshop's on fire!"

"What!" cried my grandmother, struggling to her feet. Both of them rushed noisily into the darkness of the large parlour.

"Yevgenia, take down the icons! Natalya, dress the children!" ordered my grandmother in a firm, loud voice.

"Ah-h-h!" wailed my grandfather.

I ran into the kitchen; the window overlooking the yard was bright as gold, while golden patches slithered and slid over the floor; my Uncle Yakov pulled his boots on his bare feet and then jumped about on the spots as though they burned his soles, crying:

"Aha! It's Mikhail set us on fire; set us on fire and ran away!"

"S-s-s, you cur!" said my grandmother, giving him such a push through the door that he nearly fell.

Through the frost on the windowpane I could see the burning roof of the workshop and the flames whirling through the open door. Red blossoms of fire bloomed smokeless in the quiet night; only high up in the air did a smoke cloud hover, without blotting out the silver trail of the Milky Way. The snow glowed red with the flames and the walls of the outhouses swayed and trembled as though straining toward the corner of the yard where the fire was burning merrily, lighting up the broad cracks in the workshop and thrusting its bright, twisted tongues through them. Red and gold ribbons of flame quickly slid over the dry boards of the roof where the slender clay chimney thrust up noticeably, pouring a thin stream of smoke into the air. A soft crackling and silken rustling beat at the windowpane; the fire grew, and its splendour transformed the workshop into beauty like that of the iconostasis in the church, luring the watcher with irresistible power.

I threw a heavy sheepskin over my head, pulled on somebody's boots, and staggered into the entranceway, then out onto the porch, where I stood stunned—blinded by the brilliance of the fire; deafened by its roar and the shouts of my grandfather, my uncle, and Grigori; frightened by the behaviour of my grandmother. She threw an empty sack over her head, wrapped herself in a horse blanket, and ran into the blazing workshop, shouting:

"The sulphuric acid, you fools! The sulphuric acid'll blow up!"

"Stop her, Grigori!" wailed my grandfather. "Oh, she's done for!"

But grandmother was back already, all smoking and shaking her head, bending under the weight of a demijohn of sulphuric acid.

"Lead out the horse, father!" she cried hoarsely, between coughs. "Pull this thing off me—can't you see I'm a-fire?"

Grigori took the smouldering horse blanket off her shoulders, then

grabbed up a spade and bent double to smash the huge hunks of snow at the door of the workshop. My uncle kept jumping about him with an axe in his hands, my grandfather followed at the heels of my grandmother, throwing snow at her. She buried the demijohn in a snow-drift and ran to open the gates of the yard.

"Save the granary, neighbours!" she cried, bowing to the people who came running up. "It'll spread to the granary and the hayloft—all our buildings will burn to the ground, and yours will be next. Chop off the roof and throw the hay into the garden! Grigori, throw the snow up high—what good's it on the ground? Be done with your running, Yakov, give the people spades and axes! Good people, work together, and God will be our help!"

She was as fascinating as the fire. Lighted by the flames which seemed to strike out at her, she darted like a black shadow about the yard, being everywhere at once, noticing everything and giving everybody orders.

Sharap ran into the yard and reared up on his hind legs, throwing my grandfather off his feet; the horse's rolling eyes flashed red in the fire light; he snorted and balked, and was so unmanageable that grandfather let go the reins and jumped aside.

"Hold him, mother!" he cried.

She threw herself under the very feet of the rearing horse and stood motionless with outstretched arms. The horse neighed plaintively and settled down, casting furtive glances at the fire.

"Don't be afraid," said grandmother in a deep voice as she patted the animal's neck and took the reins in her hands. "Would I leave you at such a fearful moment? You silly little mouse!"

The little mouse, three times her size, followed meekly to the gate, neighing as it looked into her flushed face.

Nanny Yevgenia led out the children, all bundled up and mumbling into their wrappings.

"Vasili Vasilyevich, I can't find Alexei!" she cried.

"Get along, get along," answered grandfather, while I hid under the porch steps so that Yevgenia would not lead me away too.

The roof of the workshop caved in, leaving a pattern of smoking, glowing rafters against the sky; from inside the structure came explosions of red, green and blue flames which licked out into the yard, reaching toward the crowd of people who were trying to extinguish

this enormous bonfire by throwing snow at it. The vats boiled furiously, giving off thick clouds of smoke and steam which filled the yard with strange odours and brought tears to the eyes; I climbed out from under the steps and landed at my grandmother's feet.

"Get away!" she cried. "You'll get crushed! Get away!"

Into the yard dashed a horseman in a plumed metal helmet. His sorrel steed was foaming at the mouth and he lifted his whip as he shouted threateningly:

"Make way!"

Little bells jingled merrily and everything was gay and festive. My grandmother pushed me up on the porch.

"Didn't you hear me? Get away from here, I tell you!"

It was impossible not to obey her at this moment. I went into the kitchen and again took my stand at the window, but the dark crowd of people cut off my view of the fire. The only thing I could see was the flash of metal helmets among the dark winter hats and caps.

The fire was quickly extinguished by beating it down and pouring water on it. The policemen drove away the people, and at last my grandmother came into the kitchen.

"Who's here? You? Not asleep? Afraid? Don't be afraid. It's all over now."

She sat down next to me and began rocking back and forth without a word. It was pleasant to regain the quiet night and the darkness, but at the same time I regretted the loss of the fire.

My grandfather appeared in the doorway.

"Mother?"

"Ah?"

"Get burned?"

"Nothing much."

He scratched a sulphur match, and the blue flame illuminated his chipmunk face, black with soot. He lighted the candle on the table and sank down heavily next to my grandmother.

"You might have a wash," she said. She was also covered with soot and smelled of smoke.

"Sometimes the Lord shows you his mercy," sighed my grandfather. "Sends you a flash of reason."

He patted her on the shoulder and added with a grin:

"Just for brief minutes, for little spells, but still He sends it."

Grandmother also laughed and was about to say something, but grandfather frowned.

"Have to get rid of that Grigori. It's all his carelessness. That *muzhik's* done for, outlived his time. Yakov's sitting out there on the porch crying, the fool. You'd better go out to him...."

She got up and went out, holding up one hand and blowing on the fingers.

"See it all, from the very beginning?" asked my grandfather without looking at me. "What did you think of that grandmother of yours, eh? And don't forget she's an old woman.... Beaten and broken.... There's something for you! As for the rest of them—phooh!"

He bent down and said nothing for some time. Then he got up and broke off the burnt end of the candle wick as he asked:

"Were you afraid?"

"No."

"That's right. Nothing to be afraid of."

He took off his shirt with an irritated movement and went to the washstand in the corner.

"Stupid to have a fire!" he said in a loud voice, stamping his foot. "Anyone who has a fire should be thrashed out in the public square as a fool or a thief! That's what they ought to do with such people and then there wouldn't be any more fires! ... Get back to bed! What you sitting here for?"

I went out, but there was no more sleeping for me that night; I had just crawled back into bed when I was galvanized into life by an inhuman wail. Once more I ran into the kitchen; I found my grandfather standing in the middle of the room, shirtless, holding a candle in his hand; the candle trembled; he kept shifting his feet but did not budge from the spot.

"Mother, Yakov, what's that?" he gasped.

I jumped up on the stove and crouched back in the corner. Once more everything became topsy-turvy inside the house, like during the fire. The wails beat in rhythmic waves against the walls and ceiling, ever louder and more insistent. My grandfather and uncle began running about like madmen; my grandmother shouted them out of the kitchen. Grigori made a great noise with the logs he was

stuffing into the stove. He filled some boilers with water and walked about nodding his head like an Astrakhan camel.

"First get the fire going!" commanded my grandmother.

Grigori climbed up on the stove for some kindling, touched my foot, and shouted in fright:

"Who's there? Phooh, what a scare you gave me! You're always where you don't belong!"

"What's happening?"

"Your Aunt Natalya's giving birth," he answered calmly, jumping down off the stove.

I remembered that my mother had not wailed like that when she had given birth.

When Grigori had put the boilers on the stove, he climbed up beside me and took a clay pipe out of his pocket.

"Started smoking to cure my eyes," he said, showing me the pipe. "Your grandmother says to take snuff, but I figure it's better to smoke."

He sat with his feet swinging over the edge of the stove, staring at the meagre light of the candle; his ear and cheek were smudged with soot, his shirt was torn, so that I got a glimpse of his ribs sticking out like hoops. One glass of his dark spectacles was cracked and a large piece had fallen out, giving a glimpse of a moist red eye that looked like a sore.

He stuffed his pipe with leaf tobacco and sat listening to the moans of the woman, muttering to himself as though he were drunk.

"Seems your grandmother got some burns after all. How's she going to do the delivering? Hear how your aunt's going on? They forgot all about her; she started her moaning soon's the fire broke out—out of fright.... Just look how hard it is to bring a living creature into the world, and still nobody holds a woman of any account. But a woman should be respected—a mother, that is—and don't you ever forget it!"

I dozed off, but was awakened by a slamming of doors, the drunken cries of Uncle Mikhail, and a general rumpus. I heard strange words being said:

"Time for the Gates of Heaven to swing wide...."

"Give her some lamp oil with rum and soot in it: half a glass of oil, half a glass of rum and a tablespoon of soot...."

"Let me have a look at her," Uncle Mikhailo kept asking.

He was sitting on the floor spitting between his widespread legs and striking the floor with his hands. The heat became unbearable on top of the stove, so I climbed down. But when I came up to my uncle he grabbed me by the leg and yanked it so that I fell, striking my head on the floor.

"Fool!" I cried.

He jumped to his feet, snatched me up and swung me into the air with a roar.

"I'll smash you against the stove!"

When I came to I was lying on my grandfather's knees in the parlour. He was sitting in the icon corner, rocking me back and forth, his eyes fastened on the ceiling as he muttered:

"And there'll be no forgiving us, any of us...."

The icon lamp burned brightly above his head and a candle was lighted on the table in the centre of the room, while a hazy winter morning glanced through the window.

"What hurts?" asked my grandfather, bending over me.

Everything hurt. My head was damp, my body like lead, but I did not wish to talk about it—everything about me was so strange: unfamiliar people were occupying most of the chairs in the room—a priest in a purple robe, a grey-haired old man in glasses and a military uniform, and many others; they were all sitting motionless, like wooden figures, frozen in expectation as they listened to a splashing of water somewhere close at hand. Uncle Yakov was standing erect in the doorway with his hands behind his back.

"Here, take him to bed, Yakov," said my grandfather.

My uncle beckoned to me and we went on tiptoe to my grandmother's room. When I had crawled up on the bed he whispered:

"Your Aunt Natalya has died...."

This did not surprise me—for some time she had not been seen around the house—had not entered the kitchen or come to the table for her meals.

"Where's grandmother?"

"In there," he answered with a wave of his hand. He went out as he had come in—tiptoeing in his bare feet.

I lay in bed glancing anxiously about me. Blind, hoary faces were glued to the windowpane; my grandmother's dress was

hanging in the corner over the trunk—I knew this, but now it seemed to me that the dress was some living creature lurking there in the shadows. I hid my head in the pillow, keeping one eye on the door; I wanted to jump up and run away; it was hot in the room, and the house was filled with a stifling odour reminding me of how Tsiganok had died and the blood had flowed over the kitchen floor. My head, or perhaps my heart, seemed to swell up; everything I had witnessed in that house dragged through me like a sledge along a wintry road, pressing me down, blotting me out....

Slowly the door of the room was opened and my grandmother edged through. Pushing the door closed with her shoulder, she remained leaning against it, her arms outstretched toward the blue flame of the icon lamp.

"My poor hands... how they hurt..." she whispered in a plaintive, childlike voice.

The division of property was made that spring; Yakov remained in town and Mikhail went across the river. My grandfather bought himself a fine new house on Polevoi Street, with a saloon on the first floor, a cosy little room in the attic, and a garden overlooking a ravine bristling with bare willow shoots.

"Plenty of whips!" said my grandfather with a merry wink at me as we walked together down soft, thawing paths on an inspection of the garden. "Soon I'll begin teaching you your letters, and then the whips'll come in handy."

The whole house was crowded with tenants; my grandfather left only one large room on the upper floor for himself and the reception of guests, while my grandmother and I had our quarters in the attic. The window of this room gave onto the street, and by leaning out I could watch the drunkards come out of the saloon in the evening and on holidays. They would go stumbling down the street, roaring and falling in the gutter. Sometimes they would be thrown out of the saloon like sacks of flour, but they always crawled back to the door, which would slam with a jarring of glass and a shriek of the rusty pulley. Then a fight would begin. It was amusing to watch

all this from up above. Every morning my grandfather went to his sons' workshops to help them get started, returning in the evening, tired and depressed and irritable.

My grandmother sewed and got the meals and dug in the garden, bustling about all day long like a huge top driven by invisible springs. She would take her snuff, sneeze appetizingly, and observe as she wiped her perspiring face:

"Praised be the saints and the angels to the end of time! At last we've come to a quiet life, Alyosha my pigeon-widgeon! Everything's so nice for us now, thanks to the Holy Virgin."

But I did not find our life very quiet. From morning to night the tenants kept running about the yard and through the house; neighbours kept popping in, always hurrying somewhere, always being late for something, always getting ready for something.

"Akulina Ivanovna!" they would call to my grandmother.

And Akulina Ivanovna would smile upon all of them in her friendly way and listen attentively to all of them as she pushed the snuff up her nose with her thumb and wiped it neatly with a large red-checked handkerchief.

"To get rid of the lice?" she would say. "To get rid of the lice you must wash often at the bathhouse, my dear, and best to take a steaming with oil of peppermint. But if the lice be under the skin, then take a tablespoon of goose fat—the very purest—a teaspoon of bichloride of mercury, and three drops of mercury; mix it all together seven times with a china pestle and then rub it on. Never to use a bone or a wooden spoon, else the mercury will spoil; and never to touch it with copper or silver—that's very harmful."

Sometimes, after careful consideration, she would say:

"You'd best go to Asaf-the-Recluse at the abbey, my good woman. Your question be too much for me to answer."

She served as a midwife, as arbiter in family quarrels, treated sick children, recited "The Virgin's Dream" so that the women could learn it "for good luck," and gave advice in household matters:

"The cucumbers themselves know when it's time to be pickled; soon as they stop smelling of earth and the like, that's when to begin salting them down. To set good kvass, its temper must be stirred: beings as kvass can't abide anything sweet, throw in a few raisins, or some sugar—a teaspoonful to a pailful. There's different tastes

in *varenets*,* there's the Danube way to make it, and the Shpanish, and then there's the Caucasian...."

All day I trotted at her heels, in the yard or the garden, or at the neighbours', where she would sit for hours drinking tea and recounting tales; it was as if I had grown to be part of her, and during that period of my life I can remember nothing but that kind, indefatigable old woman.

Sometimes my mother would put in her appearance for brief stretches. She was still proud and stern and looked upon everything with eyes as cold and grey as winter sunlight. She never stayed long, and went away without leaving any remembrance of herself.

One day I said to my grandmother:

"Are you a witch?"

"There now, whatever made you think of such a thing!" she laughed. But presently she became very serious and added, "Who am I to be a witch? Witchcraft takes lots of learning, and here am I without even knowing my letters! Look what a learned man your grandfather is, but the Blessed Virgin didn't see fit to make me wise."

Then she confided another bit of her life to me:

"I too grew up an orphan. My mother was without husband, and a cripple in the bargain. Frighted she was by the lord who owned her when still a maid. So she threw herself out the window at night, hurting her side and her shoulder so that her arm withered after that, her right one, the main one, and she an expert lacemaker. After that the nobleman had no use for her and let her go—to make her way as best she could—but how could she make her way with only one arm? So a beggar she became. But at that time the people of Balakhna were richer and better—such brave carpenters they were, and lacemakers, each one better than the other! So we used to go a-begging, my mother and me, through the town in autumn and winter; but when the archangel Gabriel raised his sword and drove off the frost, and the spring came over the earth, then off we'd go, far as feet would carry, to Murom we went, to Yurievets, and up along the Volga and the quiet Oka. How nice it is to walk the earth in spring and summer—with the ground so soft and the grass like

* *Varenets*: Baked milk curds.—*Trans.*

velvet! And there in the fields the Virgin has sprinkled flowers for your joy, and there lie the great spaces for your heart's delight! And then my mother would half close her blue eyes and her song would go winging away to the heaven—a soft voice she had, and a sweet one—and everything around would get quiet and breathless with listening. How good it was to go a-begging then! But when my tenth year came my mother was ashamed to take me with her begging; a disgrace it was, so she settled down in Balakhna; there she'd go alone from door to door, and on Sundays on the porch of the church, while I sat home learning to make lace. I couldn't learn fast enough, so anxious I was to help my poor mother; and when the pattern wouldn't turn out, there I'd sit with the tears rolling down my cheeks. In a bit over two years, mind, I learned the lacemaking, and my fame spread throughout the town. Whenever some special work was wanted, they'd come to us—'Well, Akulya, start your bobbin working!' Didn't that make me happy though! To be sure it wasn't me to take the credit, but my mother for teaching me. If she couldn't work herself with her one hand, she knew how to teach, and a good teacher is worth ten workers. I was so proud! 'You can stop your begging now, mother,' says I. 'I can feed you now with the work of my hands.' But 'Hush, you,' says my mother. 'Don't you know it's a dowry you must lay by for yourself with that money?' Soon after that your grandfather put in his appearance—a very noticeable young man: only twenty-two and overseer of the *burlaks* already. So his mother looked me over. She saw how poor I was—the daughter of a beggarwoman, which made it sure I would make a dutiful wife. Hm-m.... And she herself a bun-seller, and an evil-spirited woman ... but why speak ill of the dead? The Lord sees all that without our help; the Lord sees it, the devil needs it...."

She laughed her hearty laugh; her nose quivered comically and her eyes caressed me with musing tenderness, conveying much more than words.

I remember one quiet evening when my grandmother and I were having tea in my grandfather's room; he himself was not well, and sat on the bed without any shirt on, his shoulders covered by a long towel with which he frequently wiped the perspiration off his brow. His breathing was hoarse and rapid, his green eyes were filmy, his

face red and puffy. His sharp little ears were particularly red, and when he reached out for a glass of tea his hand shook pitifully. He was very meek and not at all like himself.

"Why don't you give me any sugar?" he complained to my grandmother in the tone of a spoiled child.

"Because honey's better for you," she answered gently but firmly.

He swallowed down the hot tea with much grunting and blubbering.

"Watch out I don't die," he said.

"Don't worry, I'm watching."

"That's it. If I should die now it would be like I never lived at all—all for nothing."

"Lie down and stop talking."

For a minute he lay quiet with his eyes closed, smacking his blue lips. Suddenly he jumped up as though someone had pinched him.

"Have to marry off Yakov and Mikhail soon as possible. Maybe wives and some more children will tame them down, eh?"

He began naming over the eligible young women in the town while my grandmother sat drinking glass after glass without making any comment. My grandfather had forbidden me to go out because of some misdemeanor, so I sat at the window watching the fading sunset and its bright reflection in the windows of the houses.

Down in the garden flocks of beetles were buzzing about the birches. A cooper was hammering away in the next yard, while not far away I could hear the wheel of a scissors-grinder. From the ravine beyond the garden came the shouts of children playing among the thick bushes. I had a desperate longing to be out there with them, and my heart was heavy with the sadness of twilight.

Suddenly my grandfather took out a brand-new book, slapped it against his palm, and called to me in a cheerful voice:

"Hey you young whippersnapper, you cabbage ears you, come on over here! Sit down, Tatar face! See that sign? That's 'a' for apple. Say it—'a' for apple. 'B' for butter. 'C' for cellar. What's this?"

"'B' for butter."

"Right. And this?"

"'C' for cellar."

"Wrong! 'A' for apple. Look close: 'd' for dinner, 'e' for ever—'f' for father—what's this?"

"'E' for ever."

"Right. And this?"

"'D' for dinner."

"Fine. And this?"

"'A' for apple."

My grandmother interrupted.

"Be better for you to lie quiet, father."

"Silence! This is just what I need to keep my mind off my worries. Go on, Alexei!"

He threw his hot, moist arm about my neck and pointed to the letters, while with the other hand he held the book under my very nose. He effused a smell of vinegar, sweat, and baked onion which nearly suffocated me. He became strangely excited and shouted into my ear:

"'K' for kitchen, 'l' for lady!"

The words were familiar, but the Slavonic letters in no way resembled them. The "l" looked more like a worm than a lady; the "f" looked like humpbacked Grigori rather than father; the bulging "b" reminded me of my grandmother and me together, while there was something about all the letters that resembled my grandfather. He kept drilling me on the alphabet, taking the letters in order and out of order; he infected me with his excitement, so that I too broke into a sweat and began to shout at the top of my voice. This struck him funny and his laugh brought on a fit of coughing.

"Just look how he's took it, mother," he gasped, clutching his breast and the book. "Phooh, you Astrakhan plague, you! What you hollering about?"

"It's you that's hollering...."

It delighted me to watch him and my grandmother, who sat with her elbows on the table, her fists at her cheeks, laughing quietly as she watched us.

"Enough of shouting your heads off!" she said.

My grandfather turned to me in friendly explanation:

"I'm shouting because I'm sick, but what you shouting for?"

Then he shook his perspiring head and said to my grandmother:

"The late Natalya was wrong when she claimed he had a bad memory. He's got a memory like a horse! Go on, snub-nose!"

At last he jokingly pushed me off the bed.

"That's enough. Hang on to the book. Tomorrow you'll tell me the whole alphabet without a mistake, and for that I'll give you five kopeks."

When I reached for the book, he drew me toward him and said sadly:

"What did your mother have to go and abandon you for, sonny?"

"Now, father, no sense in talking like that," put in my grandmother.

"Wouldn't talk like that if the hurt of it didn't make me.... Ah, what a girl to go wrong!"

He pushed me away with a brusque movement.

"Go on out and play! But not in the street—only in the yard or the garden, hear!"

The garden was just the place I had been longing to be: I knew that as soon as I put in my appearance up on the embankment, the boys down in the ravine would start throwing stones at me, and I wanted nothing more than to pay them back in kind.

"There's the pug!" they cried on catching sight of me. "Here goes!" And they hurriedly collected ammunition.

I had no idea what a "pug" was, so the name carried no insult; but it was a joy to find myself pitted against so many and to see how a well-aimed stone would put the enemy to flight or make them hide in the bushes. Such fights held no malice and left no feeling of injury.

I learned my letters quickly, and perhaps it was this that made my grandfather pay more attention to me and stop whipping me so often, though in my opinion I deserved more lickings than ever before. As I became older and bolder, I began to violate my grandfather's rules and orders, but he only scolded, or shook his fist at me.

It seemed to me that he had often beaten me without cause, and one day I told him so.

He gave me a light tap under the chin and blinked into my eyes.

"Wha-a-at?" he drawled, adding with a chuckle:

"You little heretic, you! Who are you to decide how many lickings you deserve? I'm the only one can know that! Beat it, now!"

But he caught me by the shoulder as I turned and once more looked me in the eye.

"You being sly, or just a simpleton?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know, don't you? Well, then I'll tell you: you be sly—that's better than to be a simpleton. A calf's a simpleton, understand? Now go on out and play."

Soon I was reading the Psalter letter by letter. Usually we studied after tea in the evening, and each time I had to read an entire psalm.

"B" for butter, "l" for lady, "e" for ever, "s" for sugar, "s" for sugar—bless; "e" for ever, "d" for dinner—ed: blessed. "Blessed is he . . ." I spelled, running my index finger along the line. The boredom of it gave rise to all kinds of questions.

"Who is blessed? Uncle Yakov?"

"I'll give you a whack over the head and then you'll know who is blessed!" answered my grandfather with an angry snort. But I sensed that his anger was not genuine; it was only assumed by force of habit, and for decency's sake.

And I was not mistaken; a minute later my grandfather grumbled, without a thought for me:

"Hm-m, when it comes to singing and playing, he's a regular King David, but when it comes to working, he's no better than an Absalom. A songster, a trickster, a jester—phooh! 'Dancing merry o'er the green!' Well, and how far does that dancing get you? Not very far!"

I stopped reading to listen to him, glancing up into his frowning, worried face; his narrowed eyes were gazing off into the distance, and they were filled with a warm sadness thawing his usual severity. His golden eyebrows quivered and his stained fingernails glistened as he tapped nervously on the table.

"Grandfather!"

"Eh?"

"Tell me a story."

"You go on with your reading, lazybones," he grumbled, rubbing his eyes as though he had just waked up. "You'd rather hear all kinds of fairy tales than the Psalter."

I suspected that he too would rather hear fairy tales than the

Psalter, though he knew the latter almost by heart, having taken a vow to read part of it out loud every evening before going to bed, chanting like the deacon chanted the breviary in church.

But I pressed him for the story, and finally the old man gave in.

"Oh, all right. You'll be having the Psalter with you all your life, but soon I'll be going to meet my Maker at the judgment seat."

Leaning against the needle-point of the old armchair, he threw back his head, fixed his eyes on the ceiling, and lost himself in recollections of old times: once a robber band had come to Balakhna to loot the shop of the merchant Zayev. My grandfather's father had run to the belfry to give the alarm, but the robbers overtook him, slashed him with their swords, and threw his remains down from the belfry.

"I was only a little chap at that time; I didn't see what happened and I don't remember it; I only remember from the time the French came, in 1812—when I was just twelve. They drove about thirty prisoners into Balakhna at that time—all of them little and skinny, dressed in whatever they could lay hands on—worse than beggars—shivering in their skins, some of them with their arms and legs froze, so they couldn't even stand up. The *muzhiks* wanted to kill them off, but the convoy wouldn't let them. Then the troops from the garrison came and drove the *muzhiks* to their huts. After that they got used to each other; the Frenchmen turned out to be a shrewd, nimble lot, and jolly in the bargain, singing their songs whenever the mood struck them. The quality used to drive down from Nizhni in troikas to have a look at them. Some of those who came would curse the French and shake their fists at them, even strike them; others would talk kind to them in their own tongue and give them money and old clothes to cheer them up. I remember one old man—a gentleman he was—who covered his face with his hands and started crying: 'Just see what that fiend Napoleon has done to the French!' he says. Think of that—a Russian, and a gentleman at that, with such a kind heart—taking pity on foreigners that way. . . ."

For a moment he was silent, closing his eyes and stroking down his hair. Then he continued cautiously, rummaging through his memories of the past.

"Winter, with a blizzard raging and the cold pressing down hard on the huts, and the Frenchmen running to our window and calling

to my mother—she used to make buns to peddle—they'd knock at the window, jumping about and shouting for buns. My mother wouldn't let them into the hut; she'd hand them their buns through the window. They'd grab them, all hot and steaming, right from the oven, and stick them inside their shirts, tight against their frozen bodies, right to their hearts; how they ever stood it! Lots of them died of the cold—people from a warm country, not used to such frosts. Two of them lived in our bathhouse, down in the garden—an officer and his orderly named Miron; the officer was tall and thin, nothing but skin and bones, and he went around in a woman's cloak that came to his knees. He was a gentle soul, but a regular drunkard. My mother brewed beer on the side and sold it; he'd buy himself beer and drink himself drunk and start singing his songs. He learned to babble a bit in our tongue: 'Your land's not white,' he would say. 'It's black and harsh.' He spoke very broken, but you could understand what he meant, and it's the truth—nothing gentle about our northern parts. If you go down the Volga the land gets warmer and softer, and down past the Caspian seems there's no snow at all. You can be sure of this, seeing's how you'll not find anything about snow or about winter in the Gospels, or the Acts, or the Psalter, and it was down in that country Christ lived.... Soon's we finish the Psalter, you and me'll start reading the Gospels."

Again he became silent and seemed to doze off; when his mind was fixed on something, he would stare out the window with his eyes narrowed, his whole figure little and sharp.

"Go on," I urged quietly.

"Ah well!" he said with a start. "What was it I was talking about? The French? Well, they're also humans, no worse than us sinners. They'd go shouting after my mother, 'Madame, madame!' which means 'my dame' in their tongue, but that there 'dame' would go toting home a sack of flour weighing no less than five poods if an ounce. Strong as an ox she was; it meant nothing for her to go flinging me around by the hair right up until I was twenty years old. And I was no weakling myself at that time. That orderly Miron was a great lover of horses: he'd go from yard to yard making signs, asking to be allowed to groom the horses. At first people were scared —an enemy—might ruin the horses. But after a while the *muzhiks* used to ask him themselves: 'Hi there, Miron!' and he'd laugh and

duck his head like a bull and come running. His hair was red as a carrot, and he had a big nose and thick lips. He was a fine groom and knew how to cure the horses of various ailments; later he became a groom in Nizhni, but he went out of his head and the firemen beat him to death. As for the officer, he sort of went into a decline when spring came, and on the day of Saint Nikolai he died quietlike: sat dreaming at the window of the bathhouse and passed away, just sitting there with his head out the window. I felt sorry for him; even shed a few tears; a gentle soul he was; used to take me by the ears and whisper something soft in his own tongue. I couldn't understand his words, but they sounded nice. Not too much human kindness in this world. Once he started teaching me how to talk his language, but my mother forbid it. She even took me to the priest and he ordered me a beating and put in a complaint about the officer. People were strict in those days, brother! You don't have to suffer what we did—others have suffered it for you, and don't you ever forget it! Take me, for example—what I've suffered!"

It grew dark. My grandfather strangely expanded in the darkness and his eyes shone like those of a cat. He recounted his story quietly, cautiously, musingly, but when he spoke of himself he became animated and boastful. I did not like to hear him speak of himself and I did not like his constant admonitions:

"Remember that!" "Don't you forget it!"

There were many things he told me which I would have been glad to have forgotten, but they stuck in my mind like painful splinters, even without his admonitions. He never told me fairy tales—only accounts of true happenings. I had observed that questions annoyed him, and so I made a point of putting them:

"Who's better—Russians or Frenchmen?"

"Who can tell? I never saw Frenchmen in their own country," he answered with irritation, adding,

"Even a rat's all right in its own hole."

"Are Russians all right?"

"Some are, some aren't. They were better when they were serfs —like wrought iron. Now the chain's off their feet, but they've nothing to eat. To be sure the gentlefolk are a hard-hearted lot, but they've got more sense than the *muzhik*. Can't say that about all of them, but once a gentleman's good, he's very good. Some are the veriest

fools—like sacks—hold whatever you stuff them with. Too many empty shells among us—at first glance looks like a human being, but on looking a little closer you see the worms have eaten out all the kernel—nothing left but a shell. What we need is some learning; need to sharpen our wits, but there's nothing to sharpen them on...."

"Are Russians strong?"

"Some are, but it's not strength that counts, it's skill; the strongest man is weaker than a horse."

"Why did the French fight us?"

"Well, now—wars—they're the business of the tsar. It's not for simple folk like us to understand why."

But I shall never forget my grandfather's answer when I asked him who Bonaparte was:

"He was a brave fellow who wanted to conquer the whole earth, so's everybody could live equal—no lords and officials, but just like that—all the same. The names would stay different, but the rights equal for everybody. And the same faith for everybody. No sense in that, of course; it's only crabs are all alike. Take fish, now—even they're all different: the salmon's no friend of the catfish, and the sturgeon's not making up to the herring. We've had our own Bonapartes—Stepan Razin, for example, and Emelyan Pugachov—but I'll tell you about them another time...."

Sometimes he would stare at me wide-eyed for a long time, as though he had never seen me before, and this was very unpleasant.

But he never spoke to me about my father or mother.

Sometimes grandmother would enter during these conversations. She would quietly take a seat in the corner and say nothing until suddenly she would ask a question in her caressing voice:

"Remember, father, how fine it was that time you and me made a pilgrimage to Murom to pray to the Virgin? What year was that?"

"Don't remember exactly, but it was before the cholera—the year they combed the forest for the Olonchans."

"That's right. I remember how scared we were of them...."

"Hm-m."

I asked who the Olonchans were and why they hid in the forest. My grandfather answered reluctantly.

"The Olonchans were simply *muzhiks*—serfs who ran away from work at the factories."

"How did they catch them?"

"How do you suppose? Like when the boys play—some of them run, others catch them. Once they're caught, they get licked with whips and thongs; used to get their nostrils slit too, and brands put on their foreheads to show they were punished."

"What for?"

"Who knows? That's a dark business, and it's hard to say who was at fault, the ones who did the running or the ones who did the catching."

"Remember, father," put in my grandmother once more, "how it was after the great fire?"

"Which great fire?" asked my grandfather with a stern insistence on accuracy.

Lost in their reminiscences, they became oblivious of my presence. Their voices went on quietly, and with such measured rhythm that at times it seemed they were singing a song, a gruesome song about fires and illnesses and the thrashings dealt to human beings, about accidental deaths and clever swindles, about religious fanatics and irascible gentlemen from the upper classes.

"How much we've seen! How much we've lived through!" muttered my grandfather.

"And has it been a bad life?" asked my grandmother. "Just think what a fine spring it was when Varvara was born!"

"That was in '48, the year of the march on Hungary; day after we had Varvara baptised they drove off her godfather Tikhon...."

"And he never came back," sighed my grandmother.

"Never came back. From that day on God's mercy slipped past us like water over a raft. Ah, Varvara...."

"Enough, father...."

"Why enough?" he answered angrily. "Turned out bad, our children, however you look at them. Our strength all poured away into nothing. You and me thought we were putting things by in a sound basket, but the Lord saw fit to slip a sieve into our hands...."

He cried out as if he had been branded, running about the room, moaning, denouncing his children, shaking his bony little fist at my grandmother.

He threw his cap into the corner and without a word of greeting began to speak with wild gestures.

"Mikhail's on a rampage, pa! He had dinner at our place, drank himself drunk and went raging mad: broke the dishes, tore up a woolen dress belonging to a customer, broke the window, and cursed me and Grigori. He's coming here and swore he'd get you: 'I'll pull all the hairs out of pa's beard!' he yelled. 'I'll kill him!' he cried. You better watch out...."

Grandfather leaned on the table and slowly pulled himself to his feet, his face all drawn toward his nose, making it look for all the world like a hatchet.

"Hear that, mother?" he squeaked. "What d'ye think of that, eh? Coming to kill his own father! There's a son for you! Well, the time's come! The time's come, fellows...."

He squared his shoulders and began pacing the floor. Then he went to the door and fastened it with a heavy hook.

"The both of you are still after that dowry of Varvara's, I know," he said, turning to Yakov. "Well, here's how you'll get it!" and he snapped his fingers under my uncle's nose.

"Why jump on me, pa?" said the latter, springing back and speaking in an offended tone.

"You? I know you too!"

Grandmother said nothing as she hurriedly put the cups in the cupboard.

"I came to defend you!"

"Ha!" laughed my grandfather scornfully. "That's a good one! Thanks, son! Here, mother, give this foxey something to work with—a poker, or a flatiron! And you, Yakov Vasilyevich, soon as your brother breaks the door open you'll give it to him—on my head!"

My uncle thrust his hands in his pockets and slunk off to one side.

"Well, if you don't want to believe me...."

"Believe *you*?" shouted my grandfather with a stamp of his foot. "I'd believe a cat, or a rat, or a kangaroo—but not you! It's you that gave him the liquor and egged him on—I know! Well, now beat him up! Take your choice—him or me!"

Grandmother turned to me and whispered:

"Run upstairs and watch for Uncle Mikhail through the window. Soon's you see him, come tell us! Be off, hurry!"

So up I went and planted myself at the window, a bit intimidated by the thought of what my raging uncle would do when he got here, but swelling with pride at the responsible task entrusted to me. The street was wide, and covered with a thick layer of dust, through which the curves of the cobbles protruded. It extended far to the left, crossing a ravine and coming out on Ostrozhnaya Square, where the grey building of the old jail with its four towers stood firmly implanted in the clay soil. There was a certain melancholy beauty and impressiveness about this building. To the right, three houses from ours, the street ran into Sennaya Square, bounded on the opposite side by yellow barracks for prisoners and the ogling fire tower, at the top of which the watchman walked round and round like a dog on a chain. The square was cut up by gullys and ditches, the bottom of one of which was filled with green slime, while to the right lay Dukov Pond. It was there, according to my grandmother, my uncles had once thrown my father through a hole in the ice. Almost opposite my window was a by-street lined with little, motley houses; it ended in the church of the Three Saints, a thick structure crouching against the earth. On looking straight out of the window, the roofs seemed to be boats upturned on the green waves of the orchards.

The dusty houses of our street, faded by the winds of long winters, washed by endless autumn rains, stood huddled together like beggars on a church porch, glancing about furtively with their bulging windows as though, like me, they were waiting for something. The few people in sight walked as unhurriedly as meditative roaches climbing the stove. A stifling heat rose to my window, bringing with it the detested odour of *pirog* stuffed with green onions and carrots. To the present day I find this odour intolerable.

The scene was oppressive—oppressive in a peculiar way which was almost unbearable. My breast became filled with liquid lead, which pressed against my ribs and chest until it seemed that I was being blown up like a bubble which could not be contained in this tiny room with its coffin-like ceiling.

Suddenly I caught sight of Uncle Mikhail glancing out from behind the grey house on the corner of the by-street. He had pulled his cap down so that it made his ears stick out. He was wearing a short brown coat and knee boots all covered with dust; one hand was

in the pocket of his checked pants, the other holding on to his beard. I could not see his face, but he was standing as though he meant to leap across the street and dig his black, hairy claws into grandfather's house. I should have run downstairs and told them that he had come, but I could not tear myself away from the window. I saw him steal cautiously across the street, as though he were afraid to dirty his grey boots, and heard the jarring of glass and the squeaking of hinges as he opened the door of the saloon.

I ran downstairs and knocked at the door of my grandfather's room.

"Who's there?" he cried gruffly, without opening. "You? Well? Went into the saloon, you say? All right, go back where you came from!"

"I'm afraid. . . ."

"Can't be helped!"

I went. It was getting dark; the dust of the street became thicker and darker; oily yellow lights appeared in the windows; from the house across the street came the sound of string music playing something fine and mournful. Someone was singing in the saloon; whenever the door was opened I could hear a tired, broken voice which I knew to belong to the one-eyed beggar Nikitushka, a bearded old man whose left eye was tight shut and whose right one resembled a red hot coal. The slamming of the door would chop off his song like the blow of an axe.

My grandmother envied the beggar; whenever she heard him sing she would sigh and say:

"How lucky he is to know so many wonderful songs!"

Sometimes she would call him into our yard. He would sit on the porch leaning on his cane, singing and reciting verses, while my grandmother would sit next to him, interrupting with an occasional question.

"You mean to say the Holy Virgin has been in Ryazan?"

"She's been everywhere—in all the gubernias . . ." he would answer convincingly.

A sleepy exhaustion crept imperceptibly along the street, pressing down on my heart and closing my eyes. If only my grandmother would come! Or even my grandfather! What sort of person must my father have been, that my uncles and grandfather should have

disliked him so, while my grandmother and Grigori and nanny Yevgenia should speak so well of him? And where was my mother?

Of late I kept thinking more and more often of my mother, envisioning her as the heroine of all my grandmother's tales and legends. The fact that my mother did not want to live with her family only raised her in my estimation. I imagined that she was living with a band of highwaymen at an inn, and that they robbed the rich and divided the spoil among the poor. Or perhaps she was living in a cave in the forest, again with a band of kindhearted robbers for whom she cooked and guarded stolen gold. Or still another version was that she was wandering over the earth counting its treasures like the "Robber-princess" Yengalycheva, accompanied by the Holy Virgin, who kept saying to her as she said to the "Robber-princess":

It is not for thee, thou greedy one,
To strip the earth of its silver and gold;
It is not for thee, thou grasping one,
To hide thy shame 'neath the treasures of earth!

And my mother answered her in the words of the "Robber-princess":

Forgive me, oh Virgin Immaculate,
And pity my soul for its sinfulness,
Not for myself do I plunder so,
For the sake of my son, my beloved one....

Then the Holy Virgin, who was as kindhearted as my grandmother, forgave her, and said:

Ah, thou vixen, thou Varushka,
Ah, thou Tatar incorrigible!
Go, if thou must, thy chosen path:
Choose the way; rue the day.
But touch not the folk of this Russian land,
On a forest trail a Mordovian flail,
Or a Kalmyk slay on the steppelands grey....

I lost myself in recollections of these legends as in a dream, from which I was roughly awakened by a bustling and shuffling and roaring coming from the hall and the yard down below. Leaning out

of the window I saw my grandfather and Uncle Yakov and the funny saloonkeeper Melyan pushing my Uncle Mikhail through the gate out into the street; he fought his way back, but they kicked him and beat him on the arms, the back, the shoulders, and at last he went flying into the dust of the street. The gate was slammed, locked and bolted, his battered cap tossed over the fence, and everything became quiet.

After lying still for a while, my rumpled, tattered uncle sat up, picked up a cobblestone, and hurled it at the gate, producing a dull thud like a blow on the bottom of a barrel. Dark-faced people came crawling out of the saloon and started bellowing and waving their arms; heads appeared in the windows of the houses; the street became lively with yells and laughter. This too was like a fairy tale—fascinating, but unpleasant and even frightening.

Suddenly everything was over, everyone had gone, all was quiet.

On the trunk by the door sat my grandmother, all hunched over, motionless, scarcely breathing; I was standing in front of her stroking her soft, warm, wet cheeks, but apparently she was unaware of it, and only sat there muttering miserably:

"Dear Lord, wasn't there enough good sense to go around when it came to me and my children? God help us. . . ."

It seems to me that my grandfather lived not more than a year in this house on Polevoi Street—from spring to spring. But in so short a time the house managed to become notorious; almost every Sunday the urchins would come running to our gates, joyfully announcing to the entire block:

"Another fight at the Kashirin's!"

Usually Uncle Mikhail would come in the evening and remain the whole night, keeping the house in a state of siege, its inhabitants in a state of alarm. Sometimes he would bring two or three assistants along—desperate young bucks from the Kunavino workshop. They would climb up the ravine into the garden, and there give full rein to the dictates of their drunken imagination. They pulled up all the raspberry and currant bushes, and one night they ruined the bathhouse, breaking everything in it that was breakable—the shelves, the benches, the boilers. They took the stove apart, pulled up some of the floor boards, ripped off the door and the jamb.

My grandfather stood at the window silent and lowering, listening to them destroy his property; my grandmother ran out into the yard, where she became lost in the darkness. But her voice came back pleadingly:

"Mikhail! Think what you're doing, Mikhail!"

In reply came a string of foul and idiotic Russian oaths, the meaning of which must have been beyond the comprehension and feeling of the beasts vomiting them forth.

There could be no thought of following grandmother at such a moment, but it was frightening without her. I went down into grandfather's room.

"Out of here, anathema!" he shouted at me hoarsely.

I ran back into the attic and stared out into the darkness of the garden, trying not to lose sight of my grandmother, crying and calling to her, afraid that they would kill her. She did not come, but on hearing my voice, my drunken uncle addressed some filthy oaths to my mother.

On one such evening my grandfather was ill. He lay in bed and kept crying plaintively as he rolled his head back and forth over the pillow:

"Is this all I lived for, sinned for, hoarded for? If it wasn't so shameful, I'd call the police and haul them up before the governor.... What a disgrace! Who ever heard of parents sicking the police on their own children? So there's nothing you can do but keep lying here, old man!"

Suddenly he threw his legs over the edge of the bed and went staggering to the window.

"Here, where you going?" cried my grandmother, catching him by the arm.

"Give me a light!" he ordered, his breath coming in great gasps.

When my grandmother had lighted the candle, he held it in front of him like a gun and shouted mockingly through the window:

"Phooh, Mishka, thief in the night, mad as a dog with the scurvy!"

Immediately the upper pane of the window was shattered and half a brick fell on the table next to my grandmother.

"Missed!" yelled my grandfather, and began either to laugh or to cry.

My grandmother picked him up in her arms as though he were me and laid him on the bed, muttering in a frightened voice:

"What are you doing, for the love of Christ! If anything should happen, it'd be Siberia for him; do you think he realizes it means Siberia when he's in such a state?"

My grandfather lay with his legs jerking as he sobbed hoarsely: "Let him kill me...."

A roaring and stamping came from outside. I took the brick off the table and ran to the window, but my grandmother managed to snatch me up and thrust me in the corner, hissing:

"You crazy little brat!"

Another time my uncle mounted the back porch and began swinging a huge club at the entrance door. My grandfather stood in the hall waiting for him, supported by two lodgers with clubs in their hands and the large wife of the saloonkeeper wielding a rolling pin. Behind them pressed my grandmother.

"Let me reach him," she pleaded. "Let me have a word with him."

My grandfather held his club upraised and stood with one foot forward like the *muzhik* with the spear in the painting, "The Bear Hunt." When my grandmother rushed over to him, he silently pushed her away with his foot and his elbow. All four of them stood in menacing poses of expectation; a lamp hanging on the wall above them lighted their faces with its fitful flame. I stood watching from the attic stairs, anxious to take my grandmother away.

My uncle kept furiously beating the door. The lower hinge was already broken, and scraped unpleasantly, leaving the door hanging by only the upper hinge, which also threatened to give way. Grandfather spoke to his supporters in the same sort of scraping voice:

"Beat him over the hands and the legs, but not on the head, mind."

Next to the door was a little window, just large enough to stick a head through; my uncle had already broken the glass of this window, leaving it to gape darkly, fringed with splintered glass, like an empty eye socket.

My grandmother ran to the window, thrust her arm through, and waved to Mikhail as she cried:

"Misha, for Christ's sake, go away! They'll cripple you for life! Go away!"

He struck her over the arm with his club; I could see something heavy flash across the window and fall on her arm, after which my grandmother sank to the floor, just managing to cry once more, "Run, Misha ..." before she became limp and silent.

"Ah,—mother!" wailed my grandfather in a dreadful voice.

The door opened, my uncle jumped through the black opening, but was immediately thrown out onto the porch like a spadeful of dirt.

The wife of the saloonkeeper took my grandmother to grandfather's room; he soon followed.

"Is the bone broken?" he asked unhappily, going over to her.

"Looks like it's broken," she replied without opening her eyes. "But what have you done to him—to him!"

"Come to your senses, woman!" cried my grandfather angrily. "What do you think I am, a beast? We tied him up and he's lying out in the shed. I poured a bucket of water over him. There's a fiend for you! Where does he get it from?"

My grandmother groaned.

"I've sent for the bonesetter already; try to bear it a while," said my grandfather, sitting down next to her on the bed. "They'll be the death of us yet, mother; bring us to our graves before our time."

"Give them everything."

"And what about Varvara?"

They spoke for a long time, grandmother in a quiet, plaintive voice, my grandfather noisily and angrily.

Then a little, hunchbacked old woman put in her appearance. She had a mouth stretching from ear to ear; her lower jaw trembled, her mouth hung open like a fish's, and her upper lip was bisected by a sharp nose. Her eyes could not be seen, she could scarcely move her legs and kept shuffling across the floor with her crutch, jingling the little bundle she carried.

This, I thought, was Death come to my grandmother. I ran over to the old woman and shouted at the top of my lungs:

"Get out of here!"

My grandfather grabbed me up and hauled me unceremoniously to the attic.

VII

At a very early date I realized that my grandfather had one god, my grandmother another.

On waking in the morning, grandmother would usually sit for a long time on the bed combing her amazing hair, jerking her head, clenching her teeth as she pulled out whole locks of the long black silk, and cursing under her breath so as not to wake me up:

"A pox on you, a plague on you, damn you!"

When she had managed to untangle it more or less, she would braid it and wash herself hurriedly, with angry spluttering. Without having washed the irritation from her large face, all wrinkled with sleep, she would kneel in front of the icons. Then would begin her true morning ablutions which left her completely refreshed.

Straightening her spine and throwing back her head, she would glance affectionately into the round face of the Virgin of Kazan and cross herself fervently as she whispered:

"Blessed Virgin, pour thy blessings on the coming day...."

Then she would bow to the very floor, raise herself slowly, and again whisper with growing fervour:

"Fount of all joy, beauty inexpressible, like an apple tree in full bloom...."

Almost every morning she found new words of praise and adoration, and this made me listen to each of her prayers with strained attention.

"Dear heart, so pure, so divine! Light of my soul, guardian of my hearth, sun of heaven, so bright, so golden, precious mother of God, save us from the onrushings of evil, save us all from needless abuse, and me from being offended without cause...."

A smile hovered in the depths of her dark eyes, and she seemed to have become younger as she again crossed herself with a slow movement of her heavy hand.

"Dear Jesus, son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner, for thine own mother's sake...."

Her prayers were always a laudatory offering, a pean of praise coming from a simple and sincere heart.

In the morning she did not linger long over her prayers; it was necessary to put up the samovar, since my grandfather no longer

kept a servant, and if she made him wait for his morning tea, she was rewarded by violent and endless reproaches.

Sometimes, if he had awakened earlier than my grandmother, he would climb up to the attic and find her at her prayers. He would stand listening silently, with a contemptuous smile at the corners of his thin, dark lips, remarking later at the breakfast table:

"How many times have I taught you how to pray, you thickhead, but on you go, in your stubborn way, muttering along like a heretic! How God ever puts up with it is more than I can understand!"

"He understands," answered my grandmother confidently. "No matter what you say to Him, He's sure to understand."

"Crazy as a Chuvash, that's what you are! Phooh!"

Her God was with her all day long. She even told the animals about Him. I could see that it was easy for all creatures—people, dogs, birds, bees, and even growing things—to submit to that God. He was equally kind and equally dear to everything on earth.

One day the mischievous tomcat belonging to the saloonkeeper's wife—a lovely grey beast with a golden head who was a favourite in the yard in spite of the fact that he was a toady and a sly glutton—caught a starling. My grandmother took the tortured bird away from the cat and said angrily:

"No fear of God in your heart, that's what's the trouble with you, you horrid beasty!"

The janitor and the saloonkeeper's wife laughed at my grandmother for these words, but she shouted at them angrily:

"You think the animals have no knowledge of God? The least of them knows Him as well as you, you hard-hearted creatures!"

While harnessing the fat, listless Sharap, she would murmur:

"Why so unhappy, servant of God? Getting old I guess...."

The horse would sigh and shake its head.

Yet she did not utter the name of God as often as did my grandfather. I could understand my grandmother's God and was not afraid of Him, yet I dared not lie in His presence. That would have been shameful. Because of this shame, I never lied to my grandmother. It was quite impossible to hide anything from so kind a God, and so far as I can remember, I never had any inclination to do so.

One day the saloonkeeper's wife had a quarrel with my grandfather, and included my innocent grandmother in her vituperations, even throwing a carrot at her.

"And it's a fool you are, my fine lady!" retorted grandmother calmly. But I was deeply offended for grandmother's sake and decided to have revenge.

For some time I considered what would be the best way to injure this fat, redheaded woman with the double chin and no eyes to speak of.

In the internecine wars waged by our neighbours, I had observed that vengeance was wreaked by chopping off the tails of cats, poisoning dogs, killing chickens, or by stealing into the enemy's cellar at night and pouring kerosene into barrels of sauerkraut or pickles, or pulling the stoppers out of kegs of kvass. But none of these means satisfied me. It was necessary to think up something more bold and terrible.

And so I decided on the following measure: when the saloonkeeper's wife climbed down into the cellar, I closed the hatch after her, locked it, did a dance of vengeance on top, and threw the key up on the roof. Then I rushed into the kitchen where my grandmother was cooking. At first she could not understand my ecstasy, but when she discovered its cause, she slapped me on the parts provided for that purpose, dragged me out into the yard, and sent me up on the roof for the key. Crushed by her reaction, I silently procured the key and then ran into a corner of the yard, from where I watched my grandmother free the prisoner, and then come walking toward me in the company of the hated one, both of them laughing amiably.

"I'll give it to you yet!" threatened the saloonkeeper's wife, shaking her fat fist at me, but her eyeless face was smiling good-naturedly. My grandmother took me by the scruff of the neck and led me into the kitchen.

"What did you do that for?" she asked.

"Didn't she throw a carrot at you?"

"Aha! So it was on my account you did it, eh? I'll show you, you little whippersnapper! I'll shove you under the stove with the mice, and then you'll get some sense in you! A fine champion you make! Come, everybody, and take a look at this little bubble before it bursts! If I tell your grandfather, won't he take the skin off your

behind for you though! Get up into the attic now and have a look at those books of yours!"

She did not speak to me for the rest of the day, but in the evening before saying her prayers, she sat down on the side of my bed and said these unforgettable words:

"Listen, pigeon-widgeon, just remember this: never butt into the affairs of grownups. Grownups are a spoiled lot—tried by toils and temptations. But you're not—not yet. So you just go on living according to your child lights, until the Lord sees fit to touch your heart and show you your task, leading you out onto the path you must trod. Is that clear? As for who's to blame for what—that's none of your business. God will judge and punish. That's for Him, not for us."

She was silent for a minute, during which she took some snuff, and then she narrowed her right eye and added:

"Sometimes the Lord Hisself is hard put to tell who's to blame."

"Why, doesn't He know everything?" I asked in surprise.

"If He did," she replied sadly, "there's lots of things people wouldn't be a-doing. He sits up there in heaven, watching us sinners down below, and sometimes he breaks into such tears, such sobbing! 'Ah, my people, my people, my own dear people!' he weeps. 'How my heart bleeds for you!' "

She herself was weeping, and without bothering to dry her tears, she went to the icon corner to pray.

From that time on her God became even dearer and more comprehensible to me.

At his lessons my grandfather also taught me that God was all-knowing, all-seeing, and ever present, a help to man in all his trouble. But grandfather did not pray like grandmother.

Before going to the icon corner in the morning, he would carefully wash and dress and comb his red hair and beard; only after adjusting his blouse in the mirror and tying the black cravat he wore inside his vest would he creep stealthily toward the icons. He would always come to a halt at one and the same knot in the floor board which resembled the eye of a horse, his arms stiff at his sides like a soldier's. After a moment's silence, during which he stood with bowed head, thin and straight, he would say impressively:

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!"

It always seemed to me that the room became particularly quiet after these words—even the flies seemed to buzz with a certain veneration.

Now his head was thrown back, his eyebrows bristling, his golden beard horizontal with the floor. He said his prayers in a firm voice, as though reciting a lesson, pronouncing the words emphatically and demandingly.

"Cometh the Judgment Day when no man knoweth, to expose the deeds of men. . . ."

Beating himself lightly on the chest, he would press his request:

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned. . . . Hide Thy face from my sins. . . ."

Every word was stressed as he recited the "Creed," and he beat time by jerking his right leg. He stood there neat and clean and commanding, drawing his whole body toward the icons, seeming to grow taller and thinner and harder.

"Thou, who hast borne the Great Healer, cleanse my heart of all evil; hark to the groaning of my soul and have mercy, Oh Mother of God!"

Then he would wail thinly, the tears gleaming in his green eyes:

"Let my faith be accounted for works, oh my God, and lay not a burden beyond my strength to bear. . . ."

He crossed himself over and over again, quickly and convulsively, nodding his head like a butting goat and speaking in a wheezing, whimpering voice. When in later life I had occasion to visit a synagogue, I realized that my grandfather prayed like a Jew.

The samovar had long since been steaming on the table, the room was filled with the scent of hot rye cakes stuffed with cottage cheese, and my stomach was roaring with hunger. My grandmother stood leaning against the doorjamb, sighing and frowning, with her eyes fastened on the floor; the sun glanced merrily through the window, the dew shone like pearls on the trees, the morning air bore the fresh scent of dill, currants, and ripening apples, but my grandfather still continued to rock and wail at his prayers:

"Quench the fire of my passion, for I be base and accursed!"

I knew all his matins and all his vespers by heart, and would

follow him with intense concentration to see whether he made a mistake or left out something.

That rarely happened, but it always roused in me a malicious sense of triumph.

When my grandfather had finished his prayers, he turned to me and my grandmother and said:

"Good morning."

We bowed, and at long last took our places at the table.

"You left out 'sufficient,'" I said, turning to my grandfather.

"Sure you're not lying?" he asked sceptically.

"No. You should have said, 'And may my faith be sufficient unto my need,' but you left out 'sufficient.'"

"Humph!" he exclaimed, blinking guiltily.

Some day he would repay me with interest for that remark, but for the present I took my fill of pleasure in his embarrassment.

One day my grandmother said jokingly:

"Must be boring for God to listen to your prayers, father—always saying one and the same thing."

"Wha-a-t?" he drawled menacingly. "What's that you're gibbering?"

"It's never a word from your own soul you offer your Maker, that's what I'm saying."

Trembling and flushing, he jumped up on a chair and threw a saucer at my grandmother.

"Get out of here, you old witch!" he screeched like a saw on glass.

Whenever he spoke about the strong arm of God, he emphasized its ruthlessness: once, for example, when people sinned they were drowned in a flood; another time their cities were burned and destroyed; people were punished by famine and plague. For him, God was a raised sword, a lash held over the heads of the wicked.

"Any as violates the laws of God are sure to come to some bad end!" he warned me, tapping the table with his bony fingers.

It was difficult for me to believe in the cruelness of God. I was suspicious that grandfather had invented this in order to make me afraid of himself, rather than of God.

"Is it to make me obey you that you tell me this?" I asked candidly.

"Of course," he replied with equal candor. "A fine thing it would be if you didn't obey!"

"What about grandmother?"

"Don't you listen to that old fool," he said sternly. "She's been that way all her life—crazy and unlearned. I'll let her know she's not to talk to you about such important things. Now answer me this: how many ranks are there among the angels?"

I answered and then asked:

"What does it mean, 'A person of high rank?'"

"Have to know everything, don't you?" he snorted, dropping his eyes and chewing his lips. On second thought he explained reluctantly:

"That's got nothing to do with God, that's human business—people of high rank—government officials and the like. An official is one as lives off the law—chews it up and swallows it down."

"What's the law?"

"The law? That's, so to speak, what people take on as their habit," answered the old man, his sharp, clever eyes twinkling with relish. "People live together and come to an agreement among themselves: that, for example, is the best way to do something or other, so they take it on as a habit, make it a rule, or a law, as they call it. Like when the boys get together to play a game and decide among themselves how they'll play. What they decide on is the law."

"And the officials?"

"They're like the bad boys who come and break the law."

"Why?"

"That's not a thing for you to understand," he said with a frown. "The Lord stands over all the affairs of men. They want one thing; He wants another. Nothing sure about human affairs. Just one little breath from the Lord, and everything gets scattered to the wind like so much dust."

There were many reasons why I was interested in officials, so I kept pressing my point:

"There's that song Uncle Yakov sings:

The holy angels—servants of God,
The state officials—slaves of Satan!"

My grandfather closed his eyes, lifted his beard on his palm and stuck it into his mouth. From the trembling of his cheeks, I could tell he was laughing inside.

"Have to put you and Yakov in a sack and throw you in the river," he said. "He has no business singing such songs and you have no business listening to them. That's a song made up by dissenters and heretics—a bad sort of joke." He looked past me in a moment's meditation, then added with a sigh, "Phooh! What people!"

While in his conception God stood high and menacing above the affairs of men, he, like my grandmother, considered that the Lord had a hand in all his business—He and an endless number of saints. The only saints my grandmother seemed to recognize were Nikolai, Yuri, Frol and Lavr, who were kind and good, spending their time wandering from village to village, from town to town, helping people and sharing all their human qualities. Almost all of my grandfather's saints, on the other hand, were martyrs who had torn down idols and pitted themselves against the Caesars, as a result of which they had been tortured, burned at the stake and skinned alive.

Sometimes my grandfather would say wistfully:

"If only the Lord would help me sell this house for a profit of even five hundred rubles I'd hold a service for Nikolai-the-Martyr!"

My grandmother would laugh and say to me:

"The old fool! Like as if Nikolai had nothing better to do than sell houses for him!"

For many years I kept my grandfather's church calendar with various remarks written in his hand. Opposite the days of Iochim and Anna he had inscribed in red ink:

"Saved by their mercy from great misfortune."

I remember what that misfortune was. In his efforts to help his worthless sons he had secretly begun to lend money, taking various articles of value as security. Someone reported this, and one night the police came to search our house. There was great excitement, but everything ended happily. My grandfather prayed until sunrise, and in the morning he wrote those words on the calendar in my presence.

Before supper he had me read the Psalter, the prayerbook, or the heavy volume of Yefrem Sirin. After supper he once more began to pray, and in the evening silence his monotonous words of repentance went on and on:

"It is Thine to give, and Thine to take away, most merciful immortal King.... Lead us not into temptation.... Protect us from the wicked.... Let my tears absolve me of sin...."

Often my grandmother would say:

"Oh, how tired I am! Looks like I'll be going to bed without saying my prayers tonight!"

My grandfather took me to church: on Saturdays to vespers, on Sundays to late mass. Even at church I could tell which God people prayed to: the priest and the deacon prayed to grandfather's God, but the choir always sang to grandmother's.

To be sure, I have given a crude picture of the childish distinction I drew between the two Gods, a distinction which I remember having caused me much spiritual conflict. I feared and disliked grandfather's God, who loved no one and kept a stern eye on everyone. He was primarily interested in unearthing something wicked and vicious in man. It was clear that he did not trust people, was ever waiting for them to repent, and took pleasure in meting out punishment.

During those days my mind dwelled primarily on God, the only beauty I found in life. All other impressions repulsed and saddened me with their filth and cruelty. God—my grandmother's God, friend to all living things—was the brightest and best of all that surrounded me. And naturally I could not understand why grandfather was blind to God's goodness.

I was not allowed to play out in the street because this excited me too much. I became almost drunk from the impressions gained from playing there and was often the instigator of some fight or disorder. I made no friends; the neighbours' children were hostile toward me. I hated to be called a Kashirin, and knowing this, they insisted on shouting the name to each other.

"Here comes the grandson of Kashirin, the miser! Take a look!"

"Knock him down!"

And the fight would begin.

I was exceptionally strong for my age and a good fighter. Even my enemies admitted this and never attacked me singlehanded. So I always took a good beating at their hands, and returned home with a bloody nose, cut lips, and torn clothes.

Grandmother would meet me with fright and commiseration.

"What! Been fighting again, you little brat? I'll show you all right! Where'll I begin?"

She would wash my face and put a coin, or some herbs, or a lotion on my injuries, saying the while:

"What in the world makes you fight like this? Such a quiet lad at home, but a very demon once you get out in the street! For shame! I'll tell your grandfather not to let you out!"

Grandfather always noticed the bumps and bruises, but he never got really angry about them, simply muttering:

"Got on your medals again! Such a brave warrior! But don't let me catch you out in the street again, hear?"

I had no desire to go out in the street when everything was quiet there, but when I heard the merry voices of the children I would forget my grandfather's warning and run out of the yard. I did not mind the bumps and bruises, but I could never get used to the brutality of the boys' fun, a brutality with which I had become only too familiar and which nearly drove me mad. I could not bear to see them set cocks and dogs fighting each other, torture cats, chase the goats belonging to Jews, tease drunken beggars and the pious "Igosha, Death-in-the-Pocket."

The latter was a tall, lean, grimy person with a bristling beard on his bony face. His stooped figure in a long sheepskin coat swayed strangely as he moved down the street, his eyes fixed on the ground. His dark face with its sad little eyes inspired me with awe and respect. It seemed to me that this person must be engaged in some very serious task which was not to be interrupted.

But the boys ran after him and threw stones at his hunched back. For some time he would pay no attention to them, as if he did not feel the blows, but all of a sudden he would stop, throw back his head and look around, adjusting his shaggy cap with a convulsive movement as if just aroused from sleep.

"Igosha, Death-in-the-Pocket! Igosha, where you bound? Just look in your pocket—see that death there?" cried the boys.

Grabbing hold of his pocket, he would bend over, pick up a stone or a lump of earth and wave his long arm clumsily, cursing under his breath. He always used the same three swear words—the boys' vocabulary was incomparably richer. Sometimes he would run limping after them; his long coat would get in his way and he

would fall on his knees, supporting himself with grimy arms that looked like two dry sticks. Then the boys would pelt him with stones, while the bolder of them would run up to him, throw a handful of dust on his head and dodge away.

Perhaps the most painful sight the street had to offer was that of our former master-workman Grigori Ivanovich. He had gone completely blind and spent his days wandering through the city begging. Tall and silent and comely, he was led by a grey little old woman who would stop at every window and say in a squeaky little voice:

"Help a blind beggar, for the love of Christ. . . ."

Grigori Ivanovich would say nothing. His black glasses looked straight into the wall of the house or the window or the face of anyone he met; his dye-saturated hand would quietly stroke his broad beard, but his lips were always tightly closed. I often saw him, but never did I hear a sound from those tight lips, and this silence oppressed me more than anything else. I never went up to him—I could not make myself do this—but whenever I saw him I would run home and say to my grandmother:

"Grigori is coming!"

"Ah!" she would exclaim with pained agitation. "Here, run and give him this!"

I rudely refused. Then she herself would go out the gate and stand talking to him for a long time. He would laugh and shake his beard, but say scarcely a word.

Sometimes grandmother would bring him into the kitchen and feed him. Once he asked where I was. Grandmother called me, but I ran away and hid in the wood pile. I could not meet him. I felt horribly ashamed in his presence, and I knew that my grandmother felt the same. Only once did she and I speak about Grigori: when she had seen him out the gate, she came walking slowly back through the yard weeping, her head bent down. I went over to her and took her hand.

"Why do you always run away from him?" she asked quietly. "So fond he is of you, and a good man. . . ."

"Why doesn't grandfather feed him?" I asked.

"Grandfather?"

She stopped and drew me to her and whispered almost prophetically:

"Remember my words: the Lord will send us a bitter punishment for this! A bitter punishment!"

She was not mistaken. Some ten years later, when my grandmother had already gone to her rest, my crazed grandfather himself walked the streets of the city begging miserably at the windows for something to eat.

"Good folks, give me a piece of *pirog*—just a little piece.... Phooh, such people!"

That bitter, heart-rending "Phooh, such people!" was the only thing left of his former self.

In addition to Igosha and Grigori Ivanovich, there was the profligate old woman Voronikha, the very sight of whom was enough to drive me off the street. She put in her appearance every Sunday—huge, dishevelled, drunken. She had a peculiar walk, as though she did not move her feet or touch the ground, but sailed like a stormcloud, shrilling her lewd songs. The people on the street fled before her, hiding in stores, around corners, behind fences. She swept the street clean. Her face was blue and bloated like a balloon; her bulging grey eyes rolled frighteningly. Sometimes she would wail:

"Where are my children, my children?"

I asked my grandmother what that meant.

"It's not for you to know," she said at first, but then she explained in a few words: it seems the woman's husband had once been an official named Voronov. In order to be promoted to higher rank, he had sold his wife to his chief, who took her away for two years. When she returned, her children—a boy and a girl—were dead, her husband had gambled away public funds and was in jail. In her grief she began to drink and lead a profligate life. Now the police took her off the streets every Sunday.

There was no doubt about it—home was better than on the streets. It was particularly pleasant during the hours after dinner when grandfather went to visit Uncle Yakov and grandmother would sit at the window telling me stories and reminiscences of my father.

She had clipped the broken wing of the starling rescued from the cat and cleverly attached a little stick to the stump of the bird's leg. Now that it was well, my grandmother tried to teach it to talk. For a whole hour she would stand before the cage on the window sill—and keep repeating the words she wanted to teach the bird.

"Come now, say: birdy wants some porridge!"

The bird would cock its round eye at her like the proverbial humorist, knock its wooden leg against the floor of the cage, stretch its neck and whistle like an oreole, imitate a jay and a cuckoo, attempt to meou like a cat, or bark like a dog, but it had a hard time reproducing human sounds.

"Enough of your nonsense!" my grandmother would say very seriously. "Try it now: birdy wants some porridge!"

If the feathered monkey would screech something faintly resembling my grandmother's words, she would laugh with joy and feed it a bit of oat porridge from her finger.

"Oh I know you, all right, you trickster!" she would tease. "You can say anything if you want to!"

And she actually taught it to speak: after some time it asked for porridge quite clearly, and on seeing my grandmother would cry something which sounded extremely like "Hello!"

At first the bird hung in my grandfather's room, but soon he outlawed it to our attic, because it began to imitate him; my grandfather enunciated his prayers very distinctly, and the starling would poke its yellow beak through the bars of the cage and say:

"True, true, oo, oo, tru-u-ue, oh, too true!"

This offended my grandfather. One day he interrupted his prayers, stamped his foot and cried angrily:

"Take that devil out of here before I kill it!"

There was much that was interesting and much that was amusing in our house, but sometimes I was overwhelmed by a vast longing. It was as though a great burden were weighing me down, and I went on living at the bottom of an inky pit, bereft of sight and hearing and feeling—blind and only half alive.

VIII

Quite unexpectedly my grandfather sold our house to the saloonkeeper and bought another one, on Kanatnaya Street. This street was clean and quiet, unpaved and overgrown with grass. It led directly out into the fields and was lined with little, brightly-painted houses.

The new house was more pleasant and cheerful than the old one. The facade was painted a dark, warm red, against the background of which the blue shutters of the three downstairs windows and the lattice-work shutter of the attic window stood out vividly. The left side of the roof was fretted by the branches of elms and limes. There were many enticing corners in the yard and garden, which seemed to have been especially designed for playing hide-and-seek. The garden was delightful—not very large, but charmingly overgrown with shrubbery. In one corner stood the bathhouse, small and neat as a toy. In another corner was a wide, shallow pit overgrown with weeds, from which protruded the charred remains of a former bathhouse. On the left the garden was bounded by stables belonging to Colonel Ovsyannikov; on the right by outhouses belonging to the Betlengs. The extreme end joined the property of the dairywoman Petrovna, a fat. red-faced, noisy creature who resembled a large bell. Her little house, dark and rickety, had settled comfortably into the earth and become overgrown with moss. Its two windows glanced out over fields, cut up by deep gullys and banked by the blue haze of the distant forest. All day long soldiers drilled on these fields, their bayonets flashing like white lightning in the autumn sun.

Our house was filled with people I had never seen before: the front apartment was occupied by a military man, a Tatar by birth, and his round little wife who laughed and shouted and played a gaily-decorated guitar from morning to night. The song she sang most often in her high, ringing voice, was the following:

To love when you despise?
Oh no! If you are wise,
You'll seek another girl.
I hope you get your prize,
And that she'll be a pearl!
A ve-e-e-ry w-o-o-n-drous pearl!

Her husband, who was as round as a ball, would sit at the window with his blue cheeks blown up as he puffed on his pipe, rolling his merry little brown eyes and coughing with a strange bark:

"Ar-r-uff! Ar-r-uff-uff-uff!"

Two draymen and a tall, glum Tatar orderly named Valei lived in the warm quarters built over the storehouse and stable. One of the draymen was a little, grey man whom they called Uncle Pyotr; the other was his deaf and dumb nephew Styopa. Styopa was sleek and smooth, with a face like a brass tray. All these people were new to me and presented rich possibilities.

But the person I found most interesting was our boarder, "That's Fine," who occupied a room next to the kitchen in the back of the house. It was a long room with two windows in it, one looking out onto the garden, the other onto the yard.

The boarder was tall and bent, with a black, parted beard accentuating the pallor of his face. He had kind eyes and wore glasses. In general he was quiet and unobtrusive, and when he was told that tea or dinner was ready, he would always answer:

"That's fine!"

My grandmother began to call him "That's Fine" behind his back, and even to his face.

"Go tell 'That's Fine' to come have tea, Alexei," she would say, or: "Have some more, 'That's Fine,' you're not eating very much."

His room was piled high with wooden boxes and secular books, a kind I had never seen before. Everywhere stood bottles filled with different coloured fluids, bits of copper and iron and lumps of lead. He was always dressed in a brown leather jacket and grey-checked pants, all spotted with paint and smelling unpleasantly. From morning to night he would stand there smelting lead, soldering copper, weighing something on his tiny scales, grunting, burning his fingers, blowing on them, stumbling over to diagrams hanging on the wall, wiping his glasses and examining the diagrams so closely that he almost touched them with his chalk-like nose. Sometimes he would stand stock-still in the centre of the room or beside the window and remain thus for a long time with his eyes closed, his head lifted, silent and motionless.

I climbed up onto the roof of the shed across the yard and observed him through the open window. I could see the blue flame of the alcohol lamp burning on the table and his dark figure bending over it; I could see him write something in a worn notebook, his glasses shining coldly, like bits of blue ice. The necromancy of this

man kept me up on the roof for hours, possessed by a torturing curiosity.

Sometimes he would stand framed in the window, his hands behind his back, staring directly at the roof; but he never seemed to see me, and this offended me. Suddenly he would jump back to his table and bend double as he rummaged nervously through papers and objects there.

I might have been afraid of him had he been rich and well dressed. But he was poor: the dirty, wrinkled collar of his shirt stuck out of his leather jacket, his pants were patched and stained, the shoes he wore on his bare feet were the worse for wear. There was nothing dangerous or frightening about poor people—this I had learned from the pity my grandmother showed them and the contempt in which my grandfather held them.

Nobody in our house liked "That's Fine." Everyone spoke of him with ridicule—the jolly wife of the military man called him "Chalk nose," Uncle Pyotr called him a chemist and wizard, while my grandfather called him a "pharmacer," a dealer in black magic.

"What does he do?" I asked my grandmother, but she answered abruptly:

"None of your business. Know when to keep your mouth shut."

One day I gathered all my courage and went to his window.

"What are you doing?" I asked, scarce able to hide my excitement.

He started and gave me a long look over his glasses. Then he held out his burned and scarred hand and said:

"Here, climb in."

The fact that he invited me to enter through the window rather than through the door raised him considerably in my estimation. He sat down on one of the boxes, placed me in front of him, moved me first to one side, then to another, and finally asked:

"Where did you come from?"

The question was strange enough, inasmuch as I sat beside him at the kitchen table four times every day.

"I'm the grandson here," I answered.

"Ah, yes," he said, and relapsed into silence as he studied one of his fingers.

I decided it was necessary to make things more clear.

"But I'm not a Kashirin—I'm a Peshkóv."

"Péshkov?" he repeated with the wrong stress. "That's fine."

He pushed me aside, got up and went back to the table.

"Well, sit down and don't make any noise."

I sat there for a long time observing how he made filings from a piece of copper which he held in pincers. When he had enough, he gathered the golden dust into a little heap which he placed in a thick mug; then he took some powder as white as salt out of a can, added it to the filings, and poured some dark liquid over it. The mixture in the mug began to hiss and smoke and give off an acrid odour that made me cough violently.

"Smell bad?" asked the wizard boastfully.

"Yes!"

"Aha! That's good, brother, that's very good!"

I failed to see any cause for boasting.

"If it's bad, it can't be good!" I said severely.

"You don't say," he cried, blinking his eyes. "Well, now, that's not always true, brother! Do you like to play knucklebones?"

"Dibs?"

"That's right, dibs."

"Sure I do."

"How'd you like me to smelt a filler for you? Make a good beater."

"I'd like it."

"Let's have the knucklebone then."

Again he came over to me, holding the smoking mug in his hand.

"If I fill it up for you, promise you won't come back any more?" he said, glancing at me out of one eye.

This injured me deeply.

"I'll never come back as it is!" I retorted and went into the garden.

There I found grandfather placing manure about the roots of the apple trees; it was autumn, and the leaves had long since begun to fall.

"Here, clip the raspberry bushes," said my grandfather, handing me the shears.

"What is 'That's Fine' making?" I asked.

"Just a mess," he answered angrily. "Spoiling the room: he's

burned the floor already and stained the wallpaper, even tore a piece off. Have to give him notice."

"That's right," I assented as I tackled the raspberry bushes.

But I was in too much of a hurry.

On rainy evenings, if my grandfather was out, my grandmother would hold parties in the kitchen. She would invite all the lodgers, including the draymen, the orderly, and even a gay young woman lodger; often the lively Petrovna would come, and always "That's Fine" would be found in the corner by the stove, where he would sit silent and motionless. The deaf mute Styopa would play cards with the Tatar Valei, who would cuff him on his broad nose and say:

"You old devil, you!"

Uncle Pyotr would bring a huge loaf of white bread and a jar of raspberry jam, slice the bread, spread it thickly with jam, and hold the pieces on his outstretched palms as he offered them to the guests.

"Be so kind as to help yourselves," he would say with a low bow. Whenever anyone took a piece, he would examine his dusky palm and lick off any drops of jam which might be there.

Petrovna brought cherry wine and the gay young lodger donated nuts and candy. A feast would begin which was my grandmother's favourite form of entertainment.

My grandmother held such a party shortly after "That's Fine" had offered me a bribe to stay away from his room. A dreary autumn rain was falling, the wind was blowing, the trees sighing and scratching at the walls of the house. It was warm and cosy in the kitchen; the people drew close together and were somehow particularly quiet and well-disposed. My grandmother was more lavish with her tales than usual.

She sat on the edge of the stove bunk with her feet resting on the step, and leaned down toward the people, her face illuminated by a little tin lamp. She always chose a seat up on the stove when she was inspired.

"I have to talk down from up above; it's easier somehow when you talk down," she explained.

I sat at her feet on a lower step, just above the head of "That's Fine." Grandmother told the charming story of Ivan-the-Warrior

and Miron-the-Hermit; rhymically flowed the rich, measured language:

Once on a time lived the evil Gordion,
Black was his soul, stoney his heart.
Hating of truth, stinting of ruth,
Living a mole in an evil hole.
Of all whom he hated, this Gordion,
Miron-the-Hermit he most abhored,
Miron, who peace and love adored,
Of blessed truth a champion.
Now summoned this Gordion, Captain-of-War,
His warrior bold dubbed Ivánushka.
Get thee hence to old Mirón
Slaughter the ancient, the haughty one,
Strike off his head, be not afeared,
Lift it aloft by its hoary beard,
And bring it me, a feast for my hounds.
Forth went Ivan, obedient,
Forth to the task, bitterly ruing:
Not of mine own, of another's will
Do I this deed, decreed of God.
Under the floor he hid his sword,
Came to the hermit, courteous bowing.
Greetings, oh ancient, how farest thou?
Many the blessings shed by the Lord?
Smiled the knowing one, Mirón the ancient,
Spake in his wisdom to Ivan-the-bold:
Why thou deceivest I know not, in sooth,
For Jesus our Saviour is wit to all things.
Goodness and evil both dwell in His hand,
And surely He knoweth thine evil intent.
Shame filled the heart of Ivánushka:
Feared he the vengeance of Gordion.
Snatched he his sword from its leathern sheath,
Boldly he burnished the baneful blade.
Feign would I spare thee the sight of this.
Keep thee in blissful unknowingness,

But now thou hast seen—on thy knees, old man!
Pray the last time to the Fountain Head,
Pray for all men, and for me and thyself.
Then shall I sever thy hoary head!
Down on his knees sank the ancient one,
There on his knees 'neath a sapling oak,
Over him bended the branches green,
Soft spake the ancient, smiling the while:
Consider, Ivan: long shalt thou wait me,
Endless the prayer for the souls of all men,
Better have done with my life undelaying,
Make thou an ending and hasten away.
Here Ivan frowned at him wrathfully,
Here he did answer him boastfully:
Nay! As decreed, thus shall it be!
Pray while I wait for you, even an age!
Prayed then the hermit 'til coming of nightfall,
Prayed he from nightfall 'til breaking of dawn,
Prayed from the dawn to descending of darkness,
Prayed from the summer straight through to the spring.
Year followed year, and still the good hermit,
Kneeled 'neath the oak, now grown to the sky,
'Round him a forest up-sprang from the acorns,
Still his petition ascended on high.
Thus to this day, there in the forest,
Pleadeth untiring the hermit Mirón,
Asking God's help for all of the people,
Beseeching the Virgin to smile upon men.
Near him reclineth Ivan-the-Warrior,
Sword and its sheathing rotted to dust,
Chain mail and armour eaten by rust,
All of his garments gone to decay.
Consumed by the heat—yet unconsumed;
Devouréd by pests—yet undevoured.
Shunned by the wolves, shunned by the bears,
Spared by blizzards, spared by the frost,
Powerless he to move from that place,
To lift a hand, or even to stand.

And this, I wist, be a punishment,
That he hearkened so to such evilness,
That he bent his will to another's will.
Still the prayers of the ancient one
Flow up to God for us sinning ones,
Flow like a stream to the ocean-sea.

At the very beginning of the tale I noticed that for some reason "That's Fine" was greatly agitated: he kept making strange convulsive movements with his hands, taking off and putting on his glasses, waving them in rhythm to the verse, nodding his head, pressing his fingers against his eyes, and wiping the sweat pouring off his forehead and cheeks. If anyone moved or coughed or scraped his feet across the floor, he would whisper impatiently:

"Sh!"

When grandmother had finished, he jumped up noisily with a waving of his arms, and began to walk about in circles, muttering:

"That's a wonderful thing! It must be written down by all means! How very true it is. . . ."

Now I could plainly see that he was crying: his eyes were filled with tears that flowed over and streamed down his cheeks. This was strange and very touching. He ran about the kitchen in funny little hops, trying to put on his glasses, but unable to hook them behind his ears. Uncle Pyotr let out a laugh, but everyone else was silent with embarrassment.

"Well, go ahead and write it down," said grandmother hurriedly. "No sin in that. I know lots of others like it."

"Oh, no! Just this one. It is so very—Russian," cried the boarder excitedly. Suddenly he came to a halt in the middle of the kitchen and began to speak in a loud voice, waving his right hand and holding his glasses in his trembling left one. He spoke heatedly and at length, emphasizing his words by raising his voice and stamping his foot.

"It's wrong to let someone else act as your conscience!" he repeated over and over again.

All of a sudden his voice broke off, and with a glance at the faces around him he stole away, quietly and guiltily, with hanging

head. People sniggered and glanced at each other uneasily. My grandmother retired into the shadows of the bunk and gave a deep sigh.

"What's wrong with him? Mad about something?" asked Petrovna, passing her hand over her thick red lips.

"No," replied Uncle Pyotr. "That's just his way."

Grandmother climbed down off the stove and began to put up the samovar.

"The gentles are all like that—capricious!" added Uncle Pyotr calmly.

"That's what comes of being a bachelor," put in Valei.

Everyone laughed, and Uncle Pyotr said:

"See him cry? Hard to come down to herring when you're used to sturgeon!"

It became dull in the kitchen; a sad dreariness pricked at my heart. "That's Fine" had greatly surprised me, and I pitied him. I could not get the memory of his brimming eyes out of my mind.

He spent the night away from home, returning after dinner the next day. He seemed chastened and embarrassed and was badly rumpled.

"I made a scene yesterday," he said to my grandmother with the guilty manner of a little boy. "Are you angry?"

"Why should I be?"

"For having my say like that."

"You didn't hurt anybody."

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I felt that grandmother was afraid of him. She did not look at him and spoke too softly to be natural.

He went over to her and said with utter simplicity:

"You see I am terribly alone. I have no one in the world. And when a person's forever silent like that, there comes a moment when all that's going on in his soul has to break loose. Then he's ready to speak to even the rocks and the trees. . . ."

"Why don't you get married?" asked grandmother, moving away from him.

"Ah!" he cried, with a wave of his hand, and went out frowning.

My grandmother watched him leave, then took a pinch of snuff and turned to me:

"Don't you go hanging around him," she said sullenly. "No telling what he's like."

But again I was drawn toward him.

I had noticed the change which came over his face as he said, "I am terribly alone." There was something comprehensible to me in those words which touched my heart, and I went to seek him.

I glanced through the window of his room—it was empty, and cluttered with strange and useless things—as strange and useless as their owner. I went into the garden and found him in the pit, sitting all hunched over on a charred beam, his elbows on his knees and his hands locked behind his neck. The beam was covered with dirt and one end of it stuck up in the air above the nettles and wormwood and burdock. It was obviously uncomfortable for him to sit there, and this fact made me feel all the more drawn to him.

For some time he sat staring past me with the unseeing eyes of an owl, but suddenly he asked with a touch of annoyance:

"Come for me?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"Nothing special."

He took off his glasses and wiped them with a handkerchief stained black and red.

"Well, climb down."

When I had taken my place next to him, he gave me a tight hug.

"Sit here. We'll just sit and say nothing, all right? Like this.... You a stubborn fellow?"

"Yes."

"That's fine."

We sat there without speaking for a long time. It was a shy, quiet evening, one of those melancholy evenings of Indian summer when the flowering fades and withers before your very eyes; when the earth has exhausted the lush smells of summer and exudes only the chill odour of dampness; when the air is strangely transparent, and the daws plunge in the rosy sky, giving rise to oppressive thoughts. Everything was hushed and mute, so that the slightest sound—the rustle of a bird's wing, the falling of a leaf—was so resounding as to cause one to start up and glance about, only to relapse once more into the engulfing silence.

Such moments give rise to thoughts which are particularly pure, but fragile and transparent as a spider's web, defying capture in

words. They flash and fade like falling stars, searing the soul with sadness, or fondling it, disturbing it, causing it to seethe and crystallize into permanent contours. At such moments character is moulded.

Snuggling against the warm body of my companion, I glanced with him through the black filigree of apple boughs and saw the linnets planing in the flushed sky, saw the goldfinches pecking at the dry turnip tops in search of spicy seeds, saw the ragged grey clouds with lurid borders strain across the fields, while beneath them the crows headed for their nests in the churchyard. All of it was good, and comprehensible to an unwonted degree.

Sometimes my companion would utter a deep sigh and remark:

"Fine, isn't it brother? Humph! But isn't it damp? Aren't you cold?"

When the sky had darkened and everything merged in nightfall, he said:

"Well, guess that's enough. Come on. . . ."

He stopped when we reached the garden gate.

"That grandmother of yours is a wonderful woman," he said. "Ah, what a world!"

Then he closed his eyes and smiled, and repeated very softly and distinctly:

And this, I wist, be a punishment,
That he hearkened to such evilness,
That he bent his will to another's will. . . .

"Remember that, brother!" he admonished, pushing me ahead. "Can you write?"

"No."

"Learn. And once you learn, put down what your grandmother recites—that's very important."

We became friends after that. From that day on I used to visit "That's Fine" whenever I wished. I would sit on a box filled with rags and watch him unmolested while he smelted lead or heated copper; when it was molten, he would forge plates on a little anvil with a fancy handle, and work on them with a rasp, sandpaper, and various files, one of which was as fine as a hair. He would weigh everything on a delicate copper scale. He would mix various liquids in thick white porcelain vessels, filling the room with acrid smoke.

He would frown as he looked into a thick book, muttering and biting his red lips, or sighing gently:

Ah, rose of Sharon....

"What are you making?"

"A certain thing, brother...."

"What thing?"

"Now you see, I wouldn't know how to explain so that you would understand...."

"Grandfather says you're probably making counterfeit money."

"Grandfather? Hm. That's all nonsense. Money, brother, is not worth bothering about."

"Now can you buy bread without it?"

"That's right, can't buy bread without it."

"See? Or meat...."

"Or meat either."

He laughed in a quiet way I found delightful, and rubbed me behind the ear as if I were a kitten.

"Can't get the better of you, brother," he said. "You push me into a corner every time. So let's not talk any more."

Sometimes he would stop working and come sit down beside me at the window, where we would watch the apple trees shedding their leaves or the rain on the roof and in the yard, all overgrown with weeds. "That's Fine" was sparing of words, but what he said always seemed to be to the point. Most often he would draw my attention to something he wanted me to notice by nudging me and indicating the object with a wink and a glance.

I could see nothing remarkable about our yard, but from those nudges and his occasional words everything I saw assumed particular significance and became engraved on my memory. A cat went running across the yard and stopped to watch its reflection in a puddle, raising its paw as though to strike the image.

"Cats are proud and sceptical," said "That's Fine" softly.

The red-gold rooster Mamai flew up on the fence, fluttered its wings, nearly lost its balance, became annoyed, and began to cluck angrily as it stretched its neck.

"He's important, is the General, but he hasn't got much sense."

The clumsy Valei picked his way through the mud like an old

horse, raising his broad, puffy face to squint at the sky; a ray of pale autumn sun struck him on the chest and set the brass buttons of his jacket aflame. The Tatar stopped and touched them with his crooked fingers.

"As if he'd just had a medal pinned on his chest."

Soon I found that my attachment to "That's Fine" had grown very deep. He became essential to me in all my joys and sorrows. Though he himself was silent by nature, he never stopped me from saying anything that was on my mind. My grandfather, on the contrary, was always interrupting me:

"Stop your chatter, you windbag!"

My grandmother was so full of her own thoughts that she could not absorb other people's.

But "That's Fine" always listened to me attentively, and often he would say with a smile:

"But that's not true, brother. You just made that up!"

His brief remarks were always timely and to the point. It was as though he could see what was going on in my heart and mind, could see what was false and superfluous before the words passed my lips, and seeing it, slew it with three sharp words, fondly spoken:

"You're lying, brother."

Sometimes I would intentionally test his magic powers by making up stories and relating them as fact. But after listening a minute he would inevitably shake his head and say:

"You're lying, brother."

"How do you know?"

"Oh I know all right!"

Often grandmother would take me with her when she went to fetch water from the pump on Sennaya Square. One day we saw five townsmen beating a *muzhik*. They had him down on the ground and were going at him like a pack of dogs. My grandmother took the pails off her *koromyslo*,* flourished it like a club, and rushed at the townsmen, shouting to me:

"Get away!"

But I was afraid, and ran after her. I began to throw stones at the enemy, while she bravely poked them with her *koromyslo*, and

* Shoulder yoke for carrying buckets of water or any other heavy load.—*Trans.*

thumped them on head and shoulders. Other people joined in the fray, and the townsfolk were driven off. Grandmother began to wash the *muzhik* whose face was badly battered. To this day I shudder at the recollection of how he pressed his dirty fingers to a torn nostril, coughing and howling while the blood spurted from between his fingers into my grandmother's face and on her breast. She also howled and trembled from head to foot.

When I got home I ran to the boarder and began to tell him all about it. He stopped working and stood in front of me holding a long file upraised like a sword. He looked at me sternly and steadily from under his glasses, then suddenly interrupted, saying with unusual emphasis:

"Splendid! That's exactly how it was! Very good!"

I was so taken up by what I had seen that I went on talking without realizing what he had said, but he put his arm around me and began pacing the floor.

"That's enough, that's enough," he admonished. "You've said all that you had to say, understand? Enough!"

I stopped talking. At first I was hurt, but on considering the matter I realized to my amazement that he had stopped me just in time, that I had, in fact, told everything.

"Don't let your mind brood over such things," he said. "Try to forget them."

Sometimes he would quite unexpectedly say things that I have remembered all my life. Once I told him about my enemy Klushnikov, one of the warriors from Novaya Street. He was a fat, large-headed boy who could no more get the better of me than I could of him. "That's Fine" listened to my trouble, and then said:

"Nonsense! Strength like that is no strength at all! Real strength lies in quickness of movement; the quicker you are, the stronger—understand?"

On the following Sunday I tried using my fists quicker, and had an easy time licking Klushnikov. That made me prize the boarder's words even more.

"You have to know how to take hold of things, understand? And that's very difficult—to know how to take hold of things."

I did not understand the meaning of what he said, but I remembered these and similar words. I remembered them because there was

something irritatingly mysterious in their simplicity: what could be difficult about taking hold of a stone, or a piece of bread, a cup, or a hammer?

The people in our house came to dislike "That's Fine" more and more. Even the friendly cat belonging to the gay young lady lodger would not climb up onto his knee as it would onto the knees of other people, nor would it answer his gentle call. I beat it for this and shook it by the ears, almost weeping as I tried to convince the cat not to be afraid of this man.

"My clothes smell of acid, and that's why it won't come to me," he explained. But I knew that everybody else, including my grandmother, had a different explanation. They were hostile to him, and I found this wrong and painful.

"Why are you forever hanging around him?" asked my grandmother angrily. "Watch out, or he'll go teaching you tricks!"

My grandfather, the mean redhead, whipped me cruelly every time he heard that I had visited the boarder. Naturally I did not tell "That's Fine" that I had been forbidden to visit him, but I frankly told him what people thought of him.

"Grandmother's afraid of you; she says you go in for black magic, and grandfather too. He says you're against God and it's dangerous for people to have anything to do with you."

He jerked his head as though chasing a fly; his pallid face flushed with a smile that made my heart contract and my head reel.

"I can see all that, brother," he said quietly. "Too bad, isn't it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Too bad, brother."

Finally they drove him away.

One morning after breakfast I found him sitting on the floor packing his things in a box and humming "Oh rose of Sharon."

"Well, good-bye, brother. I'm leaving."

"Why?"

He studied me intently for a moment before answering.

"Didn't you know? This room is needed for your mother."

"Who said so?"

"Your grandfather."

"He's lying."

"That's Fine" drew me toward him, and when I was sitting on the floor beside him he said quietly:

"Don't be angry! I thought you knew and just didn't say anything, brother, and I didn't like it."

For some reason I was hurt and annoyed.

"Listen," he said with a smile and almost in a whisper. "Remember my telling you not to visit me?"

I nodded.

"Hurt your feelings then, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"I didn't mean to, but I knew they would scold you if you started making friends with me."

He spoke as though he were my own age, and his words made me very happy. It seemed to me I had long since known what he just told me.

"I knew that long ago," I said.

"Good. Well now, so that's how it is, brother. Hm."

My heart ached unbearably.

"Why doesn't anybody like you?"

He hugged me tight and blinked hard as he replied:

"Because I'm not like them, understand? That's the whole thing. I'm not like them!"

I plucked at his sleeve, not knowing what to say.

"Don't be angry," he said, and then whispered in my ear, "and don't cry either."

But the tears were stealing down his own cheeks from under his filmy glasses.

We sat there for a long time in silence, as was our wont, occasionally exchanging brief words.

That evening, after taking a fond farewell of everyone and embracing me warmly, he went away. I slipped through the gate and saw him jouncing on top of the cart as the wheels struck the frozen ruts in the road. As soon as he had left, my grandmother set to work cleaning the dirty room while I made a point of getting in her way by running from corner to corner.

"Get out!" she cried on stumbling over me.

"Why did you put him out?"

"That's none of your business!"

"You're all fools, the whole bunch of you!" I said.

She began slapping me with a wet rag and crying:

"Have you gone plumb crazy, or what?"

"They're all crazy but you," I corrected, but this did not appease her.

"Well, thank God he's gone!" said grandfather at the supper table. "Every time I saw him it was like a knife in my heart. Had to get rid of him."

In my rage I broke a spoon, for which I was duly chastised.

Thus ended my friendship with the first of that innumerable company of people—strangers in their native land—who represent its finest sons.

IX

I might liken myself as a child to a beehive to which various common, ordinary people brought the honey of their knowledge and views on life, each of them making a rich contribution to the development of my character. Often the honey was dirty and bitter, but being knowledge, it was honey nonetheless.

After the departure of "That's Fine," I became friendly with Uncle Pyotr. He resembled my grandfather in that he was thin and neat and clean, but he was smaller in stature and in every other way. He reminded me of a young boy dressed up like an old man just for the fun of it. His face was a basket work of fine leather thongs, forming a cage from behind which his merry eyes twinkled like two little birds. His grey hair was curly, and his beard lay in ringlets; he smoked a pipe whose smoke was the colour of his hair and curled about him as did his quaint speech. He spoke in a buzzing voice that seemed to be kind and gentle, but I always had the impression that he was ridiculing people.

"At the beginning of things, the countess who owned me—Tatyan by name, Alexeyevna by patronymic—says, 'It's a smith you'll be,' but no sooner had I taken to smithing than she says, 'Be the gardener's assistant.' I had no objections, but as the saying goes, 'If you don't belong, everything's wrong.' When that didn't work out, she says: 'Try your hand at fishing, Petrushka!' Again it's all right by me; I takes up with the fish, but just I get a hankering for them, when

it's good-bye fish and I'm sent to town to serve as drayman. So it's drayman I'll be and anything else you like, but before she gets a chance to like anything else along comes 'mancipation and there I be, left with the horse on my hands, and to this very day I follow the horse instead of the countess."

The horse was old and white and looked as if a drunken painter had slung a mottled brush at it. It was a crazy quilt with bandy legs. Its bony head set with filmy eyes hung sorrowfully from a neck scarce connecting it to the body by stretched sinews and flaccid hide. Uncle Pyotr was most respectful to his horse; he called it "Tanya" and never beat it.

"Why should you give your beast a Christian name?" my grandfather once asked him.

"But it's not, Vasili Vasilyevich—not at all," he replied. "Tanya's no Christian name—the Christian name's Tatyana."

Uncle Pyotr was also literate and had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He and my grandfather were always arguing as to which of the saints was the most saintly. They were relentless in passing judgment on sinners mentioned in the Bible, condemning Absalom above all others. Sometimes their arguments assumed a purely grammatical aspect: my grandfather said, "wickedism," "lawlessism," "idolitism," while Uncle Pyotr claimed they should be pronounced "wickedry," "lawlessry," "idolitry."

"Your way's one thing—mine's another!" bellowed my grandfather all red in the face. "A fig for your '-ry's'!"

But Uncle Pyotr sat unperturbed, with the smoke curling about his head.

"And what's better about your '-isms'?" he drawled spitefully. "Not a bit better in the sight of God. Maybe when the Lord listens to them prayers of yours He thinks to Hisself, 'The prayer is big, but not worth a fig!'"

"Get away from here, Alexei!" my grandfather shouted at me, his green eyes flashing.

Pyotr was very fond of order and cleanliness. Whenever he walked through the yard, he would kick away sticks and bones and chips, muttering reprovingly:

"No good for anything but just to get in the way!"

He was very loquacious and gave the impression of being kind

and merry. But at times his eyes would become filmy and bloodshot and staring like those of a corpse. And frequently he could be found sitting off somewhere in a dark corner as sullen and silent as his nephew.

"What's the matter, Uncle Pyotr?"

"Go away," he would answer with dull severity.

Into one of the houses on our street moved a gentleman with a lump on his forehead and a very strange habit: on Sundays he would sit at the window and fire his shotgun at dogs, cats, chickens and crows, and even at passers-by if they did not strike his fancy. One day he poured grapeshot into "That's Fine." It did not penetrate his leather jacket, but some of the shot landed in his pocket. I remember watching the boarder examine the pieces he held in his hand. My grandfather urged him to put in a complaint, but he tossed the shot into a corner of the kitchen and said:

"Not worth the trouble."

Another time the sniper put some shot into my grandfather's leg; my grandfather was enraged, reported the offence and began mobilizing witnesses. But all of a sudden the gentleman disappeared.

Every time his shots were heard out on the street, Uncle Pyotr would hastily pull on the faded, large-visored cap he wore on Sundays, and rush through the gate. Once out on the sidewalk, he would put his hands under his coattails to make them stick up like a rooster's tail, poke out his belly, and stride importantly past the sniper's window. If the first stroll remained uneventful, he would repeat it a second and a third time. All the people from our house would crowd at the gate to watch, with the military man and his blond wife peering at the window. People also came out in the yard of the Betleng's house. Only the grey house belonging to the Ovsyannikovs remained lifeless.

Sometimes Uncle Pyotr's efforts were futile—the hunter refused to consider such game worthy of his attention. But sometimes the double-barrelled gun went off.

"Bang-bang!"

Without quickening his steps, Uncle Pyotr would come over to us and report with the greatest satisfaction:

"Got me in the coattails."

One day the shot landed in his neck and shoulder.

"Why should you egg on such a wild creature!" asked grandmother as she removed the lead with a needle. "He'll shoot your eyes out yet!"

"Oh no, Akulina Ivanovna!" replied Pyotr contemptuously. "He's no shot at all!"

"Why give him the satisfaction?"

"Satisfaction? I just do it to tease the gentleman!"

As he examined the wounds in his hand, he added, "No shot at all! The countess, now, Tatyan Alexeyevna, once had temporary marriage ties—she changed her husbands like her footmen—once had these ties, I'm saying, with an army man named Mamont Ilyich. Well, *he* was a shot all right! What he could do with a gun, grandmother! He'd place the feeble-minded Ignashka way off—some forty steps or so—and tie a bottle to his belt so's to hang down between his legs, and Ignashka would plant his feet wide apart and laugh like the idiot he was. Then Mamont Ilyich would take aim and—bang! went the bottle. Only once a horsefly must've bit Ignashka or something —the boy goes and jerks and gets the bullet in his knee—right in the cap! They call the doctor and quick as a wink he has the leg off—just like that! They buried it...."

"And Ignashka?"

"Oh, he was all right. An idiot has no use for arms and legs—lives by his idiocy. Everybody's ready to help an idiot—they're a harmless lot like the saying goes, 'No sense—no offence.' "

This story did not impress my grandmother—she knew dozens like it. But it gave me the creeps.

"Could one of the gentlefolk kill a person to death?"

"Why not? He could, all right! Sometimes the gentlefolk even kill each other. Once a lancer came to visit Tatyan Alexeyevna and got into a fight with Mamont. They both grabbed their pistols, went to the park and there on the path by the lake the lancer gave it to Mamont—bang!—right in the liver. Well, Mamont went to glory, the lancer to the Caucasus, and that was the end of that! There, you see? Killing their own selves! As for the *muzhiks* and their kind—phooh! Many as you like! Especially nowadays, when they don't own them no more. Used to be more careful—after all, the *muzhik* was their property!"

"Didn't care much then either," put in my grandmother.

"True enough," agreed Uncle Pyotr. "Property, all right, but cheap property."

He was always gentle with me and spoke more kindly to me than to the grownups, without dropping his eyes. But there was something about him I did not like. When he treated us to his favourite jam, he would spread my bread thicker than that of the others. He would bring me ginger cookies and poppy-seeds when he went to town, and he always spoke with me quietly and seriously.

"Well, what we going to be when we grow up, my man? A soldier, or a clerk?"

"A soldier."

"Good for you. Not hard to be a soldier these days. The priests have it easy too—just go around shouting, 'Praised be the Lord!', and there's an end to it. Even easier to be a priest than a soldier. But the easiest of all is to be a fisherman. He don't need to know anything at all—just get the habit, that's all!"

He gave an amusing imitation of how the fish circle around the bait and how a bass, a bream, and a mackerel struggle when they are hooked.

"You get mad, now, when your grandfather gives you a beating, don't you, though?" he said consolingly. "But there's no reason at all to get mad in a case like that, my man. They're all for your own good, those beatings, and they're just childish beatings. But take my Tatyan Alexeyevna, for instance. There was a person for you when it came to beatings! She kept a special man for such business—Christopher was his name—such an expert he was that the owners of neighbouring estates used to send to the countess: be so good, Tatyan Alexeyevna, as to lend us your Christopher for a beating or two! So she'd send him over."

He gave an unimpassioned and detailed account of how the countess would sit in a red armchair on the columned porch of her estate, resplendent in a sheer white dress with a blue scarf about her shoulders, supervising the lashings Christopher administered to her serfs of both sexes.

"That Christopher person came from Ryazan—something like a gypsy or a *khokhol** he was, with moustaches from ear to ear, but his

* *Khokhol:* Russian nickname for Ukrainians.—*Trans.*

face all blue-like, from shaving his chin. And there was no telling whether he was really half-witted or just made believe to be so's to make life easy for hisself. He'd go into the kitchen and fill a basin with water, catch a fly, or a roach, or some kind of a beetle, and drown it by pushing it with the end of a stick—keep drowning it for a long time. Or sometimes catch the vermin under his own collar and drown it. . . ."

I was well acquainted with stories like this, having heard many of them from my grandfather and grandmother. But with all their variations, they were the same in that they told of human torture and humiliation. I was sick of such stories.

"Tell me about something else," I said.

The drayman gathered all his wrinkles about his mouth, then shifted them to his eyes as he gave his consent.

"All right, greedy. Here's something else. Once we had a cook. . . ."

"Who had?"

"Countess Tatyan Alexeyevna."

"Why do you call her Tatyan, like a man, instead of Tatyana? She wasn't a man, was she?"

"Of course not—she was a lady, but still she had a moustache. A little black one. She was a black German by birth—a tribe something like the Negroes. Well, then this cook of ours—this is going to be a funny story, my man. . . ."

The funny story was an account of how the cook had spoiled a pie and was punished by being made to eat the whole thing at one sitting, as a result of which he became sick.

"That's not funny," I said with annoyance.

"So what's funny? Come on, let's hear."

"I don't know."

"Then keep your mouth shut."

Once more he started spinning his dull tales.

Sometimes my cousins would come for a visit on Sundays—Uncle Mikhail's sad and lazy Sasha, Uncle Yakov's neat and knowing Sasha. One day, when the three of us were exploring the roofs of the outhouses, we saw a gentleman sitting on a woodpile in the Betleng's yard, playing with some puppies. He was wearing a green long coat lined with fur, but his little yellow bald head was uncovered. One of my cousins suggested that we steal one of the puppies, and we imme-

diately thought up a plan: my cousins were to go out in the street and wait at the Betleng's gate while I was to frighten the man. When he ran away, my cousins would dash into the yard and grab a puppy.

"How shall I frighten him?"

"Spit on his bald head," suggested one of my cousins.

I found nothing particularly wicked about spitting on a bald head —I had seen and heard about greater crimes being committed, so I did not hesitate to fulfil the task entrusted to me.

But the act created a tremendous fuss. A whole army of men and women from the Betleng's house invaded our yard, led by a handsome young officer. And since my cousins were innocently playing out in the street at the moment when the crime was perpetrated, I was the only one to receive the beating which my grandfather performed with great gusto in order to propitiate the insult offered the house of Betleng.

While I lay bruised and aching on the bunk in the kitchen, Uncle Pyotr came to see me, all dressed up and in a cheerful mood.

"That was a clever thing to think up, young man," he whispered. "Serves him right, the old goat! Spit on the bunch of them! Better to have thrown a brick at his rotten head!"

I remembered the round, hairless, childlike face of the gentleman in the green coat, and how he had squealed softly and plaintively as a puppy as he wiped his yellow pate with his little hands. This had made me hate my cousins and feel frightfully ashamed of myself at the time, but now I forgot it as I looked into the basket-work face of the drayman, which was trembling in the same frightening and repulsive way my grandfather's had when he gave me the beating.

"Get out!" I cried, pushing Pyotr away with my hands and feet.

He chuckled and winked and got up off the bunk.

From that time on I never had any desire to talk with him. I began to avoid him, and at the same time to keep a suspicious eye on him, as though I were vaguely expecting something.

This incident was shortly followed by another. For some time I had nurtured a secret interest in the quiet house belonging to the Ovsyannikovs. It seemed to me that a mysterious fairy tale existence went on in that grey house.

The Betleng house was always noisy and cheerful. A number of attractive young girls lived there courted by students and officers who

were always talking, laughing, singing and playing. The very house itself had a gay look, with its flashing windows through which the green of the plants shone with particular vividness. My grandfather did not like this house.

"Infidels! Heretics!" he called the occupants in general, while he applied a particularly filthy word to the women—a word which Uncle Pyotr once explained to me in a gloating, filthy manner.

But grandfather was impressed by the stern and silent house of the Ovsyannikovs.

It was high and one-storied and ran far back into a clean, open yard carpeted with grass. In the centre of the yard stood a well, covered by a roof supported on two columns. The house stood back from the street, as though hiding from it. Three narrow arched windows whose panes were turned to rainbow hues by the sun, decorated the facade. A barn to the right of the entrance gate also had three windows matching those of the house, but they were imitation windows, formed by moulding tacked to the wall, with frames and sashes painted in white. There was something unpleasant about these blind windows, and the barn seemed to emphasize the fact that the house wanted to hide away and live its life unobserved. The entire house, with its empty stables and empty barns with their huge gates breathed a sense of quiet injury, or silent pride.

Sometimes a tall, beardless old man with white moustaches bristling like needles could be seen limping about the yard. Occasionally another old man with side-whiskers and a crooked nose led a grey horse out of the stable. Once out in the yard, the narrow-chested, thin-ankled horse would nod to everything about it like a modest nun. The lame old man would slap it noisily, whistle and take deep sighs, then send the horse back into the dark stable. It seemed to me that the old man wanted to escape from the house, but was held there by some evil spell.

Almost every day from noon to evening, three little boys played in the yard. They were all dressed alike in grey pants and blouses and similar hats, and they themselves were so much alike, with their round faces and grey eyes, that I could distinguish them only by their size.

I watched them through a chink in the fence, but to my disappointment they did not notice me. It was pleasant to see in what a

happy, friendly manner they played games that were unfamiliar to me. I liked the way they were dressed and the way they took care of each other, especially the older ones in relation to the youngest—a sturdy, amusing little fellow. If he fell down, they laughed as people always laugh at anyone who falls down, but there was nothing mean about their laughter; they would immediately help him get up and brush off his hands and knees with burdock leaves or their handkerchiefs.

"You clumthy thing!" the middle one would say.

They never fought or played tricks on each other, and all three of them were strong and agile and full of energy.

One day I climbed a tree and whistled to them. They stopped at the sound of the whistle, then drew together with their eyes on me and held a consultation. I expected them to start throwing stones, so I descended, filled my shirt and pockets with missiles, and once more climbed the tree. But they were already playing again in a far corner of the yard and apparently had forgotten all about me. That was regrettable, but I did not want to be the first to declare war. Presently, someone called from the window:

"Home, children—quick!"

They turned obediently but unhurriedly, and marched off like geese.

Many times I sat on the tree above the fence, hoping they would invite me to play with them, but they never did. In my imagination I often joined them in their games, even calling out and laughing aloud in my enthusiasm. At such times all three of them would look at me and quietly pass remarks to each other, while I would slip embarrassedly down the tree.

One day they began to play hide and seek. The middle brother was "it," and he stood at one corner of the barn with his hands over his eyes, without peeking, while his two brothers hid. The oldest boy quickly climbed into a sledge sheltered by the overhanging roof of the barn, but the little fellow ran round and round the well, not knowing where to hide.

"One!" cried the boy who was "it." "Two. . . ."

The little one climbed up on the edge of the well, grabbed hold of the rope, and jumped into the empty bucket, which immediately disappeared, knocking dully against the sides of the well.

I was frozen with horror as I saw the rope quickly and noiselessly unwinding. But I immediately realized what might be the result and jumped down into the yard, shouting:

"He fell in the well!"

The middle brother reached the well at the same time I did, grabbed the rope, which lifted him off his feet and burned his hands, but I took hold, and by that time the eldest boy came running and helped me haul up the bucket.

"Not so fast, please," he said.

We rescued the little one, who was badly frightened. Blood was flowing from the fingers of his right hand, one of his cheeks was also badly scratched, he was soaked to the waist and deathly pale, but he smiled and said with a shudder:

"How I fel-l-l!"

"You craythy thing!" lisped the middle brother, hugging him and wiping the blood from his face, while the eldest frowned and remarked:

"Come on, we can't hide it anyhow, so we may as well go now."

"Will you get a licking?" I asked.

He nodded and held out his hand.

"You ran mighty fast," he said.

I was so overwhelmed by his praise that before I could take his hand he was saying to the middle brother:

"Come on, or he'll catch cold. We'll say he simply fell down. No sense telling about the well."

"Yes," agreed the little one. "We'll just say I fell in a puddle."

And they went away.

Everything had happened so fast, that when I glanced up at the branch on which I had been sitting it was still shaking, scattering its yellow leaves.

For about a week after that the brothers did not appear in the yard, and when they did, they were noisier than ever. As soon as the eldest boy saw me, he cried in a friendly tone:

"Come play with us!"

We climbed into the sledge and sat there for a long time getting acquainted.

"Did they beat you?" I asked.

"We got it, all right," answered the eldest.

It was hard to believe that these boys also took beatings like mine, and I thought it unfair.

"Why do you catch birds?" asked the little one.

"Because they sing nice."

"Don't catch them any more. Let them stay free to go where they want."

"All right, I won't any more."

"Only first catch one and give it to me."

"What kind?"

"A cheerful kind—to put in a cage."

"That'll be a chaffinch."

"The cat'll kill it," said the middle brother. "And father won't let uth keep it."

"That's right," agreed the eldest.

"Haven't you got a mother?"

"No," answered the eldest, but the middle brother corrected him: "We have, only another one—not ourth—ourth died."

"That kind's called a stepmother," I said, and the eldest nodded. "That's right."

All three of them fell into a brooding silence.

I had learned what a stepmother was from grandmother's tales, and so I could understand their silence. They sat there huddled together, as like as three peas. I recalled the story of the witch stepmother who resorted to foul means to take the place of the real mother, and I tried to console the boys by saying:

"Don't worry, your real mother will come back yet."

"How can she, once she's dead? That never happens," said the eldest with a shrug of his shoulders.

Never happens? Heavens, how many times a sprinkling of living water had brought back to life not only those who were merely dead, but even those who had been chopped into a hundred pieces! And how many times death turned out to be not a real death, sent by God, but the work of witches and wizards!

I began an enthusiastic recounting of grandmother's stories, but the eldest laughed contemptuously and said:

"We've heard those—they're just fairy tales!"

His brothers listened in silence, the little one with a frown on his face and his lips compressed, the middle brother with one elbow on

his knee, the other arm crooked about the little one's neck, drawing him toward me.

It was already well on toward evening; rosy clouds had settled low over the roofs, when the old man with white whiskers appeared among us. He was wearing a long brown coat like a priest and had a shaggy fur cap on his head.

"Who's that?" he asked, pointing his finger at me.

The eldest boy rose and nodded toward my grandfather's house.

"He's from over there," he said.

"Who asked him to come?"

All three of the boys immediately climbed silently out of the sledge and went home, once more reminding me of obedient geese.

The old man took me firmly by the shoulder and led me through the yard to the gate. I was on the verge of tears from fright, but he strode ahead so quickly that I found myself out in the street before I had time to cry. He stood at the gate shaking his finger at me and saying:

"Don't dare come see me again!"

"I never came to see you, you old devil!" I retorted angrily.

His long arm reached out for me once more, and he led me down the sidewalk, reiterating the same question, like hammer blows over my head:

"Is your grandfather at home?"

Unfortunately for me, he was. He stood before the menacing old man, his head thrown back, his beard sticking out, looking up into eyes as round and dull as kopek pieces.

"His mother's away, I'm busy, nobody to look after him—begging your pardon, Colonel!" he said hastily.

The Colonel gave a roar that could be heard all over the house, swung around on his heel and marched away. Some time later I was thrown out into Uncle Pyotr's cart.

"Got it again, my man?" asked the drayman as he unharnessed the horse. "What was the beating for this time?"

When I had told him the story, he flared up and hissed through his teeth:

"What do you want to make friends with the likes of them for? They're gentlefolk's spawn; see what you took on their account? Hereafter you give it to them!"

He kept on muttering to himself, and at first, rankled by my injuries, I sympathized with what he said. But his basket-work face trembled so disgustingly that I was reminded of the fact that those boys would also be flogged, and that they had in no way offended me.

"No reason why I should give it to them," I said, "and what you're telling is just a pack of lies."

He glanced at me sharply, then suddenly shouted:

"Get out of my cart!"

"Fool!" I cried, jumping down.

"A fool, am I? A liar, am I? I'll show you . . ." and he began chasing me around the yard, but was unable to catch me.

My grandmother appeared on the kitchen porch. I ran to her, and he began to complain about me:

"I get no peace with that brat around! Don't spare his words—calls me all sorts of filthy names, and me five times his senior. . . ."

When people lied in my very face, I was stunned out of mind. Now I stood there at an utter loss for words, but my grandmother said firmly:

"Now, there, Pyotr, aren't you taking a little too much rope? You can't tell me as he called you filthy names."

My grandfather would have believed the drayman.

From that day on the relationship between me and the drayman was one of silent, vicious war. He would try to find opportunities for poking me or striking me with the reins as if by chance; he set my birds free and one day he sicked the cat on them. He was always complaining to my grandfather about me, invariably exaggerating the cause. I found it impossible to look upon him as anything but a boy like myself dressed up like an old man. In my turn I would unravel his bast sandals and untwist the cording, so that it would break when he was lacing them. One day I sprinkled pepper in his cap, and he went about sneezing for a whole hour. In general, I did everything in my power to give him measure for measure. On Sundays he would spend the entire day spying on me, and more than once he caught me in illegal communication with the spawn of the gentlefolk, on which occasions he straightway reported the fact to my grandfather.

I had continued my acquaintanceship with the boys, and derived more and more pleasure from it. Between the wall of my grand-

father's house and the Ovsyannikov's fence there was a little corner shaded by an elm and a lime and overgrown with elderberry bushes. Behind these bushes I had cut a little opening in the fence, to which the brothers would come in turns or pairs, to talk quietly with me. One of them always watched to see that the Colonel did not catch us.

They told me about the dull life they lived, and this made me very sad. We talked about my birds, and about many childish interests, but so far as I can remember they never mentioned their father or their stepmother. Most often they simply asked me to tell them stories, and I conscientiously related all the tales I had heard from my grandmother. If I forgot anything, I would ask them to wait while I ran to her to be prompted. She was only too glad to do this.

I often told them about my grandmother. One day the eldest boy gave a deep sigh and said:

"All grandmothers must be nice. We used to have a nice grandmother too...."

He so often and so sadly repeated the expressions: "used to be," "used to have," "once upon a time," that it seemed he had lived a hundred years, instead of only eleven. I remember that he had slender hands with long thin fingers. He himself was slender and fragile with eyes as shy and clear as the icon lamps in church. I was fond of his brothers as well. They won my sympathy and inspired me with the desire to do something nice for them. But I was most fond of the eldest.

So absorbed would I become in our conversation that I often failed to notice the approach of Uncle Pyotr, who would startle us with his long-drawn-out:

"Wha-a-t! At it again?"

I could see that he was becoming more and more subject to fits of sullenness. I even learned how to determine the mood in which he returned from work: ordinarily he opened the gates unhurriedly, so that the hinges gave a prolonged creak. But if the drayman was in a bad mood, the hinges would let out a sharp, sudden shriek, like a cry of pain.

His mute nephew left for the country to get married. Pyotr went on living alone in a low-ceilinged room over the stable containing one tiny window and smelling of tar, old leather, tobacco and sweat. I could never visit him because of this odour. These days he slept

without extinguishing his lamp, a thing which displeased my grandfather very much.

"Watch out or you'll be burning the place down, Pyotr."

"No danger of that. I always stand the lamp in a basin of water at night," he answered, glancing off to one side.

He was always glancing about shiftily nowadays, and he no longer attended grandmother's parties or treated us to jam. His face had become dried up, the wrinkles had grown deeper, and he swayed like a sick man when he walked.

One morning when my grandfather and I were shovelling the snow which had fallen abundantly during the night, the latch on the gate clicked with particular importance, a policeman entered the yard, closed the gate, stood with his back to it, and beckoned to my grandfather with a fat grey finger. When my grandfather went over to him, he stuck his big nose into his face and said something to which my grandfather hastily replied:

"Here? When? If only I can remember...."

Suddenly he started comically and cried:

"Merciful God! Not really?"

"Sh!" warned the policeman.

Grandfather glanced about and caught sight of me.

"Take the shovels and go home!"

I hid around the corner of the house and watched them enter the drayman's quarters in the stable. The policeman took the glove off his right hand and began slapping his left with it.

"He understands all right; abandoned his horse and went into hiding."

I ran into the kitchen to tell my grandmother all I had seen and heard. She nodded her flour-dusted head as she kneaded the dough.

"Must've stole something or other," she said calmly when I had finished. "Go out and play. What's it to you?"

When I ran out into the yard again, grandfather was standing at the gate with his hat off and his eyes raised to heaven, crossing himself. His face was angry and bristling and one of his legs was trembling.

"Didn't I tell you to get in the house?" he cried, stamping his foot.

He followed me into the kitchen.

"Come here, mother!" he said.

They went into the next room and whispered together for some time. One look at grandmother's face when she returned told me that something dreadful had happened.

"What are you scared of?" I asked.

"You just keep your mouth shut," she replied softly.

A strained and awed atmosphere hung over the house the rest of the day; my grandmother and grandfather kept exchanging furtive glances and short, incomprehensible words which heightened the feeling of alarm.

"Light all the icon lamps, mother," ordered my grandfather, clearing his throat.

They ate dinner hurriedly, but without appetite, as if expecting someone. Grandfather wearily blew out his cheeks, cleared his throat, and murmured:

"Satan's too strong for a man to pit hisself against. Take him, for instance—a godly, pious man to all appearances, but look what he's done!"

Grandmother sighed.

The silvery winter day dragged on interminably, while the atmosphere at home became more uneasy and oppressive with every hour.

Towards evening another policeman came. He was fat and redheaded and sat drowsing on a bench in the kitchen, nodding and snuffling.

"How did they find out?" my grandmother asked.

After a short pause he replied gruffly:

"Don't worry, they find out everything."

I remember sitting at the window heating an old coin in my mouth in order to make an impression of St. George the Victorious on the frosted windowpane.

Suddenly there was a great bustling in the entranceway and the door burst open. Petrovna stood on the threshold and shouted:

"Go have a look at what's out on your property!"

On catching sight of the policeman she rushed back into the entranceway, but he caught her by the skirt and also shouted in fright:

"Wait a minute! Who are you? What's out there?"

She fell on her knees and began to cry, swallowing down her words and her tears:

"I went out to milk the cow, and all of a sudden I sees something like a pair of boots in the Kashirin's yard."

"That's a lie, you hussy!" shouted my grandfather in a rage. "You couldn't see anything in our yard—the fence is too high and there's no holes in it! You're lying! There's nothing out there!"

"Ah me!" wailed Petrovna stretching out one hand to him and holding her head with the other. "It's the truth when he says I'm lying. I was walking along and all of a sudden I sees tracks leading up to your fence and the snow all trampled down in one place, so I climbs up and looks over the fence, and there he is lying there. . . ."

"Who-o-o?"

The cry came frightful and long-drawn and meaningless. Then all of a sudden, as though they had lost their senses, everyone went running and shoving out of the kitchen into the yard. There in the snow-filled pit lay Uncle Pyotr, his back against a charred beam, his head drooping on his breast. Just below his right ear was a great gash resembling a red mouth with bluish fringes sticking up like teeth. I closed my eyes in horror, and through my lashes I saw Uncle Pyotr's saddle knife lying on his knee with the twisted darkened fingers of his right hand alongside, while his left hand was buried in snow. The snow had melted under his slight figure, which lay deep in the white fluff, looking more childlike than ever. On his right the snow was stained with a strange red design that looked like a bird, while on his left it remained unspotted, and lay smooth and glistening. His head, so meekly bowed, rested on his chest, pushing up his curly beard, beneath which hung a large brass cross framed by rivulets of dried blood. My head swam from the confusion of voices; Petrovna shouted without interruption; the policeman shouted to Valei to go somewhere; my grandfather shouted:

"Don't spoil the tracks!"

Suddenly he frowned and dropped his eyes.

"No sense in yelling like that, officer," he said in a loud, authoritative voice. "This is the hand of God, the judgment of God, and you with your silly business—fie on you!"

All the people became silent, sighing and crossing themselves and staring at the dead man.

Others climbed over the fence from Petrovna's side and came

running across the yard, falling and muttering, but making little noise until my grandfather glanced around and cried in despair:

"You're breaking all the raspberry bushes, neighbours! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?"

My grandmother took me by the hand and led me into the house.

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Didn't you see?" she answered, whimpering.

All that evening and until late in the night strange people moved about the kitchen and the room adjoining it. The police gave orders, and a man who looked like a deacon made notes in a book and kept quacking like a duck:

"What's that? What's that?"

Grandmother served tea to everybody. At the kitchen table sat a round, bewhiskered, pock-marked man who said in a squeaky voice:

"Nobody knows his real name. The only thing they know is that he comes from Elatma. But that there deaf mute is no more deaf than you nor me, and he come out with the whole story. And the third chap squealed too—seems there was a third one. They been robbing churches ever so long—that was their main specialty...."

"My God!" exclaimed Petrovna, all moist and red.

I lay up on the bunk looking down on them, and they all appeared short and fat and ugly....

X

Very early one Saturday morning I went into Petrovna's garden to catch bullfinches. Some time passed, but the proud, red-breasted creatures would not enter my snare. Vaunting their beauty, they would step importantly over the silver snow crust, or fly into the bushes, where they would sway on the hoar-covered branches like bright flowers among blue sparkles of snow dust. All this was too lovely to allow of my feeling disappointment in the hunt. In general I was not a very impassioned hunter: I always took greater pleasure in the process than in the result. I was most interested in observing and meditating on the lives of the birds.

What could be more pleasant than to sit alone at the edge of a snowy field and listen to the chirping of the birds in the crystal si-

lence of a winter's day, while somewhere far away in the distance sounded the bells of a passing troika—that melancholy lark of the Russian winter.

When I was chilled to the bone and felt that my ears were freezing, I gathered up my snares and cages, climbed the fence into grandfather's garden, and went toward the house. The gates were open, and a huge *muzhik* was leading three horses hitched to a large, closed sleigh out into the street. Clouds of steam rose from the horses, the *muzhik* whistled gaily, and my heart stood still.

"Who did you bring?" I asked.

He turned, glanced at me from under his hand, jumped up into his seat, and said:

"The priest!"

That did not concern me—if the priest had come, he was probably visiting one of the tenants.

"Get going, my chickens!" cried the *muzhik* as he touched the horses with the whip, causing them to spring ahead and set the air ringing with bells. I watched them go, then closed the gates and went into the house. When I entered the kitchen I heard my mother's deep voice coming from the adjoining room:

"Well, what now? Off with my head—is that it?"

I threw down my cages and rushed out into the entranceway without taking off my coat, but my grandfather caught me. He looked at me with wild eyes, swallowed painfully, and gasped:

"Your mother's come—go in to her! Wait!" He shook me so that I could scarcely retain my footing, then pushed me toward the door.

"Go on, go on," he said.

I fumbled at the door, scarcely able to lift the latch with my frozen, trembling fingers; when at last I opened it, I stood speechless on the threshold.

"Ah, so here he is!" said my mother. "Heavens, how big you've grown! Don't you recognize me? The way you dress him! And look, his ears are frozen! Give me some goose grease—hurry, mother!"

She stood bending over me in the middle of the room, taking off my clothes and turning me around like a ball. Her large body was clothed in a soft, warm red dress as wide as a man's cloak, with large black buttons descending diagonally from the shoulder to the waist, and then down to the very hem. I had never seen such a dress before,

Her face seemed to have grown smaller and paler, her eyes larger and deeper, and her hair more golden. She threw aside the clothes she took off me, drawing down the corners of her red lips disdainfully and saying in an imperious tone:

"Well, why don't you say something? Aren't you glad? Phooh, what a dirty shirt!"

Then she rubbed goose grease on my ears. It hurt, but the pain was compensated by the refreshing, delightful scent which emanated from her. I pressed up close and looked deep into her eyes, unable to utter a word in my agitation. As a background to what she was saying, I heard my grandmother softly complaining:

"He's gotten clean out of hand, don't even fear his grandfather any more. Ah, Varya, Varya...."

"Stop whining, mother! Everything will be all right!"

In contrast to my mother, all the surroundings seemed little and old and drab. I myself felt as old as my grandfather.

She held me tightly between her knees as she stroked my head with a warm, heavy hand.

"Need a hair cut," she said. "And time for you to be going to school. Do you want to study?"

"I've already studied."

"There's more to be learned. But what a sturdy little fellow you are!" And she laughed a rich, warm laugh as she fondled me.

My grandfather came in, grey and bristling, with bloodshot eyes. She pushed me away with a single gesture and asked in a loud voice:

"Well, what am I to do, father? Leave?"

He stood at the window scratching the ice with his nail and saying nothing. The atmosphere was so strained that I could feel my eyes and ears expanding until they seemed to comprise my whole being, while my breast was nigh to bursting with the impulse to scream.

"Get out of here, Alexei," said my grandfather dully.

"Why?" asked my mother, once more drawing me to her.

"You'll not leave! I forbid it!"

My mother got up and soared about the room like a lurid sunset cloud.

"Listen, father," she said, halting behind his back.

"Silence!" he shrieked.

"I won't allow you to shout at me!" said my mother quietly.

"Varvara!" cried my grandmother, rising from the divan and shaking a warning finger, while my grandfather sank weakly onto a chair, muttering to himself:

"What's this? What's this, eh? Who am I? What do you call this?"

Suddenly he let out a roar like a wounded beast:

"You've disgraced me, that's what you've done, Varka!"

"Go away," said my grandmother to me. Deeply unhappy, I went into the kitchen and climbed up onto the stove, from where I could hear the sounds coming from the other room—now everyone talking excitedly, now everyone silent, as though suddenly fallen asleep. They were talking about a baby my mother had given birth to and left with someone. But it was impossible to tell whether my grandfather was angry because my mother had given birth without his consent, or because she had not brought him the baby.

Finally he came into the kitchen, red and dishevelled and exhausted, followed by my grandmother, who was wiping the tears from her cheeks with a corner of her blouse. He slumped down on a bench, leaning on his hands, biting the grey lips of his twitching face. My grandmother fell on her knees before him.

"Forgive her, father, for the love of Christ, forgive her! Even better sleighs have broken down. Don't such things happen among the gentlefolk too, and among the merchants? Just see what a woman she is! Forgive her, father—none of us are perfect. . . ."

Grandfather leaned back against the wall and looked her in the eye as he whimpered:

"Oh yes, of course! Why not? You'd forgive anybody. You'd forgive anything. Phooh! Fie on you!"

Then he leaned toward her, grabbed her by the shoulder and shook her.

"But what about the Lord?" he said in a rapid whisper. "He doesn't forgive anything, eh? Here we are at the brink of the grave, and the punishments we get—our last days, and no peace, no joy, and none to hope for! Beggars we'll die—mark my words—beggars!"

My grandmother took his hands in hers, sat down beside him, and laughed softly.

"What of it? Why you so scared to be a beggar? So we'll be beggars. You can sit home and I'll go out with the cup. Nobody'll

refuse me—we'll not go hungry! Stop worrying yourself with all this business!"

Suddenly he snorted, turned his head like a goat, grabbed my grandmother about the neck and hugged her up tight, little and crumpled and blubbering:

"You fool! You blessed little fool! The only person left to me! You'd be willing to lose everything, simpleton that you are! Just remember how we worked for our children, how I sinned for them! And now at the end, not to have anything, not even a little bit. . . ."

At this point I could stand it no longer; I jumped off the stove with the tears streaming down my face and ran to their side, sobbing with joy that my mother had come, that they should be speaking together with such unprecedented tenderness, and that they allowed me to share their grief with them, both of them embracing me, fondling me, bathing me in their tears.

"So you're here too, you little scoundrel," whispered my grandfather into my ear. "Now your mother's come you won't be needing me, your grandfather, the old devil, eh? Nor your grandmother, the old harpy that only knows how to spoil you. Phooh, fie on you!"

He waved us off with his hands and stood up.

"Everybody leaves us—everybody tries to get away—each for himself. . . . Well, call her in," he said angrily. "Hurry up!"

Grandmother left the kitchen and grandfather went over to the icon corner.

"Merciful God—just see—to think of it!" he muttered with bowed head, striking himself vauntingly on the chest. I did not like this, and in general I did not approve of the way in which he spoke to God, always so boastful. My mother entered, filling the room with the cheer of her red dress. She sat on the bench at the table with grandmother and grandfather on either side of her, the full sleeves of her dress draped over their shoulders. She spoke to them softly and seriously, and they listened without a word. Both of them looked so small beside her that it seemed she was the mother and they the children.

Worn out with emotion, I fell fast asleep on the bunk.

That evening both the old people dressed up in their best clothes and went to vesper service. Grandmother merrily winked at my grandfather, who was resplendent in the suit of a master-workman and a racoon coat.

"Just see what a neat little goat your father is," she said, nudging my mother.

Mother laughed gaily.

When she and I were alone in her room, she sat on the divan with one leg drawn up under her and called me over, patting the divan next to her.

"Here, come sit down. Well, how are things? Not very good?"

"How were they? I don't know."

"Does your grandfather beat you?"

"Not so much any more."

"Really? Well, tell me anything you like."

I had no desire to talk about my grandfather, so I began to tell her that a very nice man had lived in the room we were in, but nobody had liked him and grandfather had finally put him out. Apparently this story did not interest my mother, and she said:

"Tell me something else."

I told her about the three little boys and how the Colonel had chased me out of his yard.

"What a nasty man," she said with a hug.

Then she became quiet, studying the floor through narrowed eyes and shaking her head.

"Why is grandfather so angry with you?" I asked.

"I am to blame."

"You should have brought him the baby. . . ."

She started up, frowned, and bit her lip, then burst out laughing and hugged me again.

"You little silly! But don't say a word about that again, hear? Not a word—and don't even think about it!"

For some time she spoke words that were quiet and stern and unintelligible. Then she got up and began to pace the floor, tapping her chin with her fingers and moving her heavy brows.

A wax candle burned and melted on the table and was reflected in a mirror. Dirty shadows crept across the floor, an icon lamp glowed in the corner, and the frost-covered window was silver with moonlight. Mother glanced about as though searching for something on the empty walls and ceiling.

"When do you go to bed?"

"A little later."

"That's right, you had a nap this afternoon," she remembered with a sigh.

"Do you want to go away?" I asked.

"Where to?" she replied with some surprise, then she lifted my head and gazed for so long into my eyes that I could not hold back the tears.

"Why are you crying?"

"My neck hurts."

But my heart hurt more. I realized that she could not live in that house, that she would surely go away....

"You will look like your father some day," she said, tossing the carpet away with her foot. "Has grandmother told you about him?"

"Yes."

"She was very fond of Maxim—very! And he was fond of her...."

"I know."

Mother looked at the candle, frowned, and put it out.

"That's better," she said.

It seemed fresher and cleaner in the room without the candle. The dirty shadows on the floor were replaced by patches of blue moonlight, while golden reflections glittered on the windowpane.

"Where did you live before you came here?"

She mentioned the names of several towns as though remembering something long forgotten, all the while circling about the room like a hawk.

"Where did you get such a dress?"

"I made it myself. I do everything for myself."

It was pleasant to find her so different from everybody else, but I regretted that she spoke so little. If I did not ask her questions, she said nothing at all.

Once more she sat down next to me on the divan, and we remained there without speaking, holding tight to each other, until the old folks returned smelling of wax and incense, gravely quiet and gentle.

Supper was a solemn and elevated affair. We spoke little and cautiously, as though afraid of awakening someone from a light sleep.

Soon mother energetically undertook my "secular" education: she bought me a few books, one of which was called "A Russian Primer,"

From this book I learned the secular alphabet in a few days. But mother immediately had me learn poetry by heart, and this was the beginning of mutual torture.

Here is the first verse I had to learn:

A winding road, an endless road,
A road past fields and man's abode,
No pick or spade the path has laid,
But countless hoofs the bed have made.

When I recited it I always said "binding" instead of "winding," "blade" instead of "spade" and "by" instead of "but."

"But just think," protested my mother, "How could a road be 'binding,' silly? 'Winding'—that's what you must say."

I understood, and yet I kept saying "binding," to my own consternation.

Mother became angry and insisted that I was stubborn and stupid. That was a very bitter accusation to hear, and I strained every effort to remember the accursed lines. Mentally I recited them without a mistake, but when I said them out loud I invariably mixed up the words. I came to hate these illusive lines, and began to distort them for spite, thinking up a whole series of words in alliteration, which gave me the greater pleasure the less sense they made.

But this amusement cost me dear: one day at the end of a successful lesson, mother asked me to recite the poem, and in spite of myself I began to mutter:

A road was sowed and blowed with toad,
No pixies, twixies, fixed the nixies....

I realized what was happening only too late: my mother rose with her hands on the table and asked, enunciating each word separately:

"Where did you get that?"

"I don't know," I answered, thoroughly shocked.

"Oh yes you do! Tell me!"

"Just like that."

"Just like what?"

"For fun."

"Get into the corner."

"What for?"

"Into the corner!" she repeated threateningly.

"Which corner?"

Without answering, she gave me such a look that I completely lost all sense of what I was doing or what she wanted me to do. In the icon corner stood a round table containing a vase filled with sweet-scented dried flowers and grasses. In another corner stood a trunk covered with a rug. A bed occupied the third corner, while the fourth was taken up by the door.

"I don't know what you want me to do," I said, with a desperate effort to understand.

She sank into a chair, silently rubbing her brow and cheek.

"Hasn't grandfather ever stood you in the corner?"

"When?"

"At any time," she cried impatiently, striking the table twice.

"No, not that I remember."

"Don't you know that it is a punishment—to be stood in the corner?"

"No. Why is it a punishment?"

"Dear me!" she said with a sigh. "Come here."

"Why are you shouting at me?" I asked, coming over.

"Why do you make a point of mixing up the poem?"

I explained to the best of my ability that when I shut my eyes I remembered the poem as it was written, but when I said it out loud, other words came out.

"Aren't you just making that up?"

I swore I was not, but immediately I began to wonder whether I was or not. Suddenly, taking my time, I recited the poem without a mistake. That amazed and overwhelmed me.

I felt my face flushing, my ears burning. I stood there in front of my mother consumed with shame, and through my tears I could see her face darken with disappointment, her lips tighten, her brows lower.

"What does that mean?" she asked in a strange voice. "So it seems you actually did make it up!"

"I don't know. I had no intention to. . . ."

"You're a hard person to deal with," she said, lowering her head. "Go away."

She began to give me more and more poems to learn, but my mind refused to absorb them. The desire to distort these rhythmic lines and to fit different words into them grew more viciously intense, I had no trouble in doing this—the unwelcome words came to my mind in droves, quickly substituting themselves for the required ones. Often whole lines refused to be captured by my visual memory however much I tried. One plaintive verse—by Prince Vyazemsky it seems—caused me particular trouble.

'Til late at night from early morn,
Old folks and orphans and widows
Beg for a crust 'neath the windows.

I always left out the third line:

Stretch out their hands and in voices forlorn,

In exasperation my mother told my grandfather about my freaks of memory.

"Spoiled, that's what he is!" he said angrily. "There's nothing wrong with his memory; knows all the prayers better than me. His memory's like stone—once a thing's cut into it, it's there for good. Try giving him a licking!"

My grandmother confirmed his opinion.

"He remembers fairy tales and songs, and songs be the same as poetry."

All this was true, and I felt that I was to blame, but as soon as I undertook the learning of a poem, other words would come crawling out like a flock of roaches and line themselves up:

Night and morning, to our gate,
Cripples, orphans, come and wait,
Wait and whine and beg for bread,
Take it to Petrovna's shed,
Sell it for her cows, and then,
Wallow drunken in the glen.

At night as I lay alongside of my grandmother, I would tell her all I remembered from the books and all that I myself made up. Sometimes she would laugh, but mostly she reproved me.

"Just see what you can do if you want! But you hadn't ought to make fun of beggars. Christ was a beggar, and so were all the saints."

I replied by muttering:

Beggars I hate,
And grandfather too,
So help me God,
What can I do
To escape my fate,
And grandfather's rod?

"May your tongue wither at the roots, you wicked boy!" exclaimed grandmother. "What if your grandfather hears it?"

"Let him!"

"Why ever should you be a-worrying of your poor mother? Hard enough it is for her without you making it worse," coaxed grandmother gently.

"Why is it hard for her?"

"Hold your tongue! It's not for you to understand such things!"

"I know it's grandfather that...."

"Hold your tongue I tell you!"

I was unhappy almost to the point of despair, but for some reason I wanted to hide the fact. And so I became bold and unruly. My mother's lessons increased and became more difficult. I had no trouble with arithmetic, but I could not bear to write and understood nothing about grammar. The thing which oppressed me above everything else was the knowledge that my mother was so miserable living in my grandfather's house. She became more gloomy with every day, looking upon everyone with alien eyes and sitting for hours at the window gazing into the garden, seeming to wither away. The first few days after her arrival she was quick and full of life, but now there were dark circles under her eyes and she neglected her appearance, going about the whole day long in a wrinkled, unbuttoned blouse without combing her hair. It hurt me to see her so unattractive, she who always should have been neat and clean and beautiful, the most beautiful person in the world!

During our lessons she stared past me at the wall or through the window, asking her questions in a tired voice and forgetting to listen

to the answers. She had become very irritable and often shouted at me. This also hurt my feelings: a mother should be more just than other people, like the mothers in fairy tales.

One day I said to her:

"Are you unhappy with us?"

"Get on with your work," she replied sharply.

I also observed that my grandfather was preparing to do something which frightened my grandmother and my mother. Often he would lock himself up with my mother in her room and screech like shepherd Nikanor's horrible wooden whistle. On one such occasion my mother shouted so loud as to be heard throughout the house:

"That will never be, never!"

She slammed the door and my grandfather howled.

That was in the evening. My grandmother was sitting in the kitchen making grandfather a shirt and muttering under her breath as she sewed. When the door slammed she listened, and then said:

"Oh Lord, she's gone to the tenants!"

Suddenly my grandfather rushed into the kitchen, struck my grandmother over the head, and hissed as he nursed his stinging hand:

"When you going to learn to hold your tongue, you old witch?"

"It's a fool you be," answered my grandmother calmly, adjusting her hair. "Think you're going to get me to hold my tongue? You can be sure I'll always be telling her anything I find out about your scheming...."

He threw himself at her and began to pummel her head. Grandmother made no resistance, but kept saying:

"Go ahead and beat me, you fool! Harder, harder!"

From the bunk where I was sitting I began throwing pillows and blankets and boots at him, but in his rage my grandfather did not notice it. Grandmother fell on the floor, and there he kicked her head until he himself stumbled and fell, overturning a pail of water. He jumped up, spitting and sputtering. With a wild glance around, he ran out of the kitchen and up to his room in the attic. Grandmother got up with a groan, sat down on the bench, and began straightening out her tangled hair. I jumped down off the bunk on the stove.

"Gather up these pillows and things and put them back on the stove," she said angrily. "A fine thing to go throwing the pillows

about! Learn to be minding your own business! And that old devil going off his head like that too!"

Suddenly she let out a little cry, frowned, and called me over.

"Look here," she said, lowering her head. "What is it hurts so here?"

I lifted her heavy hair and discovered that a hairpin had been driven into her scalp. I pulled it out and found another. I went weak all over.

"I better call mother," I said. "I'm afraid."

"What you saying—'I'll call mother!' " she cried with a wave of her hand. "Thank the Lord she didn't see or hear it, and you'll be calling her! Get out of here!"

With the deft fingers of a lacemaker, she herself began feeling through her heavy black mane for the imbedded hairpins. Gathering all my courage, I helped her pull out two more.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not specially. Tomorrow I'll heat up the bathhouse and wash all the hurt away. But don't you go telling your mother he beat me, pigeon-widgeon," she coaxed tenderly. "They're angry enough with each other as it is. You won't, now, will you?"

"No."

"Don't forget! Now let's straighten up here. Can you see anything on my face? No? That's good. So everything's neat as daisies."

She began to wipe up the floor, and I said from the bottom of my heart:

"You're like one of the saints—they beat you and torture you, and you don't pay any attention to it."

"What nonsense is that! A saint! A fine place to go looking for a saint!"

She kept on muttering as she crawled about on all fours, while I sat on the doorstep figuring out how I could pay back my grandfather for what he had done.

This was the first time he had shown such violence to grandmother in my presence. There in the twilight I seemed to see his red face with the red hair waving about it. My heart was burning with indignation, and I suffered from the inability to think up a fitting revenge.

Two days later, on entering his room in the attic, I found him sitting on the floor in front of an open chest going through some papers. On a chair beside him lay his favourite calendar of saints—twelve sheets of heavy grey paper divided into squares for the days of the month, with figures of the saints in the squares. My grandfather prized this calendar highly, allowing me to look at it only on those rare occasions when he was particularly pleased with me. And I always contemplated those attractive little grey figures with a peculiar emotion. I knew the lives of some of them: Kirik and Ulita, Varvara-the-Martyr, Panteleimon, and many others. I was especially moved by the sad life of Alexei, Man-of-God, and the splendid verses about him which my grandmother often recited to me with deep feeling. When you looked at these hundreds of saints, it brought the quiet consolation that there had always been martyrs.

But now I decided to cut up this calendar, and when grandfather went over to the window to read a blue paper embossed with eagles, I grabbed up several sheets, quickly ran downstairs, took the scissors from grandmother's table, climbed up on the stove and began cutting off the heads of the saints. When I had decapitated one row, my heart was touched with pity for them, so I began to merely cut along the lines dividing the sheet into squares. Before I had cut up the following line my grandfather appeared on the doorstep.

"Who gave you permission to take the calendar?" he asked.

Suddenly he caught sight of the little squares scattered over the bunk. He grabbed them up, peered at them, discarded them for others, and when he realized what was happening, his jaw clamped, his beard began to quiver, and he breathed so hard that the papers went flying.

"What have you done!" he shouted at last, yanking me off the stove by the leg. I somersaulted into the air, but my grandmother caught me.

"I'll kill you!" shrieked my grandfather, pummeling both me and my grandmother.

Suddenly my mother appeared and I found myself in the corner with her in front of me.

"Stop this nonsense!" she cried as she warded off grandfather's blows. "Come to your senses!"

"I'm done for," wailed my grandfather, sinking down on the bench by the window. "You're all against me—all of you!"

"You should be ashamed of yourself for putting on such a show!" came my mother's low voice.

Grandfather shouted and kicked the bench, his eyes tight closed and his beard pointing ridiculously toward the ceiling. It seemed to me that he really was ashamed of the show he was putting on in the presence of my mother, and that was why he closed his eyes.

"I'll paste these pieces together on some calico and the calendar will be better than ever—stronger," said mother as she straightened out the sheets of paper. "See, they're all wrinkled and worn and falling to pieces."

She spoke to him in the same tone she used during our lessons when I did not understand. Suddenly grandfather got up, straightened his shirt and his vest with great importance, cleared his throat, and said:

"See that you paste them together today! I shall bring you the other sheets."

He went to the door, but turned at the threshold.

"He deserves a licking!" he said, shaking a crooked finger at me.

"Yes he does," agreed my mother. "Why did you ever do such a thing?" she asked, bending over me.

"I did it on purpose. If he ever beats grandmother again, I'll cut his beard off!"

Grandmother, who was in the act of taking off her torn blouse, shook her head.

"It's holding your tongue you should be, like you promised!" she said, spitting in disgust. "May it swell up so's it can't go wagging any more!"

Mother glanced at her, then turned to me.

"When did he beat her?" she asked.

"Have some shame on you, Varvara, asking him about such things! It's none of your business!"

"Ah, mother, you blessed creature!" cried my own mother, embracing her warmly.

"Hm, a fine sort of a mother for you! Here, let me go. . . ."

They looked at each other in silence for a minute, then moved

apart. My grandfather could be heard moving about in the entranceway.

From the very first day of her arrival, my mother was friendly with the gay wife of the army man, and went to visit her almost every evening. There she met people from the Betleng's house—pretty young girls and brave officers. My grandfather did not like this, and often as he sat over his supper in the kitchen he would shake his spoon in their direction and grumble:

"Another party on, curse them! There'll be no sleeping the night through!"

Soon he asked the tenants to move, and when they had gone he brought two loads of odd furniture from somewhere, placed it in the empty apartment, and locked the door.

"Don't need those tenants any more—going to be entertaining guests myself from now on."

And on Sunday the guests began to arrive. Among them were grandmother's sister, Matryona Ivanovna, a noisy, large-nosed laundress wearing a striped silk dress and a golden scarf on her head. With her came her two sons, Vasili, a draughtsman, long-haired and dressed in grey—a jolly, good-natured fellow; and Victor, who had a horsy head and a narrow face sprinkled with freckles. While he was taking off his rubbers out in the entranceway I heard him piping like a clown:

"Andrei-papá, Andrei-papá. . . ."

This surprised and frightened me.

Uncle Yakov came with his guitar. He also brought along a quiet, bald-headed, one-eyed watchmaker, dressed in a long black coat that made him look like a monk. He always sat smiling in the corner with his head tipped to one side, and one finger supporting his cloven, clean-shaven chin. He was dark, and his one eye gazed at everyone with particular intensity. He spoke little and constantly repeated the same phrase:

"Please not to trouble yourself—it's all the same. . . ."

When I first saw him I suddenly remembered the time, long ago. (we were still living on Novaya Street) when I had heard the drums beating ominously out in the road and seen a high black cart surrounded by soldiers and people move from the jail to the public square. On a bench in the cart sat a man with a round cap on his

head and chains on his hands that jingled with the swaying of his body. A black sign hung about his neck with something written on it in large white letters. The man's head hung down as though he were reading it....

"This is my son," said my mother, introducing me to the watchmaker, but I edged away in fright, holding my hands behind my back.

"Please not to trouble yourself," he said, stretching his mouth to his right ear in a frightful way. Catching me by the belt, he yanked me toward him and whirled me about with a quick, deft movement.

"He's all right, a sturdy chap," he said in approbation as he let me go.

I took up my position in a leather armchair large enough to sleep in. Grandfather always boasted that this chair had belonged to Prince Gruzinsky. From the corner I observed with what an effort the grown-ups tried to be jolly and how strangely and suspiciously the watchmaker changed his facial expressions. His face was thin and greasy, all melted and running. When he smiled, his thick lips shifted to the right and his little nose moved like a dumpling in a stew. His large, protruding ears also moved, now rising along with the brow above his one eye, now sliding toward his cheekbones, and it seemed to me that if he so desired, he could cover his nose with them like with hands. Sometimes with a sigh he would stick out his dark little tongue, as round as a pestle, drawing circles with it to moisten his thick, oily lips. I found this more surprising than amusing, and could not take my eyes off of him.

The guests drank tea with rum, which smelled like burnt onions. They also drank grandmother's liqueurs, which were golden, or green, or dark as tar. They ate seasoned *varenets* and honey cakes with poppy seeds. They swelled and sweated and praised my grandmother. When they had had their fill they sat back in their chairs, flushed and bloated, and lazily asked Uncle Yakov to play for them.

He bent over his guitar and strummed it as he sang in his unpleasant voice,

Oh, we lived as best we could,
Lots of noise, but little good.
Ca-a-ame the lady from Kazan,
Looking for another man....

I found this a very sad song, and my grandmother said:

"Sing something else, Yakov—a true kind of song. Remember the songs they used to sing, Motrya?"

"There's a new style in songs these days, my dear," said the laundress with an impressive rustle of her dress.

My uncle stared at my grandmother through half-closed eyes as though she were far away, and continued plucking out his gloomy tune and singing his ugly words.

My grandfather was carrying on a secret conversation with the watchmaker, demonstrating something with his fingers. The latter lifted his brow, glanced in my mother's direction, nodded, and a subtle change spread over his liquid face.

Mother was sitting with the Sergeyevs as usual, speaking to Vasili in a quiet, serious voice.

"Hm-m. Have to think about that," he said with a sigh.

Victor gave a well-fed smile, shuffled his feet, and suddenly began to sing in a thin voice:

"Andrei-papá, Andrei-papá. . . ."

Everyone stopped talking and glanced at him.

"He got that from the theáyter," explained his mother proudly. "They sing that in the theáyter."

There were two or three such evenings, memorable for their insufferable boredom. Then one Sunday the watchmaker put in his appearance at noon, just after late mass. I was sitting in my mother's room helping her unravel an old beaded embroidery when the door was suddenly flung open and grandmother's frightened face appeared just long enough to whisper:

"Varya, he's come!"

My mother did not start or move a muscle. A minute later the door opened again and my grandfather said solemnly:

"Dress yourself and come along, Varvara!"

"Where to?" asked my mother without glancing at him and without getting up.

"Come along, and God bless you. Don't start arguing. He's a steady man, a master at his job, and he'll make a good father for Alexei. . . ."

Grandfather spoke with unwonted importance and kept stroking his thighs with his hands, while his elbows quivered as though his

arms wanted to stretch forward and he was struggling to keep them back.

"I have already told you that that would never be," said my mother calmly.

Grandfather strode over to her with his arms ahead of him like a blind man.

"Come along or I'll drag you along—by the hair!" he shouted hoarsely, bristling all over.

"You'll drag me?" said my mother rising. Her face was white and her eyes narrowed menacingly. Quickly she began to take off her skirt and blouse. When she remained in only her slip, she said to my grandfather:

"All right, drag me along!"

He bared his teeth and shook his fist.

"Put on your clothes, Varvara!"

My mother pushed him away and went to the door.

"Well, are you coming?" she cried.

"I'll disown you!" hissed my grandfather.

"I'm not afraid. Well?"

She opened the door, but he grabbed the hem of her slip and fell on his knees.

"You'll come to an awful end, Varvara, you she-devil! Don't disgrace me. Mother! Mother!" he wailed.

Grandmother had already barred mother's way and was shooing her back into the room like a chicken.

"You fool of a Varka!" she muttered. "Get back, you shameless wench!"

When she had her back in the room, she put the hook on the door and turned to my grandfather. With one hand she raised him off the floor, while she shook the other at him menacingly.

"O-o-o, you old devil, you senseless creature!"

She sat him down on the divan like a rag doll with his head flopping and his mouth hanging open.

"Get into your clothes, you!" she shouted at my mother.

"I won't go out to him, do you hear?" said my mother as she picked up her clothes.

Grandmother pushed me off the divan.

"Go bring a dipper of water, quick."

She spoke almost in a whisper, but calmly and imperiously. I ran out into the entranceway, from where I could hear someone walking slowly up and down in the front room.

"Tomorrow I'm leaving!" I heard my mother say.

I went into the kitchen and sat down at the window as in a dream.

My grandfather sniffled and groaned, my grandmother muttered under her breath, then a door slammed and all was quiet and terrifying. Suddenly remembering what I had been sent for, I dipped up some water and went out into the entranceway. From the front of the house appeared the watchmaker with drooping head, stroking his fur cap and making hoarse sounds. He was followed by my grandmother with her hands crossed on her stomach, bowing and saying quietly:

"You yourself can understand—no forcing a person to like you."

He stumbled through the door and out into the yard, while grandmother crossed herself and stood there trembling all over, laughing or crying—I couldn't make out which.

"What's the matter?" I asked, running over to her.

She snatched the dipper out of my hands, wetting my feet and crying:

"How far did you go to fetch this water? Lock the door!"

She went back into my mother's room, and I into the kitchen, from where I could hear them groaning and sighing and muttering, as though they were pushing a weight beyond their strength from one place to another.

It was a fine day with long rays of winter sun coming through the frosted panes of the two windows. The table was laid for dinner, and shone with pewter dishes as well as with the decanters containing golden kvass and grandfather's vodka, green from the wort and cowslip added for flavour. Through a thawed circle of windowpane I caught a glimpse of the dazzling snow on the roofs and the sparkling silver caps of fence posts and birdhouses. My captured birds played in sun-flooded cages hanging from the window frames: the tame chaffinches chirped merrily, the bullfinches chattered, while the goldfinch trilled a song. But the music and brightness of this silvery day brought me no joy. The day was unwanted. Everything was unwanted. I would have set the birds free, but just as I was taking

down the cages my grandmother came bustling into the kitchen, slapping herself on the thighs and crying as she ran to the stove:

"Curses on all of you, devil take you! Ah, what an old fool you are, Akulina!"

She took the *pirog* out of the oven, struck the burnt crust with her fingers, and spat in vexation.

"Burnt to a cinder! There's warming it up for you! Phooh, demons, the whole bunch of you—may you blow up and float away! What you sitting there goggling at, you owl! I'd like to smash the lot of you like cracked jugs!"

She began to cry, turning the *pirog* from side to side, tapping the dry crust, watering it with enormous tears.

My mother and grandfather came into the kitchen, and she flung the ruin on the table, causing the dishes to rattle.

"Just see what's happened, all on account of you, devil take

My mother, now in a calm and merry mood, embraced her and coaxed her to forget it. Grandfather looked tired and wrinkled as he took his place at the table, tied his napkin around his neck, squinted his swollen eyes in the sun, and muttered:

"All right, forget it! We've tasted *pirog* before. The Lord's a bit of a miser—pays for years in minutes and doesn't believe in interest. Sit down, Varya ... forget it!"

It was as though his mind had been touched. All during the dinner he talked about God and the impious Ahab and the trials and tribulations of being a father. Grandmother angrily interrupted him:

"Go ahead and eat and don't talk so much," she said.

Mother laughed, her clear eyes shining.

"Well, were you frightened a while ago?" she asked as she gave me a nudge.

I had not been very much frightened, but now I felt uneasy and could not understand what had happened.

They ate much and long, as was usual on Sundays. It was difficult to believe that these were the same people who half an hour ago had been shouting at each other on the verge of a fight, sobbing and seething with anger. Nor could I believe that all this had been serious or had cost them any effort. I had become used to their crying and

shouting and the scenes which flared up so often and died down so quickly. I no longer took them to heart as I had at first.

Long afterwards I came to understand that Russians, as a result of the poverty and dullness of their lives, sought diversion in grief, playing it up like children, and rarely feeling ashamed of their misfortunes.

When life is monotonous, even grief is a welcome event, even a fire is diversion.

A wart is adornment to a vacuous face.

XI

After this incident, my mother became strong and erect and the head of the household, while my grandfather became quiet and unobtrusive, not at all like himself.

He almost never left the house, sitting alone in the attic reading a mysterious book called "Notes Written by My Father." He kept this book in his strongbox under lock and key, and I had often observed that before taking it out, he always washed his hands. The book was small and thick and bound in tan leather. On the bluish title page was the following inscription in faded ink:

"To the honourable Vasili Kashirin with the fondest regards and gratitude."

It was signed by a strange name ending in a flourish representing a bird in flight. My grandfather would carefully open the heavy leather cover, put on his silver-framed spectacles, and gaze for long at this inscription as he twitched his nose to adjust his glasses. More than once I asked him what the book was, but he always answered impressively:

"That is not for you to know. Just wait a bit—when I die I'll leave it to you, and my racoon coat too."

He began to speak less often and more gently to my mother, and when she spoke he would listen attentively, muttering and making little gestures with his hand and blinking his eyes like Uncle Pyotr.

His trunks were full of many extraordinary costumes: brocaded skirts, satin vests, cloth-of-gold *sarafani*, *kiki* and *kokoshniki*,*

* *Sarafani*—long, sleeveless dresses; *kiki* and *kokoshniki*—headdresses.—*Trans.*

ornamented with pearls, bright kerchiefs and scarfs, heavy Mordovian necklaces and beads of varicoloured stones. He brought all this into my mother's room and spread it over the table and chairs. When my mother admired the finery, he said:

"In my day, people dressed ever so much richer and finer than nowadays! The clothes were richer, but people lived simpler and more friendly. But I suppose there's no going back! Try them on—dress yourself up...."

One day mother went into the next room and returned wearing a dark blue sarafan embroidered in gold, and a pearl headdress.

"Does it please your grace?" she said, bowing low to my grandfather.

Grandfather gasped, beamed all over, and walked around her waving his arms and muttering indistinctly, as in a dream:

"Ah, Varvara, if only you were rich and there were decent people around!"

My mother had taken up her quarters in the two rooms at the front of the house, and she often entertained guests. Most frequent were the Maximov brothers: Pyotr, a huge, handsome officer with a large blond beard and blue eyes—the same in whose presence grandfather had given me a beating that time for spitting on the old gentleman's head; Yevgeni, who was also tall, but pale and long-legged, with a pointed little black beard. He had eyes like sloes and always wore a green uniform with gold buttons and gold insignia on his narrow shoulders. He had the habit of tossing back his long, wavy hair from his high forehead and smiling condescendingly. He was forever telling something in a husky voice, crawling up on whatever he had to say with the inevitable phrases:

"You see, the way I look at it...."

My mother would listen to him with half-closed eyes, often interrupting him with a laugh:

"You're still a child, Yevgeni Vasilyevich, if you'll forgive my saying so...."

"That's what—a child!" the large officer would corroborate, with a slap on the knee for emphasis.

The Christmas holidays passed in noisy merriment. Almost every evening my mother and her friends dressed up in fancy costumes and went visiting. Mother's costume was always the finest.

Every time the gay company went out the gate, the house seemed to sink into the earth; everything became dull and alarmingly quiet. Grandmother moved through the rooms like an old goose tidying up, while grandfather stood warming his back at the tile stove and muttering to himself:

"Well, all right, let her have her own way.... We'll see what'll come of it...."

After the Christmas holidays mother took me and Sasha, Uncle Mikhail's son, to school. Sasha's father had married a second time, and his stepmother had taken an immediate dislike to him. She beat him so often that grandmother insisted on grandfather's taking him to live with us. We attended school for about a month. Of all I was taught during that time I can remember only one thing—that when asked what my name was, it was not sufficient to answer:

"Peshkov."

I had to say:

"My name is Peshkov."

Nor could I say to the teacher:

"Don't you go shouting at me, mister. I'm not afraid of you...."

I immediately disliked school. My cousin, on the other hand, liked it from the very start and made many friends. But one day he happened to fall asleep during the lesson and cried out in his sleep:

"No I wo-on't!"

When he woke up, he asked permission to leave the classroom, for which the other boys teased him mercilessly. The next day, on reaching the gully at the Sennaya Square on our way to school, he stopped and said:

"You go on without me. I'm not going to school today. I'd rather go for a walk."

He squatted down, buried his books in the snow, and went away. It was a bright January day with the whole world glittering with sunlight. I envied my cousin, but grit my teeth and went on for mother's sake. Naturally the books Sasha had buried in the snow were stolen, so that he had real reason for not going to school on the following day. On the third, my grandfather found out about his truancy.

Both of us were put on trial: behind the kitchen table sat my grandfather, my grandmother, and my mother for the cross-examina-

tion. I remember the funny answer Sasha gave to my grandfather's question:

"How is it you never reached the schoolhouse?"

"I forgot where it was," he said, looking my grandfather straight in the face with his timid eyes.

"You forgot?"

"Yes. I looked and looked for it. . . ."

"You should have followed Alexei; he remembered."

"I lost sight of him."

"Of Alexei?"

"Yes."

"How could you do that?"

Sasha thought a moment, then answered with a sigh:

"There was a blizzard—I couldn't see anything."

Everybody laughed, because the weather had been clear and sunny. Sasha also gave a faint smile, but my grandfather bared his teeth and said sarcastically:

"Couldn't you have held onto his hand or his belt?"

"I did, but the wind tore me loose."

He spoke slowly and hopelessly; I felt uncomfortable listening to that clumsy, useless lying and could not understand his stubbornness.

They gave us a licking and hired an old retired fireman with a twisted arm to escort us to school. He was to see that Sasha did not wander from the path to knowledge. But all was in vain. When we reached the gully on the following day, my cousin took off one of his felt boots and hurled it to the left, he took off the other and hurled it to the right, and made off across the square in his stocking feet. The old man gasped and set out after the boots. When he had found them, he led me home in fright.

All day long my mother and grandmother searched the town for the runaway, finding him that evening in Chirkov's saloon near the monastery, entertaining the public by dancing for them. They brought him home and did not even beat him, so overwhelmed were they by the boy's persistent silence. He lay beside me on the bunk kicking his feet in the air and saying quietly:

"My stepmother doesn't love me, my father doesn't love me, my grandfather doesn't love me. Why should I go on living with them?

I'll find out from grandmother where the robbers live and run away to them. Then you'll all be sorry! Let's go together, shall we?"

I could not run away with him. At that time I had another aim in life—to become an officer with a great, blond beard—and so it was necessary to study. When I told my cousin my plan, he thought for a moment, then gave his approval.

"That's good too. When you're an officer I'll be chief of the robbers and you'll have to catch me. One of us'll kill the other, or else take him prisoner. I wouldn't kill you for anything."

"Neither would I you."

On that we concluded our discussion.

Grandmother came in, crawled up on the stove and began to talk to us.

"Well, little mice? Ah, my little orphans, my little sprouts!"

In her deep sympathy for us, she began to denounce Sasha's stepmother, fat Aunt Nadezhda, daughter of an innkeeper. This led her to denounce all stepmothers and stepfathers, and this in turn led her to tell us the story of the wise hermit Ion who, while still a lad, brought his stepmother before the judgment seat of God. His father, fisherman on Beloe Lake:

Was undone by a vixenish wife.
With ale she enticed him to drunkenness.
With a potion she drugged him to sleepiness,
Then she placed him, asleep, in an oaken skiff.
In a narrow skiff, like a coffin bed.
She herself took the oars wrought of maple wood.
To the depths of the lake did she row with him,
Where the water ran brooding and lowering,
Awaiting the deed of the shameless one.
There she leaned from the skiff and unbalanced it.
Overturned it, with none to be wit of it,
Like a stone sank her husband in waters deep,
While his wife quickly swam to the forest shore.
There she fell on the earth, wailing bitterly,
Feigning to grieve for the loss of him,
Him she had murdered so cruelly.

Hearkened the people and pitied her,
Wept at her plight, at her widow's lot.
Alas, thou art young to be widowed so,
Bitter and black thy unhappiness,
But the hand of the Lord rules the lives of us,
And 'tis He who doth order the death of us.
It was only her step-son, Iónushka,
*Who believed not the tears of his máchekha.**
Softly he whispered rebuke to her,
Holding his hand on the heart of her:
Oh, thou woman of subtlety,
Bird-of-the-night, full of treachery;
Nor believe I thy tears, shed so lavishly;
The heart in thy breast beats too joyously.
Let us turn to the heavenly judgment seat,
To the Lord and the powers of holiness:
And let one of us take up a whetted knife,
And hurtle it heavenward forcefully:
If I be to blame—I shall be slain;
If thou be to blame—thou shalt be slain.
Slowly his máchekha turned to him,
Glanced with a hate-flashing countenance.
Now on her feet standing steadily,
Made she retort to him vengefully:
Fool that thou art, born ere thy time,
Belched from the womb of the werewolf!
What is this talk, of thy fancy bred?
What are these lies that thy tongue hath spread?
Hearkened the folk who had gathered there,
Heard that the matter was evil-charged,
Silent they glanced, heavy-heartedly,
Softly conferred on the circumstance.
Then out-stepped an elderly fisherman,
Bowed to all sides, to his kindred-men,
Spoke he these words, each with honour weighed:
Bring me, good people, the whetted blade,
Here you shall see me take hold of it,

* Stepmother.—*Trans.*

Into the sky I shall hurtle it,
Him will it kill who has acted ill.
Brought they the knife to the ancient one,
Swung he the blade o'er his hoary head,
Bird-like it soared in the welkin bright,
Long did they wait for return of it,
Waited and gazed in the crystal heights,
Took off their caps, huddled together,
Stood there in silence, and silent the night.
Then o'er the lake came the flush of dawn,
Flushed too the máchekha gloatingly,
But sudden the knife, like a swallow swift,
Swept from the sky to the heart of her.
Down on their knees dropped the pious folk,
Praying to God in humility:
—Praised be the Lord for His righteousness!
Then to Jón came the fisherman,
Led him away to a hermitage,
Far away on the river called Kérzhenets,
*Near the fabulous city of Kitezh....**

On the next day I woke up covered with red spots. This was the beginning of a siege of smallpox. I was put up in the back attic, where for a long time I lay blind, my arms and legs tied down with wide strips of bandage, enduring horrible nightmares. As a result of one of them I nearly perished. The only visitor I had was my grandmother, who fed me from a spoon like an infant and told me endless tales and legends. One evening when I was well on the road to recovery, so that my arms and legs were unbound, though I still wore mittens to keep me from scratching my face, my grandmother did not come at the usual time, and this alarmed me. Suddenly I seemed to see her lying face down on the dusty landing of the attic with her arms widespread. Her neck was slashed almost in two, like Uncle Pyotr's, while out of the dusty shadows a large cat crept up on her, greedily rolling its huge green eyes.

* In the town of Kolyupanovka, Tambov gubernia, Borisoglebsky uyezd, I heard another version, according to which the knife kills the stepson who slandered his stepmother.

I jumped out of bed, smashed the double window with my feet and shoulder, and threw myself into a snowbank under the window. My mother was entertaining that evening, so nobody heard me break the window, and for some time I lay undiscovered in the snow. No bones were broken; I had only dislocated my shoulder and cut myself severely on the glass, but the shock caused me to lose the use of my legs. For some three months I was unable to walk and lay in my room listening to the growing animation in the house, the frequent slamming of doors and the constant coming and going of people.

Blizzards swept over the roof; the wind raged beyond the attic door, wailing funereally in the chimney and rattling the shutters. During the day I listened to the cawing of the crows, while on quiet nights I could hear the dismal howling of wolves in distant fields. To the accompaniment of this music, my soul matured. Then shyly and quietly, but more insistently with every day, the spring came glancing through the window with radiant eyes. Cats began to scream and howl on the fence, and little spring sounds penetrated the walls: the snapping of icicles, the sliding of snow off the roofs, the ringing of the bells, whose chiming assumed a solidity it had lacked in winter.

My grandmother came to see me. Of late her words had become more often and more strongly scented with vodka. She even began to bring a large white teapot with her which she would hide under my bed, admonishing me with a wink:

"Don't you go telling your goblin of a grandfather, pigeon-widgeon!"

"Why do you drink!"

"Shhh! When you grow up you'll find out!"

Then she would take a swallow from the spout of the teapot, wipe her mouth on her sleeve, and turn to me with a blissful smile:

"Well, my fine gentleman, what was it I was telling you about yesterday?"

"About my father."

"And where did I leave off?"

When I had told her, her rhymic speech would flow on for hours.

She herself had begun to tell me about my father one day when she was tired and sober and unhappy.

"I dreamed about your father last night—whistling he was, as

he walked through the fields with a beech staff in his hand and a spotted dog running after him with its tongue a-lolling. For some reason Maxim Savvateyevich's been visiting me often in my dreams of late—looks like his soul must be wandering about restless-like. . . ."

For several evenings running she told me about my father, stories as interesting as all her others. My father was the son of a soldier who had been promoted to the rank of officer and then exiled to Siberia for cruelty to his subordinates. Somewhere there in Siberia my father was born. He had a hard life, and when he was still a child began making attempts to run away from home. One day his father took a hound and searched the woods for him as though he were a rabbit. Another time after finding him he began to beat him so mercilessly that the neighbours rescued him and hid him away.

"Do they always beat children?" I asked.

"Always," replied my grandmother calmly.

His mother died when he was very young, and when he was nine years old, his father also died. He was adopted by his godfather, a carpenter, who made him a member of the carpenter's guild in the town of Perm. But my father ran away. At first he led the blind about the markets, but when he was sixteen he came to Nizhni-Novgorod and began to work for a carpenter on the steamboats belonging to Kolchin. By the age of twenty he was already a qualified cabinetmaker and upholsterer. The shop where he worked was next door to my grandfather's house on Kovalikha Street.

"A low fence, and nimble legs," laughed my grandmother. "So there we were, Varya and me, picking raspberries in the garden, and all of a sudden I looked up and—ffwwtt!—there's your father over the fence and me scared out of my wits. He came walking toward us through the apple trees, a giant of a fellow in a white shirt and plush trousers, barefoot and hatless, with a strap holding back his long hair. And what do you think he had come for? To ask for your mother's hand! I'd seen him before a few times walking past the window. And whenever I saw him I thought to myself, 'there's a fine fellow for you!' So when he comes up to me I says, 'How's that you don't know the right road, my hearty!' Down on his knees he goes. 'Akulina Ivanovna,' he says. 'Here I am, the whole soul of me at your feet. And there's Varya; help us hold a wedding, for the love of Christ.' Now that was something, I tell you! Stunned I was, and

speechless! I looked up and there's that vixen of a mother of yours hiding behind an apple tree, red as a raspberry, and making signs to him, her eyes full of tears. 'Ah, you simpleton,' says I. 'Better to wither away than start a thing like this! Have you gone clean out of your senses, Varvara? And as for you, young man, just think what you're doing! Is it for you to bend a birch this size?' Your grandfather was a rich man those days—nothing parcelled out to his children yet—owned four houses and money a-plenty, and honoured by his fellows. Not long before that they had presented him with a uniform and hat all fancied up with galloon for his being nine years head of the workshop. Ah, but a proud one he was those days! So I says what I has to say, trembling with fear the while and my heart like to burst a-pitying of them, so downhearted they was. Then your father up and says, 'I know Vasili Vasilyevich will never be giving me Varya of his own free will, so it's up to me to steal her away, and it's here we're wanting your help!' My help, think you! I shoo him away, but he don't budge. 'You can stone me if you like, but help me you must,' says he. 'I'll not give in!' Here Varvara comes up to him and puts her hand on his shoulder and says, 'We've been husband and wife for long already—since month of May. Only we're in need of a wedding.' I collapsed like they had struck me! Ah, me!"

Grandmother's whole body shook with laughter. Then she took a pinch of snuff, wiped the tears from her eyes, and continued with a happy sigh:

"You're too young yet to know the difference between being man and wife and holding a wedding. But it's a dreadful thing when a girl gives birth to a child out of wedlock. You just remember that when you grow up and never lure a maid into such trouble. That'd be a great sin on your soul, leaving the maid in misery and the babe without the law. See you don't forget, now! You must show pity for a woman and love her with all your heart, and not just for the pleasure of it. This is a good thing I am telling you."

She fell into a moment's meditation before she pulled herself together and went on with her story.

"So what was to be done about it? I struck Maxim over the head and yanked Varvara by the braids, but then he says a sensible thing: 'Beating us won't undo anything,' he says, and she puts in, 'Better to think up a way out and then beat us.' So I says to him, 'Got any

money?' 'I had some,' he answered, 'but I spent it all on a ring for Varya.' 'All of three rubles?' 'No,' says he, 'nearly a hundred.' And in those days things were cheap and money was worth a lot. I looked at your mother and father standing there—such children they were! Such little fools! 'I hid the ring under a floor board so's you wouldn't see it,' says your mother. 'We can sell it.' Just like children, weren't they though? Well, however it was, we decided to hold the wedding within the week, and I myself was to fix it up with the priest. But oh, how I wept, and my heart shivering and shuddering for fear of your grandfather, and Varvara all a-tremble! Well, we fixed everything up!

"Only an enemy there was of your father—one of the master-workmen—a spiteful man. For long he had been keeping his eye on them and guessed everything. Well, I dressed up my only daughter in the best I had, led her out the gate, and there around the corner stood a troika waiting. She climbed in, Maxim gave a whistle, and off they went. Back home I came with the tears flowing, and who should meet me but this fellow, the scoundrel! 'I'm goodhearted,' says he, 'and don't aim to break up their happiness. Only I should ask you to let me have just fifty rubles, Akulina Ivanovna.' I had no money, account I never liked it nor saved it, and fool that I be I up and says, 'I have no money, and so I can't be giving you any!' 'Then give me your promise,' says he. 'My promise? And where shall I be getting the money once I promise?' 'Is it so hard to steal from a rich husband?' says he. It's me, the ninny, should have kept him there talking for a time, but I spat in his face and went on my way. He ran ahead of me into the yard and—what a row he raised!"

She closed her eyes and a faint smile flitted across her face.

"To this day it's a fearful thing to remember the recklessness that followed. Your grandfather lets out a roar like the beastiest beast—a sorry blow it was to him! Used to be he'd look at Varvara and boast how he'd marry her off to a nobleman, to a *barin*. There's your nobleman for you—there's your *barin*! But the Holy Virgin knows better nor us how the mating's to be done! Your grandfather rushed about the yard like he was a-fire. He calls Yakov and Mikhail, Klim the coachman, and that freckle-faced master-workman; I see him take up a cudgel and a weight fastened to a strap, while Mikhail takes a gun. Ours were good, spirited horses and our buggy a light one. 'He'll

catch them sure,' thinks I to myself. But here Varvara's guardian angel sends me an enlightenment. I take a knife and cut the harness at the shaft, thinking it will snap on the road. And so it did. The shaft swung loose, nearly killing your grandfather and Mikhail and Klim. But it held them up, so when they reached the church Varya and Maxim were standing at the altar married already, thank the Lord!

"Well, so our men threw themselves at Maxim, but he was a hefty fellow, Maxim—not many's given the strength he had! He hurls Mikhail off the altar, damaging his arm, and knocks out Klim, so your grandfather and Yakov and that master-workman fear to come near him.

"But Maxim keeps his head, spite his fury. 'Put down that cudgel there,' he says to your grandfather. 'I'm a peace-loving fellow and what I've taken, it's by the grace of God and no man's got the right to take it away from me. And that's all I'll be asking of you!' Our men fell back, and grandfather sits in the buggy and shouts, 'Farewell, Varvara! You're no longer a daughter of mine, and I never want to see you again! It's all the same to me whether you're alive or dead!' He came home—gave me a beating, gave me a cussing, but I just grunted and said nothing: I knew it'd all blow over, and what had to be, would be! After that he says to me, 'Look here, Akulina, don't you forget that your daughter's gone for good—you have no more daughter here nor anywheres else, understand?' And I keeps thinking to myself, 'Go on lying, you redhead! Your temper's fast, but it won't last!' "

I listened with bated breath. I was surprised by certain parts of her story—grandfather had described my mother's wedding quite differently. He had been opposed to the wedding and had not allowed my mother into his house afterwards, but according to his account, the wedding had not been secret and he himself had been present. I hesitated to ask grandmother which version was correct because I preferred hers, which was more romantic. She rocked back and forth as she spoke, increasing her movement when she came to sad or dreadful parts, and raising one arm as though warding off a blow. Often she would close her eyes, her heavy brows trembling and a warm smile playing in the wrinkles of her cheeks. Sometimes I was touched by the blind way in which she forgave everything, but at other times I wanted to hear her cry out harsh words of protest.

"Well, for the first two weeks or so I had no idea where they were, Varya and Maxim, but then they sent a little boy to tell me. The next Saturday I set out like I was going to vespers, but instead I went to see them. They were living far away in the wing of a home on Suyetinsky Street. All kinds of workmen were living in the yard—dirty it was, and noisy, but they paid no attention, just went on purring and playing together like a pair of happy kittens. I brought them some presents—tea and sugar and cereals and jam and flour and dried mushrooms and some money—don't remember how much—whatever I could steal from your grandfather—no harm in stealing long's it's not for yourself! But your father would have none of it. 'Is it beggars we are?' he asked, hurt-like. And Varya takes up the tune: 'Now why did you have to bring all that stuff, ma?' I gave it to them all right! 'It's a God-given mother I am to you, you simp,' I says to him, 'and a blood mother to you, you little fool! Where's it written you can insult your own mother? Once you insult your mother here below, you cause God's mother to weep up above!' So then Maxim grabs me up in his arms and carries me around the room—even does a jig with me—strong as a bear he was! And Varya struts around proud as a peacock of that husband of hers, and starts talking grandly about their 'home' like she was an honest-to-goodness housewife—split your sides to listen! And the *vatrushki* she served with tea? Break the teeth of a wolf! And the cottage cheese? Like so much gravel!

"So that's how it goes on for a long time. You were about to put in your appearance, and still grandfather keeps mum—stubborn creature he is, the old goblin! I kept on sneaking off to them and he knew it, but made believe not to. Nobody in our house was allowed to mention Varvara's name, and no one did, nor me either, but all the time I knew a father's heart couldn't hold out for long. And sure enough the time came—one night when a blizzard was raging and the wind tearing at the window like a pack of wolves, the chimneys screaming, and all Hell's devils turned loose. Your grandfather and me were lying there side by side unable to sleep and I up and says to him, 'A dreadful night for the poor,' I says, 'and still worse for them as has trouble on their mind.' Suddenly grandfather says, 'How they getting along?' 'Right enough,' I says. 'Not bad at all.' 'And who do you think I'm asking about?' he asks. 'Our daughter Varvara and

our son-in-law Maxim.' 'How did you guess it was about them?' 'Enough of this comedy, father,' says I. 'Time to quit the game—who's it making happy?' He gives a big sigh. 'Ah, you devils you! You little red devils!' he says. Then he asks, 'But what about that gawking fool'—meaning your father—'is he sure enough such a fool?' 'A fool,' says I, 'is him as does no work and lives at other people's expense. If you'd have a look at your Yakov and Mikhail, now—aren't they the ones to be called fools? Who does the work and brings in the money in our house? You. And a lot of help you get from them!' Here he starts cursing me out, calling me a fool and a bitch, and a harpy and a beldam, and goodness knows what all! But I say nothing. 'How you ever could be taken in by a fellow as nobody knows where he came from or what he's like!' he says. Still I keep mum until he's worn out, then I says, 'You might go have a look how they're getting along. They're living together fine,' I says. 'Why should I do them such honour?' says he. 'Let them come here.' Well, when he says that, I just break down and cry with joy, and he starts unbraiding my hair—loved to play with my hair, he did. 'Well, don't go bawling, old woman,' he mutters. 'Think I haven't got a heart at all?' He used to be a good soul, your grandfather, afore he got the idea he was smarter than anybody else—after that he became mean and stupid.

"So they came to see us—your mother and father—on Absolution Sunday. So big they both was, so clean and handsome! Maxim stands up there next to your grandfather, and your grandfather comes just up to his shoulder. 'Don't think, Vasili Vasilyevich,' says Maxim, 'that I've come to get a dowry. No indeed. I've only come to pay my respects to my wife's father.' That pleased your grandfather, and he laughed and says, 'Aha! So that's the kind of a rascal you are! Well, enough of this nonsense. Time you came to live with me.' Maxim frowned. 'That's up to Varya,' he says. 'Whatever she wants—makes no difference to me.' Then they started arguing again—and no stopping them! I kept winking at that father of yours and kicking his foot under the table, but he would have his own way! Fine eyes he had—clear and bright, and dark brows over them. Sometimes he'd pull his brows down over his eyes and his face'd become hard as stone and then he wouldn't listen to a soul but me. I loved him ever so much more than my own sons and he knew that, and loved me too. Used to hug me up or take me in his arms and carry me around the room

saying, 'You're the only real mother I've got—like Mother Earth,' he'd say. 'I love you more than I do Varvara!' Your mother was a lively little vixen those days. She'd rush at him and shout, 'How dare you say such a thing, you son of a turnip, you cabbage ears!' And the three of us'd go chasing each other round the room, having a grand time! Happy days they were, pigeon-widgeon! He could dance like nobody else too, and knew so many fine songs—learned them from blind beggars, and nobody can sing like the blind.

"Well, so they moved into the wing facing the garden; that's where you were born—just at noon. Your father comes home to lunch, and there you are to greet him! He all but went off his head with happiness, and as for your mother—he squeezed her up like it was the hardest job in the world to go having a baby! He sets me up on his shoulder and carries me through the yard to report to your grandfather the arrival of another grandson. Even grandfather took to laughing. 'What a devil you are, Maxim!' he says.

"But your uncles didn't like him—he didn't drink, was sharp with his tongue and clever at thinking up all kinds of tricks. It's those tricks were his undoing! Once during Lent a high wind sprang up, and suddenly there was such a frightful whistling and howling through the house that everybody was scared out of their wits. Your grandfather goes running around yelling to light all the icon lamps and start praying! Then all of a sudden everything became dead quiet, and that was more fearful than ever. Your Uncle Yakov guessed the truth: 'That,' he says, 'will be Maxim's doing!' And sure enough, Maxim himself told us later how he lined up different bottles on the attic window so's the wind would go howling through. 'You better watch your step, Maxim!' warned your grandfather, 'or you'll be getting sent back to Siberia with those tricks of yours!'

"Came a winter so cold the wolves crept in from the steppes. One day there's a dog missing, the next a horse gets a fright, or a drunken sentry is found chewed to death. A lot of trouble they made, those wolves! Your father would take his gun, put on some skis, and be off in the night. He always came back with a wolf or two. He'd skin them and stuff them and put in glass in their eyes so's you couldn't tell them from live ones. One night your Uncle Mikhail goes out to the privy, and all of a sudden he comes running back with his eyes popping, his hair standing on end, his tongue hanging out so's he can't

even speak. He gets all twisted up in his pants and falls down, gasping, 'A wolf!' Everybody grabs up the first thing comes to hand and runs to the privy. Sure enough, there's the head of a wolf sticking out of the hole. They shoot it and beat it, but the wolf stays right where it is. So they creeps up on it—nothing but an empty hide with a stuffed head and the front legs nailed to the toilet seat! Your grandfather was mighty mad at Maxim that time—powerful mad he was! Soon Yakov starts joining your father in his tricks. Maxim would make a head out of cardboard, paint in the eyes, and nose, and mouth, and stick on some oakum for hair. Then he and Yakov'd go down the street and poke this scarecrow in people's windows. Naturally the neighbours got scared and raised a row. Other times they'd dress themselves up in sheets. Once they scared the priest; he ran to the sentry, the sentry also got scared and gave the alarm. They were forever pranking it like this and no talking them out of it. I told them to quit it and so did Varya, but they wouldn't listen. Maxim would just laugh and say what fun it was to see people lose their heads and start running account of some idiotic trifle. Just try to make him see sense....

"Well, so this mischief nearly finished him. Your Uncle Mikhail's like his father—mean and always harbouring a grudge, and he set his aim on getting rid of your father. One day, the beginning of winter they were returning from a visit—four of them—Maxim, your uncles, and the deacon (he lost his place later for beating a coachman to death). They came down Yamskaya Street and got your father to go with them to Dukov Pond—like as if they wanted to go sliding there. But once they reached the pond, they pushed him through a hole in the ice—seems I told you about that already...."

"What makes my uncles so wicked?"

"It's not they're wicked," replied my grandmother calmly as she took a pinch of snuff. "They're just stupid. Mishka's sly and stupid; while Yakov's just one of your milksops.... Well, so they push him in, and when he comes up and grabs onto the edge of the ice, they stamp on his fingers with their boots. Lucky he was sober and they were drunk. Somehow, with God's help he managed to stay in the middle of the hole and breathe while they threw ice at his head, but hit him they couldn't and soon they went away, figuring he'd drown without their help. But he crawled out and ran straight to the police

—the headquarters is right there on the square, you know. The sergeant knew him and all our family, so he asked how it happened."

Grandmother crossed herself and murmured gratefully:

"May the Lord give peace to his soul, the soul of Maxim Savvateyevich, righteous man, and well deserving! Never a word did he tell the police as to what happened. All my fault, he says,—went to the pond drunk and fell through the hole. But the sergeant says he's lying —he never drinks. They rub him down with vodka there in the station house, dress him in dry clothes, wrap him in a fur coat and bring him home—the sergeant and two others. Yakov and Mikhail aren't home yet—doing the saloons to the glory of their parents. Your mother and me can hardly recognize Maxim—all blue, and his fingers smashed, and the blood running down, and something like snow on his temples, only it don't melt and turns out to be his hair gone white.

"Varvara screams, 'What have they done to you, Maxim?' The sergeant goes nosing around, asking questions, and I feel in my heart things are bad. I hook Varvara up with the sergeant while I try to get the truth out of Maxim. 'Go find Mikhail and Yakov,' he whispers. 'Tell them to say we parted company on Yamskaya Street—they went along Pokrovka and I turned down Pryadilny. Don't let them mix things up or we'll be in a bad fix with the police.' I go to grandfather. 'Keep the sergeant company,' I says, 'while I go wait for our sons at the gate.' And I told him the evil thing as happened. He pulls on his clothes, a-trembling and a-muttering: 'I knew it, I expected something like this would happen!' But that was a lie—he didn't know a thing. Well, I greet my beloved sons with a good box on the ears. Mishka straightaway comes sober from fright, but Yakov's too soaked. 'I don't know a thing!' he garbles. 'It's all Mishka's doings—he's older than me!' We got the sergeant calmed down somehow—he was a good soul! 'Watch out,' he says. 'If anything happens now I'll be sure to know who's to blame!' And off he goes. Then your grandfather walks over to Maxim and says, 'Thank you, son. Another one'd have acted different in your place, I know that well enough. And thank you, daughter, for bringing such a good man into our house.' When he wanted, your grandfather could talk fine like that—it was only afterwards he got stupid and started locking up his heart. So there we were alone, the three of us, and Maxim starts crying and his mind sort of wandering: 'Why should they do such a thing to me?'

he cries. 'What have I ever done to them? Why should they do it, mama?' He always called me mama 'stead of mother—like a little child, and there was much in his nature that was childlike. 'Why, mama?' And all I can do is sit there and cry along of him. After all, they're my sons and I can't help pitying them. Your mother pulled all the buttons off her blouse and sat there mussed up like as if she'd been in a fight. 'Let's go away, Maxim,' she cried. 'My brothers are our enemies and I'm afraid of them. Let's go away!' I gave it to her for that. 'Don't throw straw on the fire,' I says. 'Enough smoke in the house without that!' Here your grandfather sends those two idiots in to ask forgiveness and she gives Mishka a slap in the face,—'There's your forgiveness for you!' she says. And your father keeps asking, 'How could you do such a thing, brothers? You could have crippled me for life. What kind of a workman would I be without my fingers, eh?' They made it up somehow. Your father was sick the next seven weeks or so, and he'd keep saying as he lay there, 'Let's go to some other town, mama—I'm sick of it here!' Soon after that he was sent to Astrakhan. They were expecting the tsar there on a visit, and your father was asked to build the triumphal arch. They sailed off on the first steamboat that left in the spring—like parting with half my soul, it was. He was sad too, and kept talking me into going with them. But Varvara was glad as glad and didn't even try to hide it, the shameless beasty! So that's how they left . . . and that's all. . . ."

She took a swallow of vodka, a pinch of snuff, and said musingly, as she looked out the window:

"Your father and me, we had no kindred blood, but kindred we were in spirit. . . ."

Sometimes during her tale grandfather would enter, lift his little chipmunk face, sniff the air, glance suspiciously at grandmother, listen a moment, and then mutter:

"Lies, lies, nothing but lies. . . ."

Once he asked unexpectedly:

"Alexei, she been drinking here?"

"No."

"You're lying—I can see by your eyes."

He left unconvinced. Grandmother winked at his departing figure and repeated the saying:

" 'Beat it, Kish, you'll scare the fish!' "

One day he stood in the middle of the room with his eyes fixed on the floor and said,

"Mother...."

"Eh?"

"See what's happening?"

"I see."

"What you think of it?"

"Fate, father. Remember what you used to say about that fine gentleman?"

"Hm-m."

"Well, seems you were right."

"A pauper."

"That's her business."

Grandfather went out. Sensing some disaster, I said to grandmother:

"What were you talking about?"

"Have to know everything, don't you?" she grumbled as she rubbed my legs. "If you know everything when you're little, won't be anything left to find out when you're old." She laughed and shook her head.

"Ah, grandfather, grandfather! You're a very unsizable speck in the eye of God! Don't you say anything, Alexei, but the fact is your grandfather's lost everything—to the last kopek. Lent a gentleman big money, up in the thousands, and the gentleman goes bankroopt...."

She became lost in thought, sitting silent for a long time while the smile on her face became replaced by a darkening sadness.

"What are you thinking about?"

"Thinking about what to tell you," she replied, pulling herself together. "Well, how about the story of Yevstignei? It was like this:

Once there lived Yevstignei the deacon,
Thinks to himself he's as bright as a beacon,
Brighter than even the priest or the tsar,
And as for the merchant—brighter by far!
Struts like a peacock, foolish fowl,
His eyes popping out like a wise old owl.
Teaches the neighbours from morning to night,
And nothing for him is ever right.

Looks at a steeple—much too low!
Rides in a buggy—much too slow!
Bites an apple—isn't sweet!
Sits in the sun—too much heat!
Says about everything he sees:

Grandmother rolled her eyes and puffed out her cheeks and her kind face assumed an amusing look of stupidity, while she drawled:

"I could have made it, if you please,
Infinitely better, but as you know,
My time can not be wasted so."

She paused for a moment, then continued in a low voice:

Some devils came to him one night:
"You find things here are not all right?
Suppose you visit us in Hell—
The fires burn there surpassing well!"
Scarce had the deacon donned his hat,
Than two of the devils on him sat,
While others grabbed him in their paws.
Pinched and tickled him with their claws,
And pushed him in the raging flame:
"Well, Yevstignei, are you glad you came?"
As the deacon roasted, he rolled his eyes,
But kept on looking very wise,
And his lip curled scornfully as he spoke:
"The fires of Hell make too much smoke!"

She finished the tale in a deep drawl, then laughed and turned to me with a change of expression:

"He didn't give in, that Yevstignei—a great one for having his own way, like your grandfather! Well, now, time to go to sleep. . . ."

My mother rarely came up to the attic to see me, and when she did, it was only to say a few hasty words and hurry away. She had become handsomer and dressed better, but I sensed the same secretiveness about her I had noticed in grandmother. I felt that she, as well as grandmother, was hiding something from me, and I tried to guess what it was.

I became less interested in the tales grandmother told me—even the stories about my father could not dispel the vague alarms which grew with every day.

"What makes my father's spirit so restless?" I asked grandmother one day.

"How should I know?" she answered, placing a hand over her eyes. "That's the concern of heaven—God's business, not for us to understand. . . ."

During sleepless nights as I lay watching the slow procession of the stars across the dark blue heaven, I thought up sad stories of which my father was the hero. He was always alone, with a staff in his hand and a shaggy dog at his heels. . . .

XII

One evening I woke up after a brief nap and felt that my legs had also awakened. I let them down over the edge of the bed, and once more they became numb and lifeless. Nevertheless, the confidence was born that my legs were whole and I would be able to walk. I experienced such poignant joy that I cried out and placed my feet on the floor. I fell, but crawled to the door and down the stairs, imagining what a shock everyone would receive on seeing me.

I cannot remember how I found myself on grandmother's lap in mother's room, but there I was, surrounded by strange people among whom was a thin, greenish old woman.

"Give him some raspberry jam in hot tea and wrap him in a blanket . . ." said the green woman in a solemn voice, which drowned out all other sounds.

Everything about her was green—her dress and her hat and her face and the wart under her left eye. Even the hair sprouting from the wart was like grass. She dropped her lower lip and raised her upper one, staring at me with green teeth and shading her eyes with a hand encased in a black mit.

"Who is that?" I asked falteringly.

"That'll be another grandmother for you," answered my grandfather in an unpleasant voice.

Mother laughed and pushed Yevgeni Maximov toward me, saying:

"And here's your future father."

She added some quick, unintelligible words, while Maximov narrowed his eyes, bent over me and said:

"I'll buy you some paints."

It was very bright in the room. On a table in the corner stood silver candelabras with five candles in each. Between them was grandfather's favourite icon, "Weep not, oh mother!" The pearls ornamenting the frame gleamed and melted in the candle light, which brought flashes of fire from the rubies set in golden wreaths. Round pancake faces peered through the dark windows, flattened noses were pressed against the panes; everything about me began to swim, and the green woman leaned over to feel behind my ears with her cold fingers, muttering:

"By all means, by all means...."

"He's fainted," said my grandmother, and carried me to the door.

But I had not fainted. I had merely closed my eyes, and as she carried me up the stairs I said:

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"All right, all right, no talking now, hear?"

"Fooling me like that, all of you...."

When she had placed me on the bed, she buried her head in the pillow and broke into tears. Her body heaved and rocked with her sobs, and she kept saying to me:

"Go ahead and cry, cry it out!"

But I had no desire to cry. It was dark and cold in the attic. The bed shook and squeaked with my trembling, and the green woman would not vanish from before my eyes. I pretended to fall asleep and my grandmother left me alone.

The next few days passed in dull monotony. After announcing her engagement, mother went away, and an oppressive silence fell upon the house.

One morning my grandfather appeared with a chisel in his hand and began to dig the putty from around the storm window. Then grandmother came with a basin of water and some rags.

"Well, old lady?" asked my grandfather quietly.

"Well what?"

"Are you glad?"

She answered him as she had answered me on the stairs:

"All right, all right, no talking now, hear?"

These words had a special significance—they concealed something big and unpleasant which everybody recognized but nobody wished to mention.

Grandfather carefully removed the storm window and carried it away. Grandmother threw open the window—a starling and some sparrows chirped out in the garden; the intoxicating odour of thawing earth filled the room; the blue tiles of the stove paled with frustration—it made me shiver to look at them. I crawled out of bed.

"Don't walk around barefoot," warned my grandmother.

"I'm going into the garden."

"Wait 'til the dampness is gone."

I did not wish to obey her. It was unpleasant for me to see the grownups now.

Pale green needles of young grass had already pushed their way through the earth, the buds were swelling on the apple trees, lovely green moss carpeted the roof of Petrovna's house, and birds were everywhere. My head swam from the fragrant, murmurous air. Brown weeds, felled by the snow, fringed the pit where Uncle Pyotr had cut his throat. It was unpleasant to look at them—neither they nor the charred beams sticking up so desolately had anything in common with the spring, and in general the pit was irritatingly out of place. I had an angry impulse to pull up the weeds, remove the beams and bricks, clear away everything that cluttered this part of the yard, and make myself a tidy corner where I could spend the summer alone, without any grownups. I immediately undertook this task, and it helped me forget recent events in our house. To be sure, the hurt remained, but with every day it became less acute.

"What are you pouting about?" my grandmother and mother would ask me. Such a question was upsetting—I was not angry with them; it was just that everything connected with the house had become unpleasant. Often the green woman would join us for dinner or tea or supper, sitting there like a rotten post in an old fence. Her eyes were sewn to her face with invisible threads. They rolled easily about in their bony sockets, seeing everything, scrutinizing everything, rising to the ceiling when she spoke of God, dropping to the floor when she spoke of mundane things. Her eyebrows seemed to be made

of bran pasted on in some mysterious way. Her wide, bare teeth noiselessly ground up everything that she stuck into her mouth. She held her fork in a funny, crooked way with her little finger sticking out. Little balls of gristle rolled around in front of her ears. Her ears moved, and the green hairs of her wart stirred as it shifted on her wrinkled, yellow, disgustingly clean skin. She and her son were so immaculate that I dared not approach them. During the first few days of our acquaintance she made several attempts to make me kiss her wizened hand, which smelled of laundry soap and incense. I always ran away.

"That boy needs very careful training, understand, Yevgeni?" she kept repeating to her son.

He would only bow his head obediently, frown, and say nothing. Everybody frowned in that green presence.

I hated the old woman—and her son as well—with a concentrated hatred that cost me many a licking. One day when we were having dinner, she rolled up her eyes and said:

"My dear Alexei, why do you eat in such a hurry, and with such big mouthfuls? You will choke on your food."

I removed the piece from my mouth, stuck my fork into it and held it out to her.

"Here, take it if you want it so bad," I said.

Mother yanked me away from the table and I was ignominiously banished to the attic.

Later grandmother joined me and roared with laughter, holding her hand over her mouth.

"Oh Lord, Oh Lord! What a little rascal you are, devil take you!"

I disliked the way she held her hand over her mouth, so I ran away from her and climbed out on the roof, sitting there behind the chimney for a long time. I had an irresistible impulse to make mischief and to say impudent things to them all. It was very difficult for me to combat this impulse, but I was forced to. One day I spread cherry paste on the chairs of my future stepfather and grandmother. They both stuck fast in a most comical way, but after my grandfather had given me a beating, my mother came up to me in the attic, drew me toward her, held me tightly between her knees, and said:

"Why should you be so naughty? If you only knew how hard you make it for me!"

Her eyes filled with bright tears and she held my head against her cheek. How much easier it would have been if she had struck me! I swore never to injure the Maximovs again if only she would stop crying.

"That's right," she said softly. "You mustn't be naughty. Soon we shall get married and take a trip to Moscow, and when we return you will live with me. Yevgeni Vasilyevich is a very kind and clever man; I know you will like him. You will go to the gymnasium and then become a student like he is now, and after that you will be a doctor or anything else you like. A learned person can do whatever he wants. Well, run along and play now. . . ."

These "thens" and "after thats" seemed to form a descending staircase leading me far away from her, into the darkness and loneliness. The future she pictured promised me no happiness. I wanted to say to my mother:

"Don't get married. I shall work and provide for you."

But I did not say it. My mother always inspired tender and solicitous feelings, but I never had the courage to express them.

My work in the garden progressed from day to day. I pulled up and hacked off the weeds and propped the sliding edges of the pit with bricks. With other bricks I built a seat wide enough to lie on, and I gathered bits of coloured glass and broken dishes which I set in clay between the bricks. When the sun shone on them they glinted and sparkled like the icons in church.

"Smart of you to think of that," said my grandfather one day as he surveyed my work. "Only the weeds'll come up again—you left the roots. Here, bring me the spade and I'll dig them up for you."

When I had brought it, he spit on his hands, and pushed the spade deep into the earth with a grunt.

"Throw away the roots and I'll plant sunflowers and hollyhocks for you. It'll be fine—fine. . . ."

Suddenly he leaned motionless on the spade and said nothing. I glanced at him and saw tears streaming from his eyes, that were small and intelligent, like those of a dog.

"What's the matter?"

He shook himself, wiped his face with his hand, and glanced at me.

"Hm, I'm sweating already. Just look all the worms there are!"

Once more he began to dig. Suddenly he said:

"No sense in doing all this. No sense at all. I'll be selling the house soon. Probably in the fall. Need money for your mother's dowry. Hm. At least *she* should live decent. . . ."

He threw down the spade with a wave of his hand and went behind the bathhouse to a corner of the garden where he had some hotbeds. I began to dig, and immediately cut my toe with the spade.

This injury prevented me from attending my mother's wedding. I could only go outside the gate and watch her walk down the street with Maximov holding her arm, her head bent, her feet picking a careful way among the young grass springing between the cracks of the brick pavement as though she were walking on nails.

It was a quiet wedding. And there was nothing cheerful about the tea which followed the ceremony. My mother immediately went into her bedroom and began packing her trunks. My stepfather sat down next to me and said:

"I promised to make you a present of some paints, but there are no good paints here and I can't give you mine. I shall send you some from Moscow."

"What shall I do with them?"

"Don't you like to draw?"

"I don't know how."

"Then I'll send you something else."

My mother came in.

"We'll be returning soon," she said. "As soon as your father passes his examination and finishes his studies we shall come back."

It was pleasant to have them speaking to me as though I were a grownup, but it was strange that a man with a beard should still be studying.

"What are you studying?" I asked.

"Surveying."

I was too lazy to ask what that was. The house was filled with an oppressive silence, a woolly rustle; I was anxious for night to come. Grandfather stood with his back to the stove staring out of the window with half-closed eyes. The green woman helped mother pack, sighing and grumbling the while. Grandmother, who had been

drunk since noon, was locked in the attic to keep her from disgracing the family.

Mother left early the following morning. She embraced me in parting, easily lifting me off the ground and gazing into my eyes with a look I had never seen before.

"Well, good-bye," she said as she kissed me.

"Tell him to obey me," said my grandfather sullenly, gazing into the sky, which was still rosy.

"You must obey your grandfather," she admonished, crossing me. I had expected her to say something else, and was angry with my grandfather for interrupting.

They got into the droshky. Mother's skirt caught on something and she fussed irritably for a long time setting it free.

"Help her, can't you see?" my grandfather said to me, but I was too deep in the throes of despair to help.

Maximov carefully drew in his long legs encased in tight navy blue trousers, while grandmother handed him some packages which he piled on his knees, holding them with his chin.

"Enough!" he drawled as he nervously wrinkled his pale brow.

The green woman and her elder son, an officer, got into another droshky. She sat stiff as a wax figure, while he rubbed his beard with the hilt of his sword and kept yawning.

"So you're off to the war?" asked grandfather.

"I am indeed!"

"That's fine. Have to lick those Turks."

They were off. Mother turned around several times and waved her handkerchief. Grandmother leaned weeping against the wall of the house and also waved, while grandfather stood squeezing tears from his eyes.

"Nothing good—will come—of this—," he mumbled.

I sat on a stool watching the droshky bounce over the ruts—there they went around the corner—something inside of me slammed shut . . . tight. . . .

It was still early in the morning. The streets were empty and the shutters of the windows still closed. Never before had I seen such utter emptiness. From somewhere in the distance came the long-drawn wail of a shepherd's pipe.

"Come have breakfast," said my grandfather, taking me by the

shoulder. "Looks like you're fated to go on living with me—scratching up against me like a match on a brick."

From morning to night he and I silently worked in the garden. He dug the soil, tied up the raspberry bushes, scraped the lichen off the apple trees, and squashed caterpillars, while I kept improving my corner. Grandfather chopped off the ends of the charred beams, and stuck poles into the ground on which I hung my bird cages. I wove awnings of dried weeds to protect my house from sun and dew. The corner became delightful.

"It's fine for you to be learning how to fix things up for yourself," said my grandfather.

I highly prized his observations on life. Sometimes he would lie down on the seat I had covered with turf and speak to me unhurriedly, seeming to pull each word out of his mouth with great deliberation.

"Now you're a piece hacked away from your mother. She'll be having other children, dearer to her than you. Your grandmother, as you see, has taken to drink."

He would fall into a long silence, as though listening to something, then continue dropping his heavy words:

"This is the second time she's taken to drink—the first was when Mikhail was to be called up for army service. She talked me into buying him a recruit certificate, fool that she was. Maybe he'd have been different if he'd served in the army. Ah me! And I'll be dying soon. That means you'll be left all alone, understand?—all alone to shift for yourself. Hm. Learn to wait on yourself, and never let others make you wait on them. Behave yourself calm and quiet-like, but stick to your chosen path. Listen to everybody, but do what you yourself think best. . . ."

Except for rainy days, I spent the entire summer in the garden, even sleeping out there on warm nights—grandmother had given me a piece of felt for a bed. She herself would often spend the night with me, bringing out an armful of straw which she would spread next to my couch, and lie down beside me, telling me stories which were interrupted by sudden exclamations like:

"Look—a falling star! That's somebody's soul as felt a longing for mother earth. A good man's been born somewhere."

Or:

"A new star's come up--look! What a jewel! The sky, the sky, how far it is—garment of God, all gem bedecked!"

"Catch your deaths, you idiots," grumbled grandfather. "Get the lumbago, or else robbers'll come and cut your throats. . . ."

The sun would go down, flooding the sky with rivers of fire, which, in expiring, scattered red-gold ashes over the green velvet of the gardens. Then the world would noticeably darken, swelling and expanding as it absorbed the warm twilight. The sun-sated leaves would droop on the branches and the grass would bend its head to the earth. Everything became richer and softer, emanating a perfume as soft as music. And music would come floating from the army camps in distant fields. The night brought a feeling as strong and refreshing as mother love; and like a mother's caress was the silence, stroking the heart with a warm, furry paw, soothing away all that should be forgotten—all the fine, caustic dust accumulated during the day. It was delightful to lie gazing up at the sky, watching the stars come out, each one opening up new depths to the heavens. These receding depths seemed to lift you lightly off the earth, and you could not tell whether the earth had shrunken to your size, or whether you had marvelously expanded until you were one with all that surrounded you. The silence increased, the darkness thickened, but invisible strings vibrated with little sounds, each of which - the singing of a bird in sleep, the rustle of a passing porcupine, the sound of a human voice --had a special quality distinguishing it from daytime sounds and lovingly stressed by the sensitive silence.

The playing of an accordion, a woman's laughter, a spur striking against the bricks of the pavement, the yelping of a dog—all these were last leaves falling from the dying day.

Sometimes there would be a sudden brawling of drunken voices out in the street or on an open lot, and the patter of running feet. Such sounds were too ordinary to deserve attention.

Grandmother would lie awake for hours on end, her arm under her head, recounting something with quiet emotion, apparently indifferent to whether I was listening or not. She never failed to select a legend which added significance and beauty to the night.

I would fall asleep to the sound of her rhythmic speech, waking up with the sun in my face and the singing of birds in my ears. The morning air stirred gently as it warmed in the sun, the leaves of the

apple trees shook off the dew, the grass was vividly green and assumed a crystal transparency in the veils of mist which hovered above it. Rays of sun fanned across the sky, transforming it from lavender to blue. The song of a lark came from some invisible height, and all the sounds and colours of the newborn day seeped like dew into my soul, filling me with quiet happiness and the desire to be up and about, and to live in harmony with all creatures.

That was the most calm and contemplative period of my whole life. It was that summer which nurtured in me a sense of my own strength. I came to avoid people. When I heard the voices and cries of the Ovsyannikov children I was no longer filled with a longing to join them, and instead of being glad when they came to see me, I only feared they might spoil something in my garden—the first thing I had made with my own hands.

My grandfather's harangues also ceased to interest me. They became ever more crisp and complaining. He began to have frequent quarrels with my grandmother and to put her out of the house, at which times she would go either to Uncle Yakov's or to Uncle Mikhail's. Sometimes she would remain away for several days, and then my grandfather would cook for us himself, howling and cursing, burning his fingers, breaking the dishes, and becoming more cantankerous with every day.

When he came to visit me in my corner of the garden, he would seat himself comfortably on the turf and watch me for a long time without speaking. Then suddenly he would ask:

"Why don't you say something?"

"I don't know."

"We're not the quality, you know," he would begin in an instructive tone. "Nobody's going to teach us anything—got to learn it all ourselves. Books have been written for others, schools have been built for them—but not for us. We got to get everything ourselves. . . ."

He would go off into a brown study—mute and motionless—dreadful to look at.

That autumn he sold the house. At the breakfast table one morning preceding the sale, he announced to grandmother in a sad, resolute voice:

"Well, mother, I've been feeding you for a good long time already, but now it's over—have to shift for yourself from now on."

Grandmother remained utterly unmoved, as though she had long expected him to say just this. She unhurriedly took out her snuffbox, stuffed her spongy nose, and replied:

"Well, nothing to do about it. Have to make the best of it."

Grandfather rented two dark rooms in the cellar of an old house in a blind alley. During the moving, grandmother took an old bast shoe with long laces and thrust it under the stove. Squatting down, she began to call the hearth goblin:

"Come goblin, come goblin, climb inside and take a ride to bring us luck in the other house. . . ."

Grandfather, who was out in the yard, glanced through the window.

"Taking it along, are you? I'll show you, you heretic! Disgracing me like this!"

"Oh, watch out, father! It'll mean bad luck for sure!" she warned, but grandfather flew into a rage and forbade her taking the goblin along.

For three days he sold our furniture and other things to Tatar secondhand men, cursing and bargaining furiously. Grandmother watched them from the window, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, and calling softly:

"Go ahead and take it—take everything—break everything. . . ."

I was also ready to cry at the thought of leaving my playhouse in the garden.

Two carts came to move us, and the one I rode in shook as though trying to toss me off the pile of goods and chattels.

And it was with this sensation of being constantly shaken off that I lived for the next two years—until the death of my mother.

Mother came to see us soon after grandfather moved into the basement. She was pale and thin, with enormous eyes burning with a kind of hurt astonishment. She studied everything intently, as though she were seeing her mother and father and me for the first time. She looked at us and said nothing, while my stepfather kept walking up and down the room, whistling under his breath, clearing his throat, and twiddling his thumbs behind his back.

"Good heavens, how big you've grown!" said my mother, taking my cheeks in her hot palms. She was wearing a wide, ugly brown dress, bulging over her stomach.

"Hello," said my stepfather, holding out his hand to me. "How you getting along?"

He sniffed the air.

"Damp here."

Both of them looked worn and dishevelled, as though they had been running and wanted nothing so much as to lie down and have a good rest.

We had a dreary tea, during which grandfather watched the rain running down the windowpane and asked:

"So you lost everything in the fire?"

"Everything," said my stepfather in a resolute tone. "We hardly managed to escape ourselves."

"Hm. A fire's no joke."

Mother pressed up against grandmother and whispered something in her ear that made grandmother narrow her eyes as though struck by a bright light. The atmosphere became even more dreary.

Suddenly grandfather said spitefully, in a loud, calm voice:

"I've heard rumours, Yevgeni Vasilyevich, as how there wasn't no fire at all, but you just lost everything at cards."

A deathly silence ensued, broken only by the tapping of the rain on the window and the steaming of the samovar.

"Father ..." said my mother at last.

"'Father!'" roared my grandfather. "Well, what next? Didn't I tell you it was crazy for thirty to marry twenty? Well, here you are —fine specimen, isn't he? Made you a gentlewoman, eh? Well, how do you like it, daughter?"

Then all four of them began shouting, my stepfather loudest of all. I went out into the entranceway, and sat down on a pile of wood, stunned. This could not be my mother—she was entirely different. I had sensed this vaguely there in the room, but now that I was seated out here in the darkness I could vividly recall what she had been like.

Then, in some forgotten way I found myself in Sormovo, in a new house with unpapered log walls. The chinks between the logs were stuffed with hemp and inhabited by innumerable roaches. Mother and my stepfather lived in two rooms facing the street, while my grandmother and I lived in the kitchen, which had one window overlooking the roof. Beyond the roof, black factory chimneys were sil-

houetted against the sky, pouring out thick, curly smoke which the winter wind scattered over the district. Our unheated rooms were always filled with the greasy odour of this smoke, and early in the morning the factory whistle howled like a wolf:

"Oo-oo-aw! Oo-oo-aw!"

By standing up on a bench and looking through the top window-pane, I could get a glimpse of the lighted factory gates, open like the toothless mouth of an old beggar devouring a horde of little people. At noon there came another whistle. The black lips of the gates opened up, revealing a deep hole through which the factory vomited forth these same little people, now well masticated. They flowed in black streams down the streets, driven into the houses by a rough white wind. The sky could rarely be seen. Above the roofs and sooty snow-banks of the district, hung another roof—flat and grey, stunting the imagination and blinding the eyes with its cheerless monotony.

In the evenings, a dull red glow hovered above the factory. It lighted the tips of the chimneys and created the impression that instead of rising from the earth, they were projected from out that lurid cloud, thrusting down to feed on fire, belching and howling with satiety. It was insufferable to gaze on that scene day after day, and my heart became filled with aching malevolence. Grandmother did all the housework. From morning to night she was busy preparing food, scrubbing the floor, chopping wood, and hauling water. When evening came she grunted and sighed with exhaustion. Sometimes after she had prepared the dinner, she would put on a short quilted jacket, tuck up her skirt, and set out for town.

"Go have a look how the old man's getting along," she would say.

"Take me with you!"

"You'll freeze to death. Just look what a wind!"

She would walk seven versts to town over roads lost in snow fields. My mother, yellow and swollen with pregnancy, would sit huddled in a ragged grey shawl bordered with long fringe. I hated that shawl, which distorted her large, handsome body; I hated the tattered fringe, and would tear it off. I hated the house, and the factory, and the whole district. Mother went about in worn felt boots, coughing so that her enormous belly shook, her grey-blue eyes flashed with hard, dry anger or stared dully at the bare walls, as though glued fast to them. Sometimes she would gaze out into the street for a

whole hour. The street was like a jaw in which some of the teeth had become blackened and distorted with age, while others had fallen out altogether and been replaced by clumsy new ones, too big for the jaw.

"Why do we live here?" I asked.

"Ah, don't ask," she replied.

She spoke little with me these days, limiting her communications to orders and requests:

"Bring me this, take that, run to the store...."

She rarely let me go out to play, for I always came home badly beaten by my fellows. Fights were my only pleasure, and I gave myself up to them with all the zest of my impassioned nature. Mother gave me strappings for this, but the punishment only irritated me, so that the next time I fought even more furiously—and my mother punished me even more severely. Once I warned her that if she continued beating me I would bite her hand and run away to freeze out in the fields. She pushed me away in consternation and began to pace the floor.

"You little beast!" she said, gasping with exhaustion.

The living, vibrant rainbow of feelings called love gradually faded in my heart, giving way to blue flashes of resentment against everyone and everything and to a smouldering discontent and sense of loneliness in this dull, nonsensical world.

My stepfather was stern with me and laconic with my mother. He was forever whistling and coughing and standing in front of a mirror picking his crooked teeth. Ever more frequently he quarrelled with my mother, addressing her in cold, distant terms which I desperately resented. During their quarrels he would close the door into the kitchen, evidently unwilling that I should hear what he said, but I made a point of listening to his gruff bass voice.

Once he stamped his foot and shouted:

"I can't invite anybody to the house on account of your damn belly, you old cow!"

Overwhelmed with surprise and fury, I jumped up on the bunk and struck my head against the ceiling with such force that I bit through my tongue.

On Saturdays dozens of workers came to my stepfather to sell the food coupons enabling them to buy products in the company store.

These were issued by the factory instead of wages. My stepfather bought them for half their value. He would receive the workers in the kitchen, sitting at the table looking very important and frowning over every coupon.

"Ruble and a half."

"Yevgeni Vasilyevich, for the love of Christ. . . ."

"Ruble and a half."

This muddled, dark life did not last very long. Just before mother was to give birth I was taken to live with my grandfather. He now had quarters in a two-storied house on Peschanaya Street in Kunavino, above the cemetery of Napolnaya Church. The tiny room he occupied contained a large Russian stove and two windows facing the yard.

"Well!" he laughed with a little squeak as he met me. "According to the saying, your best friend's your mother, but in this case it turns out to be your old devil of a grandfather! Phooh, what people!"

Scarcely had I become acquainted with my new home than mother and grandmother came with the baby. My stepfather had lost his job at the factory for cheating the workers, but he had appealed to friends and immediately received a job as cashier at the railroad station.

Much empty time flowed by until I was again sent to live with my mother in the cellar of a stone house. Mother immediately sent me to school; from the very first day I disliked school.

I put in my appearance dressed in a pair of mother's shoes, a coat made out of grandmother's blouse, a yellow shirt, and long trousers. This immediately aroused ridicule, and the yellow shirt won me the nickname of "the ace of diamonds." I easily put things straight with the boys, but the priest and the teacher took a disliking to me.

The teacher was a bald, yellow-faced man who was subject to nosebleeds. He would enter the classroom with bits of cotton stuffed up his nostrils, take his place at the desk, ask us questions in a nasal voice, and stop in the middle of a word to pull out the cotton and examine it with a shake of his head. He had a flat, brassy, sour face with a kind of green mould filling the wrinkles. The most hideous feature of his face was the tiny eyes which seemed to have no place

in the general ensemble, and kept plastering themselves to my face, making me want to wipe my cheek with my hand.

For the first few days I sat on the front bench, directly under the teacher's nose. This was unbearable. He seemed to see no one but me, and kept saying through his nose:

"Pesko-o-v, change your shirt! Pesko-o-v, stop shuffling! Pesko-o-v, again your shoes have left a puddle on the floor!"

I repaid him by thinking up the most extravagant tricks. One day I got hold of half a frozen watermelon. I scooped it out and hung it on a pulley to the door in the dark entranceway. When the door was opened, the watermelon rose in the air, but when the teacher closed the door, it descended like a cap on his bald head. The night watchman escorted me home with a note from the teacher, and I took a hiding for my mischief.

Another time I sprinkled snuff in the drawer of his desk. He had such a fit of sneezing that he was forced to leave the classroom, sending his son-in-law, an officer, to substitute for him. The officer made us sing "God save the tsar" and "Ah my freedom, blessed freedom" over and over again; if anyone got out of tune he would tap him over the head with a ruler in a manner that made a lot of noise and was funny, but did not hurt.

The teacher of religion was a young and handsome priest with a lot of fluffy hair. He disliked me because I had no copy of "Sacred Stories from the Old and New Testaments," and because I imitated his manner of speaking.

As soon as he would come into the classroom he would say:

"Peshkov, have you brought the book or not? Yes, the book."

"No, I haven't. Yes."

"What do you mean, 'yes'?"

"No."

"Get along home with you! Yes, home. I have no intention of teaching you. Yes, not the slightest intention."

I had no objection to being sent home. I would wander about the dirty streets of the district until school was over, observing the noisy life about me.

The priest had a fine, Christ-like face with affectionate, feminine eyes. He had small hands which seemed to caress everything they touched, whether it were a book, a ruler, or a pen. It was as though

he loved every object and looked upon it as a live thing that might be injured by careless handling. He was less affectionate with the children, but they were fond of him nevertheless.

In spite of the fact that I received satisfactory marks in my studies, I was soon informed that I would be expelled for my conduct. That upset me. Unquestionably the consequences would be severe: my mother was becoming more irritable every day, and had taken to beating me very often.

But I was saved from this disaster. Quite unexpectedly Bishop Chrisanth* a hunchback as I remember, visited our school.

An unfamiliar atmosphere of warmth and good cheer filled the classroom when this little man in flowing black robes entered and took his place at the desk.

"Well, let's have a little chat, my children," he said, taking his hands out of his voluminous sleeves.

My turn to be called up to the desk came towards the end of the list.

"How old are you?" he asked me. "Really? My, what a tall fellow for your age! Must have done a lot of standing out in the rain!"

He placed one thin hand with its long, pointed nails on the desk, and took hold of his scanty beard with the other, while he gazed at me kindly.

"Well, tell me any story from sacred history that you like."

When I replied that I had no book and therefore could not study sacred history, he adjusted his cowl and said:

"How's that? You have to learn these things, you know. But maybe you know something without the book—heard the stories somewhere? Do you know the Psalter? Good! And the prayers? Now, then you see? And maybe the lives of some of the saints? Even in verse? Well, it turns out you're quite a learned one!"

Our priest came in, all red and puffing. When the bishop had blessed him, he began to tell him about me.

* Bishop Chrisanth was the author of the three-volume work "Religions of the Ancient World" and the articles "Egyptian Metempsychosis" and "Woman and Marriage." The latter article, read in my youth, made a great impression on me. It seems that I have distorted the title—it was published in some religious magazine in the 'seventies.

"Just a minute!" said the bishop, stopping him with a gesture. Then he turned to me again. "All right, supposing you tell us about Alexei, Man-of-God. . . ."

"Wonderful verse, isn't it, son?" he said when I stopped because I had forgotten a line. "Maybe you know something else—about King David? Fine. Only too glad to listen!"

I could see that he really enjoyed listening, that he was fond of the verse. He let me go on for a long time before he interrupted me.

"Did you learn your letters from the Psalter? Who taught you? Your good grandfather? Your *bad* grandfather! Well now, you can't mean that. But they tell me you're always up to some kind of mischief!"

I blushed, but confessed my guilt. At some length the teacher and the priest confirmed the fact. The bishop listened with downcast eyes.

"Hear what they say about you?" he said at last with a sigh. "Come here!"

He placed a hand smelling of cyprus on my head and said:

"What makes you so mischievous?"

"School's a bore."

"A bore? There's something wrong here, son. If you found school a bore, you would be a bad student, but your marks show that that isn't so. There must be something else the trouble."

He took a little book out of his robe and wrote:

"Peshkov, Alexei. Hm. It'd be better if you stopped your mischief, son. A little bit's all right, but people can't stand too much, you know. Am I right, boys?"

"You're right!" came a gay chorus of voices.

"And what about you yourselves—I suppose you do very little mischief, eh?"

"Oh no, a lot!" laughed the boys.

The bishop drew me to him and leaned back in his chair, saying with an air of surprise that made even the teacher and the priest laugh:

"Just think—I was a mischief-maker myself at your age! What do you suppose makes us like that?"

The boys laughed and he asked them questions, cleverly entangling them in their own words so that the atmosphere became more and more merry. Finally he got up and said:

"A pity to leave you rascals, but it's time for me to be on my way!"

He raised his arm, tossing back his wide sleeve, and made the sign of the cross above the class:

"May you live and do good in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Farewell."

"Farewell, your holiness! Come back soon!" shouted the boys.

"I'll come, I'll come all right," he replied, shaking his cowl. "I'll bring you some books." Then he turned to the teacher. "Let them go home now."

Out in the entranceway he stopped me and said in a low voice:

"Promise me you won't make so much trouble in the future, all right? Oh, I understand why you do it, of course! Well, good-bye!"

I was very much moved by this. A peculiar emotion seethed in my breast, so that even when the teacher kept me after class and began to tell me that from now on I must behave like a lamb, I listened attentively and willingly.

As the priest was putting on his coat he said affectionately:

"From now on you must attend my lessons. Yes, that you must do. But sit quiet! Yes, quiet!"

Things became better at school, but a nasty thing happened at home. I stole a ruble from my mother. This crime was not premeditated. One evening mother went out somewhere, leaving me alone with the baby. For want of anything better to do, I took out one of my stepfather's books—"Notes of a Physician," by Dumas the Elder. Among the pages I found a one-ruble bill and a ten-ruble bill. The book was too difficult for me, but on closing it I was struck with the idea that for a ruble I could buy not only the "Sacred History," but "Robinson Crusoe" as well. I had learned about the existence of such a book a short time before. During recess one cold day I had been telling the boys a fairy tale. Suddenly one of them said scornfully:

"Fairy tales are no good! Robinson Crusoe now, that's a real story!"

A few of the other boys had also read Robinson Crusoe, and they all praised the book. I was hurt that they should have scorned grandmother's tale, and resolved to get hold of Robinson Crusoe so that, having read it, I could say that *it* was no good!

The next day I came to school with the "Sacred History," two dog-eared volumes of Andersen's fairy tales, three pounds of white

bread and a pound of sausage. In the dark little bookshop at the corner next to Vladimir Church I had found a copy of "Robinson Crusoe"—a skinny little book in a yellow binding. On the title page was the picture of a bearded man with a fur cap on his head and a tiger skin over his shoulder. This did not attract me, while I found even the worn bindings of the fairy tales fascinating.

During the long recess I shared my bread and sausage with the boys and we began reading "The Nightingale," a wonderful tale which gripped the heart from the very first page.

"In China, all the people are Chinese, and even the Emperor is a Chinaman." I can still remember how this sentence delighted me with its simple humour, its smiling music, and something else that was wonderfully good.

I had no time to finish reading "The Nightingale" at school, and when I came home my mother asked me in a strained voice, as she stood frying some eggs:

"Did you take a ruble?"

"Yes. Here are the books. . . ."

She gave me a vigorous tanning with the frying pan and took away the fairy tales, hiding them for all time. This punishment was infinitely more painful than the licking.

I did not return to school for several days. Apparently my stepfather told the people at work what I had done and they in their turn related it to their children. The boys carried the tale to school, and when I returned I was greeted with a new nickname—the thief. Brief and clear—but unfair. I had not attempted to hide the fact that I had taken the ruble, but when I tried to explain this, nobody believed me. So I came home and announced to my mother that I would never go back to school again.

Pregnant once more, she was sitting at the window feeding my brother Sasha. She turned her grey face and stared at me with crazed, tortured eyes, opening her mouth like a fish.

"You're lying," she said softly. "Nobody could have heard about your taking the ruble."

"Go ask them."

"You must have told them yourself. Tell me the truth—didn't you tell them? But don't lie—tomorrow I'm going to school to find out for myself who told!"

I named the student. Her face became drawn and melted in tears.

I went into the kitchen and lay down on the bed behind the stove which had been made for me out of some old wooden boxes. I could hear my mother sobbing in the next room:

"Oh Lord, Oh Lord. . . ."

The smell of warm, greasy rags became intolerable, and I went out into the yard.

"Where are you going?" called my mother. "Come here to me!"

We sat together on the floor with Sasha on my mother's knees pulling at the buttons of her dress, bowing to them and saying:

"Bubbons," which meant buttons.

I snuggled up to my mother, and she put her arm around me.

"We're very poor," she said. "Every kopek—every single kopek. . . ."

She squeezed me with her hot hands and seemed unable to finish what she wanted to say.

"Oh, what a beast, what a beast!" she suddenly burst out, repeating a word I had heard her use once before.

"Beat," mimicked Sasha.

He was a strange baby—clumsy and large-headed, with wonderful blue eyes which looked smilingly about as though expecting something. He began to speak at an unusually early age and never cried, living in a constant state of quiet joy. He was so weak that he could hardly crawl, but he always rejoiced on seeing me, stretching out his little arms and playing with my ears with his soft little fingers which for some reason smelled of violets. He died quite unexpectedly, without having been ill at all. In the morning he was quietly happy as usual; in the evening, when the church bell was tolling for vespers, he was already laid out on the table. This occurred soon after the birth of the second baby, Nikolai.

Mother had carried out her promise to clear up things at school, and once more I was studying normally. But again I had to go live with my grandfather, for the following reason:

One day at tea time, as I was entering the kitchen from the yard, I heard my mother crying desperately:

"Yevgeni, Yevgeni, don't go, I beg of you!"

"Nonsense," replied my stepfather.

"But I know you go to her!"

"Well, what of it?"

Both of them were silent for a few minutes, then my mother said between fits of coughing:

"What a mean and worthless beast you are!"

I heard him strike her. I ran into the room and saw her on her knees, bracing herself against a chair with her back and elbows, her head thrown back, her eyes shining unnaturally, while he stood in front of her, spick and span in a new suit, kicking her in the breast with a long leg. I picked up a silver-handled bread knife—the only one of my father's things left to my mother—and aimed it at my stepfather's side with all my force.

Fortunately my mother had time to push him away, so that the knife only ripped his coat and grazed his flesh. He let out a groan and ran out of the room, holding his side. With a shriek my mother grabbed me up and hurled me onto the floor. My stepfather tore me away from her when he returned from the yard.

Late that evening, when he had gone out in spite of everything, mother came to me where I lay behind the stove, gently embraced me and kissed me.

"Forgive me, dear. I have wronged you. But how could you have done such a thing? A knife!"

With a perfect understanding of the full import of my words, I swore that I would kill my stepfather and myself as well. And I think I would have done it—at least attempted it. Even now I can see that loathsome foot with the bright braid down the trouser leg swinging in the air and landing on a woman's breast.

Sometimes when I recall the abominations of that barbarous Russian life I question whether they are worth dwelling on. But on further consideration I am convinced that they demand being exposed, for they are the vicious, tenacious truth, which has not been exterminated to this very day. They represent a truth which must be exposed to its roots and torn out of our grim and shameful life—torn out of the very soul and memory of man.

But there is another, more positive reason impelling me to describe such horrors. In spite of their repulsiveness and the way in which they mutilate what would otherwise be fine natures, the Russian is sufficiently young and wholesome in spirit to abolish such things and he will surely do so.

Our life is amazing not only for the vigorous scum of bestiality with which it is overgrown, but also for the bright and wholesome creative forces gleaming beneath. And the influence of good is growing, giving promise that our people will at last awaken to a life full of beauty and bright humanity.

XIII

Once more I was living with my grandfather.

"Well, you rascal," was his greeting as he rapped nervously on the table. "I'll not be feeding you any more. It's up to your grandmother now."

"I'll manage," she said. "As though that was such a job!"

"Well, go ahead," he shouted, but then he explained to me more calmly: "Everything's separate with us now—each for himself."

Grandmother sat at the window making lace. Her bobbins clicked cheerfully above the pillow bristling with brass pins that glistened in the spring sun like a golden porcupine. Grandmother herself seemed cast of bronze, and had not changed in the least. But grandfather had become leaner and more wrinkled. His hair was thinner and the calm pompousness of his movements had been substituted by an impetuous fussiness. His green eyes looked at everything suspiciously. With a laugh, grandmother told about the division of property which had taken place between her and grandfather. He had given her all the pots and crocks and dishes and had said:

"That's all yours, and don't be asking me for anything else!"

Then he took all her old dresses and belongings, including a fox cape, and sold them for seven hundred rubles, which he lent at interest to his godson, a converted Jew who traded in fruit. He had become sick with greed—shamelessly greedy. He began to visit old acquaintances—rich merchants and artisans with whom he had formerly worked—and ask them to give him money, saying that his sons had ruined him. Out of respect for his former position they made him generous gifts. He would come home and wave a sizable banknote under my grandmother's nose, gloating like a schoolboy:

"See this, you old fool? Nobody'll give you a tenth as much!"

My grandfather lent this money at interest to a new acquaintance

—a tall, bald-headed furrier who was nicknamed "The Whip," and his sister, a fat, red-cheeked, dark-eyed storekeeper, as sweet and gooey as molasses.

Everything in the house was divided: today grandmother prepared dinner from products bought with her money, tomorrow grandfather bought the bread and food. The dinner was always worse on his days. Grandmother bought good meat, while he bought lungs and tripe. Each kept his own store of tea and sugar, but tea was brewed in the same teapot, and grandfather would ask in alarm:

"Wait—let me see—how much did you put in?"

He would sprinkle the tea leaves into his hand and carefully count them.

"Your tea's finer than mine—mine's thicker, makes a better brew, so you got to put in more."

He watched to see that grandmother poured him tea that was just the same strength as hers, and that they both drank the same number of cups.

"Have a last?" grandmother would ask just before pouring out the final brew.

"Suppose we may as well have a last," agreed grandfather after a glance into the teapot.

Even the oil for the icon lamp was bought by each in turn—and this after fifty years of labouring side by side!

I found these tricks of my grandfather amusing and disgusting—grandmother found them only amusing.

"Forget it!" she would say to me. "What of it? He's old, is the old man, and he's gone queer. Four score already—just think the number of years! Let him be queer—don't hurt anybody. As for me and you—be sure I'll always earn a crust of bread for us!"

I also began to earn money. Early Sunday mornings I would take a sack and go through the streets and yards collecting old bones, rags, nails, and paper. The junk man would pay us twenty kopeks a pood for rags or paper or metal, and eight or ten kopeks a pood for bones. I collected junk after school during the week as well, and every Saturday I earned from thirty to fifty kopeks (or even more if it had been a particularly successful week). Grandmother took my money and hurriedly deposited it in the pocket of her skirt, lowering her eyes as she rewarded me with words of praise:

"Thanks, pigeon-widgeon! You and me won't go hungry, will we, now? Just to think!"

One day I caught her gazing at one of my five-kopek pieces and weeping softly, one bright tear hanging from the end of her spongy nose.

But I found that the profits from junk dealing were less than those from stealing boards from the lumberyards on the bank of the Oka River or on The Sands, an island where they traded in metal during the annual fair, putting up makeshift booths for this purpose. When the fair was over, the booths were taken apart and the lumber stacked on The Sands, where they remained until the rising of the river in the spring. House owners would pay us ten kopeks for a good board, and we could steal two or three in the course of the day. However, it was necessary to carry on operations on foggy or rainy days, when the watchmen were indoors.

It was a friendly band of youngsters with whom I worked: there was Sanka Vyakhir, the Dove, ten-year-old son of a Mordovian beggarwoman—an affectionate child who was always quiet and good-natured; there was the waif Kostroma, skinny and impetuous, with enormous black eyes—later, when he was thirteen, he hung himself in a home for juvenile delinquents to which he had been sent for stealing a pair of pigeons; there was the Tatar Khabi, a twelve-year-old Samson, who combined extraordinary strength with a simple, generous nature; there was the pug-nosed Yaz, eight-year-old son of a gravedigger and cemetery watchman, silent as a fish and afflicted with the "black sickness"; and finally there was the oldest of our band, Grishka Churka, son of a widowed seamstress, a very just and reasonable person, and an expert at fist fighting. All of us lived on the same street.

Stealing was not considered a crime in our district. It was the usual, and almost exclusive means of getting a living for most of the half-starved petty tradesmen. The month and a half of the annual fair could not keep them alive throughout the year, and many respected householders "made extra money on the river," that is, they fished out boards and logs washed away by the tide, and hauled light baggage on makeshift rafts; but for the most part they went in for stealing—"monkeying" along the banks of the Volga and the Oka, robbing the wharfs and barges and riverbanks of anything they could lay their

hands on. On Sundays the grownups would boast of their luck, and the children would listen and learn.

In the spring, during the busy weeks of preparation for the fair, drunken artisans and other workmen would fill the streets after their day's labour. Then the children of the district would ply their trade of pickpocketing, an occupation which was accepted as quite legitimate and was fearlessly carried on with the grownups as witnesses.

They stole hammers from carpenters, monkey wrenches from fitters, axle bolts from carters. Our band did not go in for such things.

"I won't go stealing—mom won't let me," Churka announced one day.

"And I'm scared to," put in Khabi.

Kostroma always shied from thieves and pronounced the word "thief" with a peculiar emphasis, and if he found boys robbing a drunkard, he would chase them and give them a merciless beating. This sullen, large-eyed boy was always posing as a grownup. He walked with a rolling swing like the stevedores and tried to make his voice deep and gruff. Altogether there was something tight and old and unnatural about him. The Dove was convinced that stealing was a sin.

But the snitching of boards and poles from The Sands fell into quite a different category. None of us was afraid to do it, and we worked out a technique that greatly simplified the task. In the evening when it was already dark, or on foggy days, the Dove and Yaz would set out over the bulging, slushy ice to The Sands. They would go openly, trying to attract the attention of the watchmen, while the four of us would creep up unnoticeably from different sides. While the watchmen were busy keeping an eye on Yaz and the Dove, we would gather at the appointed place and select our boards; then while our fleet comrades teased the watchmen and fled from them, we set out on the return trip. Each of us had a rope with a bent nail at the end which we fastened to the board in order to haul it over the snow and ice. The watchmen rarely saw us, and if they did they were unable to catch us. On selling the boards we divided the spoils into six equal parts. Usually it came out to five or seven kopeks apiece.

This was enough to eat as much as we liked for one day, but the Dove's mother would beat him if he did not bring her vodka; Kostroma saved his money to go in for the pigeon hunting he dreamed of;

Churka's mother was ill, so he needed all he could get for her; Khabi was also saving money in order to return to the town from which he had been brought by an uncle who was drowned shortly after arriving at Nizhni-Novgorod. Khabi had forgotten the name of the town, remembering only that it was on the Kama River near the Volga.

For some reason we found the idea of this town very funny, and kept teasing the slant-eyed Tatar about it:

There's a town very fair,
But he doesn't know where—
Here or there
Or in the air!

At first Khabi became angry with us, but once the Dove said to him in a cooing voice which well justified his nickname:

"Come off now, who ever heard of pals getting angry?"

The Tatar was ashamed. He accepted the rebuff and thereafter he himself used to sing the song about the town on the Kama.

But still we preferred collecting junk to stealing boards. It became particularly interesting in the spring, when the snow had melted and the rains came to wash the cobbles at the empty fair grounds. It was always possible to find nails and bits of metal in the gutters of the fair grounds. Often we found copper and silver coins, but in order to keep the watchmen from chasing us and taking our sacks away, we had to give them two kopek-pieces or lick their boots. In general, it was not easy to make money, but we became the best of friends in the effort. Occasionally there would be quarrels among us, but I cannot remember our ever having had a fight.

The Dove was our pacifier. He was always able to find just the right words to calm our passions—simple words, but ones which had the effect of surprising us and making us ashamed of ourselves. He himself seemed surprised when he spoke them. He never took offence at the mean tricks Yaz would play, calmly dismissing everything bad as stupid and useless.

"Now why would you do such a thing?" he would ask, and it became clear to everyone that there was actually no sense in it.

He referred to his mother as "this Mordovian of mine," and none of us found it funny.

"Last night this Mordovian of mine came home soaked to the

gills," he laughed, his little round eyes glinting with gold. "Flopped down on the doorstep and there she lays singing her head off, the old hen!"

"What'd she sing?" asked Churka seriously.

The Dove slapped his knees in time to the music as he sang his mother's song in a high little voice:

Tap-a-tap-tap!
The young shepherd's rap
At my windowpane—
I am off with my swain!
The sunset glows,
The shepherd blows
Upon his pipe, so sweet and clear,
And all the village stops to hear.

He knew many such gay songs, and sang them with zest.

"Yes," he went on, "and she falls asleep there in the doorway, letting all the cold air in, and me shivering my pants off and unable to haul the bulk of her away. This morning I says to her, 'What you want to get so drunk for?' 'It's all right,' she answers. 'Try to bear it a little longer, I'll be dying soon!' "

"Sure, you can see it won't be long, all bloated up the way she is," confirmed Churka impressively.

"Will you be sorry?" I asked.

"Of course," answered the Dove with some surprise. "She's been a good one to me."

And in spite of the fact that we all knew that the Mordovian beat the Dove, we were convinced that she was a good soul; on days when our gains were slight, Churka would say:

"Let's each throw in a kopek to buy the Dove's mother some vodka, else she'll lick him."

Churka and I were the only ones who knew how to read and write. The Dove envied us this.

"When this Mordovian of mine dies," he would coo, pulling at his pointed, mouse-like ear, "I'm going to school too. I'll kiss the teacher's feet to make him take me. Then when I finish I'll be gardener to the archbishop, or maybe to the tsar."

That spring the Mordovian, accompanied by a bottle of vodka

and an old man who collected donations for the building of a new church, was killed when a stack of logs collapsed on her. The woman was taken to the hospital and Churka said to the Dove:

"Come live with me. Mom'll teach you your letters."

One day soon after, the Dove stopped in front of a store:

"Gorcery Store," he read, his head lifted proudly.

"Grocery Store, you scarecrow!" corrected Churka.

"I know, but the sybalels get mixed up."

"SYLLables!"

"The letters jump around—they're so happy to get read!"

The extent of his love for trees and grass amazed and amused us.

Our district was sandy, so there was little foliage; only here and there in the yards could be found sickly willows, twisted elderberry bushes, or some dry grass hiding under the fences. If one of us sat down on this grass, the Dove would reprimand us angrily:

"What you have to spoil the grass for? Can't you sit on the sand? It's all the same to you."

In his presence we hesitated to break off a bit of flowering elderberry or cut a willow wand on the bank of the Oka.

"What you always spoiling things for, you devils?" he would say, shrugging his shoulders in amazement.

And this amazement made us ashamed.

All week long we collected old bast sandals in preparation for the sport we had on Saturdays. On Saturday evening when the Tatar stevedores were leaving the Siberian wharf, we would hide behind some street corner and throw sandals at them. At first they became angry, and cursed and chased us, but soon they themselves were drawn into the game. In expectation of the coming battle, they would also arm themselves with bast sandals—more than once they even stole our ammunition, having noted where we hid our supply. But we objected.

"That's no game," we said.

So they would divide up the stolen goods, and launch the fight. Usually they took up their position in an open place while we yelled and danced about them as we hurled our missiles. They also yelled, and they would roar with laughter every time one of us buried his nose in the sand, tripped up by a well-aimed sandal.

Sometimes the game went on until dark. Petty tradesmen would

watch us from the shelter of some corner, remonstrating for decency's sake. But the sandals kept flying through the air like dusty, grey birds. Sometimes one of us took a staggering blow, but the pleasure of the contest outweighed all pain and injury.

The Tatars became as excited as we did. When the battle was over, we would occasionally go home with them, there to be treated to horse meat accompanied by a peculiar dish of vegetables, after which we were served a strong brew of pressed tea and nut cake. We were extremely fond of these huge men, each one of whom seemed stronger than the other. There was something simple and childlike in their natures. I was particularly impressed by the fact that they never took offence, and were always kind and considerate to each other.

All the Tatars laughed irresistibly—laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. One of them (a *muzhik* from Kasimov with a broken nose and fabulous strength—one day he carried a church bell weighing twenty-seven poods off a barge and well up onto the river-bank) would howl when he laughed and keep crying:

"Oooo! Oooo! A word's a bird; heard the word—caught the bird; a golden bird!"

One day he sat the Dove on the palm of his hand and lifted him up into the air.

"Go on live up the sky," he said.

On rainy days we would gather at the little house in the cemetery where Yaz lived with his father. His father was a crooked, bedraggled creature with long arms and sprouts of grimy hair on his head and face. His head was like a withered turnip on the skinny stalk of his neck. He would blissfully narrow his yellow eyes and mutter quickly:

"Lord preserve us from sleepless nights! Oo!"

We bought a bit of tea, some sugar and bread, and a little vodka for Yaz's father.

"Put up the samovar, you rotten *muzhik*!" Churka would order.

And the *muzhik* would laugh and obey orders. While waiting for the water to boil, we would talk about our affairs, and he would give us advice.

"Look sharp—the day after tomorrow there's to be a funeral feast at the Trusovs—ought to be a lot of bones left!"

"The Trusov's cook collects bones herself," said the omniscient Churka.

"Soon the weather'll be nice enough to go to the woods," mused the Dove as he glanced out of the window into the cemetery.

Yaz rarely spoke, and would silently watch us with his melancholy eyes as he demonstrated the toys he had found in garbage cans: a wooden soldier, a legless horse, buttons, and bits of brass.

His father set the table with odd cups and brought in the samovar. Kostroma poured the tea, while the old man drank his vodka and climbed up on the stove, gazing down on us with owl-like eyes and muttering:

"Curses on the bunch of you—is it humans you are or what? Phooh! A bunch of thieves—Lord preserve us from sleepless nights!"

"But we aren't thieves," said the Dove.

"Little thieves then."

When Yaz's father got on our nerves, Churka would bawl at him:

"Shut up, you rotten *muzhik*!"

The Dove, Churka and I could not stand hearing him enumerate all the sick people in the district and conjecture as to which of them would die first. He seemed to smack his lips with anticipation and showed not the slightest pity. When he saw that we were loth to listen, he would purposely tease us.

"Aha! Afraid, are you, you little warts! There's one big fat fellow scheduled to kick off soon. Won't it take him a long time to rot though!"

We stopped him, but he was not to be squelched.

"And your turn'll be coming soon! Can't expect to last long living off garbage heaps!"

"All right, we'll die—and they'll promote us to angels," said the Dove.

"You? Angels?" marvelled Yaz's father and broke out laughing. Then he continued torturing us with loathsome tales about corpses.

But sometimes he began saying strange things in a low, buzzing voice.

"Listen, fellows, the day before yesterday they buried a lady with a queer history. I found out all about it, and what do you think?..."

He often spoke about women, and always in a filthy manner, but there was something plaintive and inquiring about his stories, as though he were appealing to us to help him think it through. We

listened attentively. He spoke haltingly, often interrupting his speech to ask questions, but what he said always left irritating splinters and fragments in our memory.

" 'Who started the fire?' they ask her. 'I did,' she says. 'How's that, you fool? You was in the hospital that night!' 'I did!' she repeats. Now what would she say a thing like that for? Lord preserve us from sleepless nights!"

He knew the life history of almost everyone he had dug into the earth of that bare, dismal cemetery. And when he spoke, it was as though he opened the doors of the surrounding houses to us and we entered and observed the lives of the inhabitants, sensing something solemn and important in the act. He seemed capable of talking the night through, but as soon as darkness drew about the windows, Churka would get up from the table and say:

"I'm going home—mom'll be worrying. Who's coming along?"

We all went with him. Yaz walked as far as the fence with us, locked the gate, and pressed his dark, bony face to the bars as he said good-bye.

We called to him, feeling uncomfortable about leaving him there in the cemetery. One evening Kostroma looked back and said:

"One fine morning we'll wake up and find him dead."

Churka often claimed that Yaz lived even worse than the rest of us, but the Dove objected.

"We don't live bad at all," he claimed.

And I agreed with him. I enjoyed the independent life of the streets, and I was fond of my comrades. Our companionship filled me with a great new feeling, inspiring me with the desire ever to help and benefit them.

Again I was encountering difficulties at school. The boys began to call me a tramp and a junkman, and after one of our quarrels they announced to the teacher that I smelled so strongly of garbage that it was impossible to sit next to me. I remember how deeply this hurt me and how difficult it was to return to school after that. The complaint was a mean invention: I always washed myself carefully each morning and never attended school in the same clothes I wore while collecting junk.

At last I passed the examinations for the third class. As a reward for good work I was presented with a Certificate of Honour, a Bible,

a volume of Krylov's fables, and another book, unbound, bearing the enigmatic title of "Fata Morgana." When I brought these presents home my grandfather was deeply touched and overjoyed. He announced that we must carefully preserve the books, and for that reason he would put them away in his strongbox. For several days grandmother had been ill and had no money. Grandfather groaned and wailed:

"You'll be the ruin of me—you're eating me out of house and home. . . ."

So I took the books to a bookstall and sold them for fifty-five kopeks, which I gave to grandmother. I spoiled the Certificate of Honour by scribbling on it and then handed it over to my grandfather. He carefully put it away without noticing the scribbles.

When school was over I returned to the life of the streets, which with the arrival of spring became even more fascinating. We made more money now, and on Sundays the whole group of us would go out to the fields and forests, returning home late in the evening pleasantly worn out and bound even closer to each other.

But this life did not last long. My stepfather lost his job and again went away somewhere, and my mother and little brother Nikolai came to stay with grandfather. Since my grandmother had gone to live in the home of a wealthy merchant for whom she was embroidering a coverlet for the Body of Christ, I had to act as nursemaid.

My silent, wasted mother scarcely had the strength to lift her feet. My brother had scrofulous ulcers on his ankles and was so weak that he could not even cry. If he was hungry, he would moan horribly, and if he was not hungry he would drowse and give great sighs, purring the while like a kitten.

"What he needs is good food, but where can I get enough to feed you all?" said my grandfather one day, after a careful examination of the baby.

"He doesn't need much," replied my mother with a raucous sigh.

"This one a little—that one a little—and altogether a lot. . . ."

He gave a disgusted wave of his hand and turned to me:

"Nikolai needs to be out in the sun, in the sand. . . ."

I brought a sack of clean, dry sand and dumped it in a sunny spot beneath the window. Then I buried my brother in it up to his neck, as grandfather had ordered. The baby seemed to like it. He

would sit there squinting blissfully and gazing at me with amazing eyes, consisting, it seemed, of only blue irises encircled by a ring of lighter blue.

I became very fond of my brother. It seemed to me that he understood all my thoughts, and I would lie beside him for hours, under the window through which came my grandfather's squeaky voice:

"It don't take much brains to die. If you were only smart enough to know how to live, now. . . ."

This was usually followed by a prolonged fit of coughing from my mother.

Nikolai would free his little arms and lift them toward me with a nod of his pale head. His hair was thin and silvery; his face was old and wise.

If a cat or a chicken would come close, Nikolai would watch it intently, then turn to me with a faint smile. This smile disturbed me—could it be that my brother realized how bored I was sitting there beside him; was he aware of the fact that I wanted to leave him and join my friends in the street?

The yard was small and filled with all sorts of rubbish. A straggling of sheds and other structures extended from the gate to the bathhouse at the back of the yard. The roofs were piled high with boards, logs, bits of damp wood and the wreckage of boats—trophies fished out of the Oka when the ice broke and the river was swollen with spring. The entire yard was cluttered with river-soaked wood which, when heated by the sun, exuded an odour of decay.

Next door to us was a small slaughterhouse. Almost every morning we could hear the moaning of calves and the bleating of sheep, and the smell of blood was so strong that it seemed to me it hung in the dusty air like a fine red net.

When the cries of the animals were silenced by an axe blow between the horns, Nikolai would frown and purse his lips, as though trying to imitate the animal sounds, but he succeeded only in producing a puffing little "phooh, phooh."

At noon grandfather would poke his head through the window and call:

"Dinner!"

He himself would hold the baby on his knee and feed it by chewing up bread and potatoes, which he would then poke between the

baby's tiny lips, smearing its mouth and sharp little chin. When he had administered a little of such food, he would lift the child's shirt, poke its bloated stomach, and say:

"Wonder if that's enough—maybe a little more?"

"Can't you see he's reaching for the bread?" my mother would say from the dark corner where she was lying.

"A baby can't tell when it's had enough."

But he would push another ball of mush into its mouth. I suffered from the shame of this feeding. Something rose in my throat, choking me and making me want to throw up.

"All right," said my grandfather at last. "Take him to his mother."

When I took Nikolai in my arms, he would moan and reach towards the table. My mother, so emaciated that she resembled a stripped pine, would lift herself to meet me, stretching out her long, fleshless arms.

She rarely spoke any more, and the few words she uttered were wrung raspingly from her seething chest. All day long she lay silently dying in the corner. I sensed that she was dying, and my grandfather made it clear by speaking too often and too insistently of death, especially in the evenings when the air was filled with the heavy odour of decay.

Grandfather's bed stood in the corner almost under the icons. He slept with his head toward the window, and before falling asleep he would keep muttering to himself:

"Well, the time's come to die. A fine sight we'll present to our Maker! What we going to say? As if I hadn't been working all my life—always doing something. And look what it comes to!"

I slept on the floor between the stove and the window. The space was too short for me and I had to stick my feet under the stove, where the roaches kept tickling my toes. But my observations from this vantage point often gave me a malicious satisfaction. In doing the cooking, grandfather was forever breaking the glass in the window with the other end of the poker or the pole with which he pulled the pots out of the oven. It was strange and ridiculous that anyone as clever as he was should not have thought of cutting off the end of the pole.

One day when something was boiling over in the oven, he gave the pole such a yank that he upset and broke the clay pot and smashed

the cross piece of the window and both panes of glass. This was so great a misfortune that the old man sat down on the floor and wept.

"Oh Lord, oh Lord," he wailed.

When he left the house later, I took the bread knife and hacked off the end of the pole.

"Curses and damnation!" cried grandfather when he returned and saw what I had done. "Should have sawed it off—do you hear?—SAWED it off! Could have made some rolling pins out of the piece and sold them! Devil of a family I've got!"

"Better keep your hands off everything," said my mother when he had run out into the entranceway.

She died at noon on a Sunday in August. My stepfather had recently returned from his trip and again had a job. Grandmother and Nikolai had already moved with him into a clean little apartment next to the station where they were to have taken my mother within the next few days.

On the morning of the day she died she said to me in a voice which was faint, but clearer than usual:

"Go tell Yevgeni Vasilyevich I want to see him."

She sat up, leaning against the wall for support.

"Run quick!" she added, sinking back on the pillow.

It seemed to me that she was smiling, and a new light gleamed in her eyes. My stepfather was at mass and grandmother sent me to the Jewess for some snuff. She had none ready, and so I had to wait while she pulverized the tobacco.

When I finally returned to my grandfather's house, I found mother sitting at the table dressed in a clean lavender dress, her hair carefully combed, as proud and haughty as she had formerly been.

"Feeling better?" I asked, with unaccountable shyness.

"Come here," she said, giving me a fearful look. "Where have you been gallivanting?"

Before I had time to answer she seized me by the hair, grabbed a long flexible knife off the table and struck me with the flat blade until it fell out of her hands.

"Pick it up! Give it here!"

I picked up the knife and placed it on the table. Mother gave me a push and I sat down on the edge of the stove, from where I watched her with frightened eyes.

Rising from the chair, she slowly made her way to the corner, lay down on the bed and began to wipe her perspiring face. Her hand moved uncertainly, twice falling weakly on the pillow, with the handkerchief twitching in her fingers.

"Some water. . . ."

I dipped a cupful of water from the pail. Raising her head with difficulty, she took a swallow, pushed me away with a cold hand, and gave a deep sigh. She looked at the icons in the corner, then at me, moved her lips as if in a smile, and slowly lowered her long lashes over her eyes. Her elbows were pressed close to her sides, while her hands rose to her breast, to her throat. A shadow stole over her face, then receded, leaving her yellow skin tight, her nose sharp. Her mouth opened in surprise, but no breath came.

I stood there for countless ages with the cup in my hand, watching my mother's face stiffen and turn grey.

My grandfather entered.

"Mother is dead," I said.

"What you lying for?" he replied with a glance at the bed.

Then he went to the oven and with a horrible clangour of pan and pole began to remove the *pirog*. I watched him with the knowledge that my mother was dead, waiting for him to realize it.

My stepfather came in, all dressed up in a white linen coat and cap. He quietly picked up a chair and carried it to my mother's bedside. Suddenly he dropped the chair and bellowed like a brass horn:

"She's dead! Look!"

With the pole in his hand and his eyes starting out of his head, my grandfather staggered over to the bed.

When they began shovelling the dry sand down onto my mother's coffin, grandmother wandered off among the other graves. She stumbled blindly over one of the crosses and injured her face. Yaz's father took her to his house, and while she washed the wound he quietly whispered words of consolation in my ear:

"Lord preserve us from sleepless nights! What's the matter with you? Mustn't mind a thing like this, am I right, grandmother? The poor and the rich, all go in the ditch—am I right, grandmother?"

He glanced through the window and suddenly ran out of the house, returning with beaming face and the Dove in tow.

"Look at this," said the old man, holding out a broken spur. "Just look what a find! The Dove and me are making you a present of it. See that little wheel, eh? You can be sure it dropped off some Cossack's boot! I was going to buy it from the Dove—offered him two kopeks. . . ."

"What you lying for?" muttered the Dove angrily, while Yaz's father kept hopping in front of me and winking.

"How's that for a Dove, eh? Can't get away with nothing with him! Well, it's not me but him is making you a present of it, he. . . ."

When grandmother had finished washing, she wrapped a kerchief around her blue, swollen face and called me to go home with her, but I refused. I knew there would be drinking and probably quarrelling at the feast following the funeral. While we were still in the church I had heard Uncle Mikhail say to Uncle Yakov:

"Well, we'll have a good drink today, eh?"

The Dove tried to cheer me up by hanging the spur on his chin and trying to reach it with his tongue. Yaz's father laughed with obvious exaggeration, crying:

"Just look what he's doing! Just look!" But when he saw that this failed to amuse me, he became serious.

"Enough, enough! Pull yourself together. Everybody has to die, even the birds. Listen—if you want, I'll put some turf around your mother's grave, how'd you like that? We'll go to the fields now and gather it—you and the Dove and me—and my Yaz too. We'll cut the turf and put it around pretty—won't be another grave to match it!"

I liked this idea, and we all went out into the fields.

A few days after my mother's funeral my grandfather said to me:

"Well, Alexei, can't exactly call you a medal hanging around my neck! No room for you here any more. Time you were getting out in the world. . . ."

So I got out into the world.


Mother

PART ONE

I

EVERY day the factory whistle shrieked tremblingly in the grimy, greasy air above the workers' settlement. And in obedient response to its summons, sullen people, roused prematurely from strength-restoring sleep, came scuttling out of their little grey houses like frightened roaches. They hurried through the cold, dark dawn, down the unpaved street, to the high stone cells of the factory, which awaited them with detached self-confidence, lighting up the muddy road with dozens of square, oily eyes. The mud smacked beneath their feet. The air was rent by coarse oaths and exclamations in hoarse, sleepy voices. To the ears of these people came other sounds—the lumbering hum of machines and the mutter of steam. Tall black smokestacks towered menacingly above the settlement like thick clubs.

In the evening, when the setting sun found weary reflection in the windows of the houses, the factory expelled the people from its stone bowels as though they were so much slag, and once more they climbed the dirty streets—grimy, black-faced, their hungry teeth glittering and their bodies effusing the sticky odour of machine oil. Now a certain animation and even joy sounded in their voices. Work was over for another day; supper and rest awaited them at home.

The day had been consumed by the factory, whose machines sucked up as much of the workers' strength as they required. The day was struck out, leaving not a trace, and man had advanced one more step toward his grave. But now he anticipated the delights of rest, the joy of a smoke-filled saloon, and he was content.

On Sundays the people slept until ten, and then the respectable married ones put on their best clothes and went to mass, railing the while at the young people for their indifference to religion. After the service they came home, ate *pirogi* and once more slept until evening.

The weariness accumulated through the years dulled their appetites, so they tried to whet them with drink, irritating their stomachs with the sharp sting of vodka.

In the evening they strolled along the streets. Those who owned rubbers put them on even though the ground was dry, and those who owned umbrellas carried them even though the weather was fine.

On meeting their friends they spoke of the factory, and of the machines, and complained of the foremen; they thought and spoke only of things connected with their work. Occasionally the isolated sparks of faltering, impotent thoughts penetrated the dull monotony of their days. When the men came home they wrangled with their wives and frequently beat them, unsparing of their own fists. The young people frequented the saloons or had parties at each others' houses where they played the accordion, sang coarse, ugly songs, danced, swore, and got drunk. Worn out as they were, the liquor quickly went to their heads, while a morbid, incomprehensible irritation rankled in their breasts, demanding some outlet. For that reason they seized at the least opportunity to relieve their feelings, hurling themselves at each other with bestial ferocity on the slightest provocation. Bloody fights were the result. Sometimes they ended in serious injuries, and occasionally in killings.

A feeling of lurking malice dominated their human relations, and this feeling was as old as the incurable weariness of their muscles. People were born with this malady of the spirit inherited from their fathers, and like a dark shadow it accompanied them to the very grave, causing them to perpetrate deeds revolting in their senseless cruelty.

On holidays the young people came home late at night in torn clothes, covered with dirt and mud, with black eyes and bloody noses, sometimes boasting vaingloriously of the blows they had delivered their friends, sometimes sulking, raging or weeping over their insults, drunk and pathetic, miserable and disgusting. Sometimes mothers and fathers brought their sons home from where they had found them sprawling in the shadow of a fence or on the floor of a saloon in a state of drunken unconsciousness. Then the elders would curse them foully, pummel their flabby bodies, and put them to bed with more or less solicitude, only to wake them up in the morning when the an-

gry shriek of the factory whistle came rushing in a dark stream through the dawn.

They relentlessly beat and swore at their children, but the fighting and drunkenness of young people was accepted as a matter of course —when the fathers had been young, they too had fought and caroused, and their mothers and fathers had beaten them in their turn. Life had always been like that. The turbid stream of the years kept flowing on and on, slowly and evenly, clamped to an unchanging course by age-old habits of thinking and behaving. Nor had anyone the slightest desire to introduce any change.

Sometimes people from other parts came to the factory settlement. At first the very fact that they were newcomers attracted attention, and the slight interest they aroused was sustained by the tales they told about the places where they had worked. But soon the novelty wore off, people became accustomed to them and ceased to notice them. From what the newcomers said it was clear that the life of the working people was the same everywhere. And if that were true, what remained to talk about?

But it happened that some of these people spoke of things hitherto unheard of in the settlement. No one argued with them, but everyone listened with a certain scepticism. Some people were blindly irritated by what the newcomers said, others were vaguely alarmed, while still others were disturbed by a pale shadow of hope which led them to drink more heavily in order to drive away the unwanted alarms which only made life more difficult.

If they noted anything unusual about a person, the workmen would long hold it against him and become wary of him. It was as though they feared that he might upset the dull regularity of lives which, if difficult, were at least calm and undisturbed. People were accustomed to having life bear down upon them with equal pressure at all times, and since they had no hope of relief, they looked upon any change as capable only of increasing their hardships.

The working people silently avoided those who voiced new ideas. So the newcomers disappeared, wandering off to other places. In the rare cases when they remained working at the factory, they either became like their fellows or took to living apart....

After some fifty years of such a life, a man died.

II

Thus lived Mikhail Vlassov, a hairy, sullen mechanic with little eyes that glanced out suspiciously and with a mean scorn from under his thick eyebrows. He was the best mechanic at the factory and the strongest man in the settlement, but he was surly with his superiors, and for that reason made little money. On every holiday he beat somebody up, so that nobody liked him and all were afraid of him. Any attempt to pay him back in kind proved futile. Whenever Vlassov saw people making for him, he would pick up a rock or a board or an iron bar, plant his feet wide apart, and silently wait for the enemy. The sight of his hairy arms and his belligerent face, overgrown from eyes to neck with a thick black beard, was enough to terrify anyone. But people were especially afraid of his eyes, which were little and sharp and seemed to penetrate like a steel bore. Anyone who met their gaze felt himself in the presence of a wild force, ready to strike without a vestige of fear or mercy.

"Well, take yourselves off, you sons of bitches," he would say gruffly, his large yellow teeth glinting through his beard. And the people would take themselves off, hurling a volley of cowardly oaths as they went.

"Sons of bitches!" he would call after them briefly, his eyes sharp as a stiletto with scorn. Then he would follow them with head high, shouting defiantly:

"Well, who wants to die?"

Nobody did.

He spoke little, and "son-of-a-bitch" was his favourite epithet. He used it for the police, and officials, and his bosses at the factory. He always called his wife a "bitch."

"Here, can't you see my pants are ripped, you bitch?"

Once when his son Pavel was fourteen years old, he was about to grab him by the hair, when Pavel picked up a heavy hammer and said briefly:

"Hands off!"

"What's that?" asked his father, moving toward the tall, slender figure of his son like a shadow toward a birch tree.

"I've had enough," said Pavel. "I won't take any more." And he raised the hammer.

His father gave him one look and hid his hairy hand behind his back.

"All right," he said with a short laugh. Then he gave a deep sigh and added, "You're a son-of-a-bitch all right."

Shortly after that he said to his wife:

"Don't ask me for any more money. Pavel'll feed you from now on."

"And you'll drink up all your wages, I suppose," she dared to reply.

"That's none of your business, you bitch! I'll go get myself a girl if I like!"

He did not get himself a girl, but from that time on until his death, nearly two years later, he ignored his son and never spoke to him.

He had a dog which was as big and shaggy as himself. It followed him to the factory every morning and waited for him at the gate every evening. Vlassov spent his holidays going from one saloon to another. He went without speaking, scrutinizing people's faces as though looking for some one. And the dog trailed its bushy tail after its master all day long. When at last Vlassov came home drunk, he would sit down to supper and feed the dog from his own bowl. He never cursed it or beat it, but he also never fondled it. After supper he would throw the dishes on the floor if his wife were slow in clearing the table; then he would place a bottle of vodka in front of him, flatten his back against the wall, close his eyes, open his mouth, and wail a song in a voice that would give anyone the creeps. The doleful, ugly sounds became entangled in his whiskers, pushing out the bread crumbs; the mechanic stroked his beard and moustache with his thick fingers and kept on singing. The words of his song were vague and incomprehensible, while the melody reminded one of the wailing of wolves in winter. He would sing as long as the vodka lasted, after which he would slump over on the bench or drop his head on the table and sleep until the whistle blew. The dog lay beside him.

He died of a rupture. For five days he tossed in his bed, all black in the face, with his eyes closed, grinding his teeth. Occasionally he would say to his wife:

"Give me some arsenic ... poison me...."

The doctor ordered a poultice, but added that Mikhail must un-

dergo an operation and should be taken to the hospital that very day.

"To hell with you! I'll die without your help, you son-of-a-bitch!" gasped Mikhail.

When the doctor left and his wife tearfully implored him to have the operation, he shook his fist at her and said:

"If I get well it will go all the worse with you!"

He died in the morning, at the very moment that the whistle blew. He lay in his coffin with his mouth open and his brows drawn in a frown of displeasure. He was buried by his wife, his son, his dog, Danilo Vesovshchikov (an old thief and drunkard who had been expelled from the factory) and a few of the beggars from the settlement. His wife wept little and very quietly. Pavel did not weep at all. The people from the settlement who met the little funeral procession stopped and crossed themselves:

"Pelagea must be glad as glad that he's gone," they said.

"Died like the dog he was," added others.

The people went away when the coffin was buried, but the dog remained sitting on the fresh earth, silently sniffing the grave. A few days later somebody killed it....

III

On a Sunday two weeks after the death of his father, Pavel Vlassov came home dead drunk. He staggered into the house and crawled into the seat at the head of the table, striking the board with his fist as his father had been wont to do and shouting at his mother:

"Supper!"

His mother sat down next to her son, put her arms about him and pulled his head down to her breast. But he held her off.

"Come on, mom! Make it lively!"

"Foolish boy," said his mother sadly and affectionately as she removed his hand.

"And I'm gonna smoke! Gimme pa's pipe," muttered Pavel, moving his thick tongue with difficulty.

This was the first time he had ever become drunk. The vodka weakened his body but did not blot out consciousness, and inside his head thumped the question:

"Am I drunk? Am I drunk?"

He was embarrassed by his mother's affection and touched by the grief in her eyes. He wanted to cry, and in order to suppress this impulse he pretended to be drunker than he actually was.

His mother stroked his damp, tousled hair.

"You shouldn't have done this," she said quietly.

He began to feel nauseated. After a severe attack of vomiting his mother put him to bed, placing a wet towel on his pale brow. This sobered him a bit, but everything continued to swim about him, and his eyelids were too heavy to lift. With that ugly brown taste in his mouth he glanced through his lashes at the large face of his mother and thought:

"Apparently I'm still too young. Others drink and nothing happens, but I get sick. . . ."

From somewhere far away came his mother's soft voice:

"How are you ever going to support me if you begin drinking?"

"Everybody drinks," he replied, closing his eyes tightly.

His mother sighed. He was right. She herself knew that the saloon was the only place where people could squeeze out a drop of happiness.

"But don't you take to drinking," she said anyway. "Your father drank more than enough for both of you. Didn't I suffer enough from his hands? Couldn't you take a little pity on your mother?"

As he heard the sad, soft words, Pavel remembered that during his father's life his mother had been scarcely noticeable about the house, always silent and living in constant dread of a beating. He himself had remained away from home as much as possible to avoid meeting his father, and therefore had grown apart from his mother. Now, as he gradually sobered up, he watched her intensely.

She was tall and somewhat stooped. Her body, broken by hard work and the beatings of her husband, moved noiselessly and a bit sidewise, as though she were afraid of knocking into something. Her wide oval face, puffy and wrinkled, was lighted by dark eyes filled with fear and grief, like the eyes of most of the women in the settlement. Above her right eyebrow was a deep scar, slightly lifting the brow and creating the impression that her right ear was also higher than her left; this gave her face the expression of one who is always

listening fearfully for ill tidings. Streaks of white shone in her thick dark hair. She was all softness and sadness and submissiveness....

Down her cheeks stole slow tears.

"Don't cry," said her son quietly. "Give me a drink."

"I'll bring you some ice water."

But when she returned he was already asleep. She stood looking down at him for a minute with the dipper trembling in her hand, the ice striking against the tin. Then she placed the dipper on the table and silently sank to her knees before the holy images. Against the window beat the sounds of the drunken life outside. An accordion wheezed in the darkness and dampness of the autumn evening; someone sang in a raucous tone; someone else let out a string of filthy oaths; women's voices, tired and irritated, sounded disturbingly....

The life in the Vlassovs' little home flowed on more calmly and quietly than before, and somewhat differently than in the other houses. Theirs stood at the edge of the settlement, above a steep, if not very high embankment leading down to the swamps. One-third of the house comprised the kitchen and a little room partitioned off, in which the mother slept. The remaining two-thirds represented a square room with two windows in it. One corner was taken up by Pavel's bed, another by a table and two benches. The rest of the furnishings consisted of a few chairs, a dresser with a little mirror on it, a trunk containing their clothes, a clock on the wall and two icons in the corner.

Pavel did all that was expected of a young blood—bought himself an accordion, a shirt with a starched front, a bright necktie, rubbers, and a cane, thereby becoming just like all the other fellows of his age. He went to parties in the evening, learned to dance quadrilles and the polka, came home drunk on Sundays, but always suffered badly from vodka. On Monday mornings he would wake up with a headache and heartburn, his face pale and miserable.

"Well, did you have a good time last night?" his mother once asked him.

"Rotten!" he answered with sullen irritation. "Better to go fishing. Or maybe I'll buy myself a gun and go hunting."

He worked diligently, without missing a day or being fined for tardiness. He was a silent person, and there was discontentment in his

large blue eyes, so like his mother's. He did not buy himself a gun or go fishing, but soon it became evident that he was diverging from the path tread by everyone else. He went less often to parties, and while he disappeared on Sundays, he always came home sober. His mother's sharp glance perceived that her son's swarthy face was becoming thinner, his eyes more serious, and his lips compressed into a tight, stern line. It seemed that he must be nursing some grievance or was being wasted by illness. Formerly his friends had often dropped in, but now that they rarely found him at home, they stopped coming. His mother was pleased to see that her son was different from the rest of the young people at the factory, but she could not help being alarmed by the fact that he was stubbornly directing his course away from the dark stream of the life around him.

"Are you sure you are quite well, Pasha?" she would sometimes ask him.

"I'm perfectly well," he would answer.

"You're so thin!" she would sigh.

He began bringing books home. He would read them on the sly and always hide them when he was finished. Sometimes he would copy out something from one of the books and hide the paper.

They spoke little and saw each other for only brief periods. In the morning he drank his tea in silence and went to work. At noon he came home to dinner, during the course of which they passed insignificant remarks. Then he once more disappeared until evening. In the evening he washed up, ate his supper, and then read for a long time. On Sundays he left the house in the morning and returned only late at night. She knew that he went into town and sometimes attended the theatre, but no one from the city ever came to visit him. It seemed to her that as time went on her son spoke less and less, yet she was conscious of his using new words which she could not understand, while the coarse, sharp expressions he had formerly used disappeared from his speech. Many new details in his behaviour drew her attention: he stopped dressing foppishly and began to give more care to the cleanliness of his body and clothing. His movements became more free and deft, his manners simpler and less gruff. Yet his mother was worried by these inexplicable changes. New elements appeared even in his relations with her: sometimes he would sweep the floor, he always made his bed on Sundays, and in general tried to

help her in her work. None of the other men in the settlement ever did that.

One day he brought home a picture and hung it on the wall. It showed three people deep in conversation as they walked lightly and eagerly down the road.

"The resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus," explained Pavel.

The picture pleased his mother, but she thought to herself:

"Why don't you ever go to church if you are so fond of Christ?"

The number of books grew on the attractive shelves built by a carpenter with whom Pavel was friendly. The room took on a cosy look.

He usually called her "ma," but sometimes he would address her more affectionately:

"Don't go worrying about me, mother. I'll be coming home late tonight."

She liked that. She sensed something strong and serious in his words.

But her alarms increased. Their cause became no more tangible, yet her heart became ever more heavy with a sense of something out of the ordinary. Sometimes she was even displeased with her son, and then she would think:

"Other people behave natural enough, but he's like a monk. So very serious. It don't become his years."

Then again she would think:

"Maybe he has a girl somewhere."

But it took money to have a girl, and he handed over to her almost his entire wage.

Thus passed the weeks and months until two years had gone by —two years of this strange, silent life full of obscure thoughts and ever-increasing apprehension.

IV

One evening after supper Pavel drew the curtain over the window, and after hanging the tin lamp on the nail above his head, sat down in the corner and began to read. His mother came out of the kitchen when the dishes were washed up and slowly went over to him. He raised his head and looked at her inquiringly.

"It's nothing, Pasha—nothing at all," she muttered, and hastened back to the kitchen, her brows twitching nervously. But after a brief struggle with her thoughts, she washed her hands and once more approached her son.

"I wanted to ask you what it is you keep reading all the time," she said quietly.

He closed the book.

"Sit down, mom."

His mother sat down heavily and straightened her back, prepared to hear something very important.

Pavel spoke without looking at her, in a low voice which for some reason was very stern.

"I am reading forbidden books. They are forbidden because they tell the truth about us workingmen. They are printed on the sly, in secret, and if they find me with them they will put me in jail—in jail because I want to know the truth, understand?"

Suddenly she found difficulty in breathing. She opened her eyes wide and looked at her son, and it seemed to her that he was a stranger. His voice was different—deeper and richer and more resounding. He plucked at his thick moustache and gazed strangely into the corner from under bent brows. She became afraid for her son and pitied him.

"Why should you do that, Pasha?" she asked.

He raised his head and looked at her.

"Because I want to know the truth," he answered calmly and quietly.

His voice was soft but firm, and there was a stubborn glint in his eyes. In her heart she felt that her son had pledged himself for all time to something secret and frightening. She took everything in life as inevitable, and was used to submitting without question. So now she simply wept quietly, finding no words in a heart contracted with grief and longing.

"Don't cry," said Pavel softly and tenderly, but to her it seemed he was saying farewell.

"Just think what a life we live! Here you are forty years old, and what have you seen? Father beat you—now I realize that he took out his troubles on you—all the bitterness of his life. It overwhelmed him and he didn't realize where it all came from. He worked for thirty

years—began to work when the whole factory consisted of only two shops, and now there are seven."

She listened to him eagerly, but fearfully. Her son's eyes were burning with a lovely light. Resting his chest on the table, he leaned close to her tear-wet face and made his first speech on the truth that he had understood. With all the strength of his youth, with all the enthusiasm of a student proud of his knowledge and believing utterly in its truth, he spoke of the things that were clear to him. He spoke less to convince his mother than to test himself. Sometimes he stopped, at a loss for words, and then he became conscious of the pained face before him, with kindly eyes shining through a film of tears. They looked at him in fear and wonder. He pitied his mother, and began to speak again, but this time he spoke about her and about her life.

"What joy have you ever known?" he asked. "What has the past given you to remember?"

She listened and shook her head sadly, feeling something new and unknown, something joyful and grievous, which softly caressed her aching heart. This was the first time she had ever heard anyone speak about her and her life, and the words roused vague thoughts which had long since been discarded. they quietly revived a dying sense of dissatisfaction with life—the thoughts and feelings of distant youth. Then she had spoken of life with her girl friends. She had spoken at length about everything. but all her friends—and she herself—had only complained, without seeking an explanation for the hardness of their life. But now her son was sitting before her, and all that his eyes and face and words expressed touched her very heart, filling it with pride in this son, who so well understood his mother's life. who spoke to her of her sufferings. and pitied her.

But mothers are never pitied.

She knew that. All that he said about the life of women was the bitter, familiar truth, and within her breast stirred a tangle of feelings which warmed her heart with unwonted affection.

"What do you wish to do?" she asked, interrupting him.

"First study, and then teach others. We workingmen must study. We must find out and understand why our lives are so hard."

She was happy to see that his blue eyes, always so stern and se-

rious, were now filled with a soft and tender light. A quiet smile curved her lips, though tears still trembled in the wrinkles of her cheeks. She was torn between a feeling of pride in her son, who so clearly perceived the bitterness of life, and her realization that he was still young and that he spoke differently from everyone else, and that all by himself he had undertaken to struggle against this life which was habitual for everyone, including herself. And she wished to say to him:

"What can you do all by yourself, my darling?"

But she did not want to spoil her admiration for him, who had suddenly revealed himself to be so clever, though somewhat estranged from her.

Pavel saw the smile on his mother's lips, the concentration in her face, the love in her eyes, and it seemed to him that he had succeeded in making her understand the truth he championed, and young pride in the force of his words heightened his belief in himself. He spoke excitedly, now smiling, now frowning, and sometimes his words sounded with hate, and his mother was frightened when she heard these hard, ringing words, so that she shook her head and asked her son softly:

"Is it really like that, Pasha?"

"Yes it is," he answered firmly. And he told her about those who, in their desire to help the people, had sown the truth among them, for which the enemies of life had hunted them down like beasts, thrown them in jail and condemned them to penal servitude.

"I have seen such people!" he cried hotly. "They are the salt of the earth!"

The thought of these people frightened her, and once more she wanted to ask her son if it was really like that, but she did not dare. With bated breath she listened to his tales of men whom she did not understand, but who taught her son to say and think such dangerous things. At last she said to him:

"Soon it will be getting light. You better go to bed and get some sleep."

"I shall go to bed presently," he agreed. Then, bending down to her he said, "Have you understood what I said?"

"Yes," she answered with a sigh. Once more the tears flowed, and with a sudden impulse she cried, "It will be your ruin!"

He rose and crossed the room.

"Well, now you know what I am doing and where I go," he said. "I have told you everything. And if you love me, I beg you not to interfere, mother."

"Oh my dear, my dear!" she cried. "Maybe it'd be better if you hadn't told me!"

He took her hand and pressed it tightly.

She was overwhelmed by the warm feeling with which he had pronounced the word "mother," and by that strange and unaccustomed pressing of her hand.

"I won't do a thing," she said brokenly. "Only you take care of yourself—take care!" Without understanding what danger threatened her son, she added mournfully, "You keep getting thinner and thinner."

She swept his strong, tall body with a loving glance.

"Go ahead and live as you see fit—far be it from me to interfere. Only one thing I ask—don't be too brazen in your talking with people. You must have the fear of people in you. They hate each other—live in greed and envy—take joy in hurting each other. Once you begin to show them up and accuse them, they'll hate you and destroy you."

Her son stood in the doorway listening to her grievous words. He smiled when she had finished.

"You are right—people are bad," he said. "But when I learned that there is such a thing as justice in the world, people seemed better." Again he smiled and added, "I myself don't know how it happened. In childhood I was afraid of everyone. Then as I grew up I began to hate everyone—some for their rottenness, others—I don't know why—just because. But now everything seems different. Maybe because I pity people. Somehow my heart softened when I realized that not everyone is responsible for being filthy. . . ."

He stopped speaking, as though listening to a voice within him, then he added quietly and thoughtfully:

"So there's the truth for you."

"Ah, Christ Saviour, it's a dangerous change has come over you," breathed his mother with a glance at him.

When he had fallen asleep, she rose quietly from her bed and went to him. Pavel lay on his back, the stern and stubborn contours of his

swarthy face standing out sharply against the white pillow. His mother stood there barefoot in her nightdress, her hands pressed to her breast, her lips moving soundlessly, while large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Once more they continued their silent life, distant, yet close to each other.

On a holiday in the middle of the week, Pavel turned to his mother as he was leaving the house:

"On Saturday I shall have some visitors from town," he said.

"From town?" repeated his mother, and suddenly began to whimper.

"What's the matter, mom?" exclaimed Pavel in annoyance.

She wiped her eyes on her apron.

"I don't know," she said with a sigh. "Nothing special...."

"Afraid?"

"Yes," she admitted.

He bent toward her and spoke gruffly, as his father had been wont to speak.

"It's fear that's the ruin of us," he said. "And those who boss us take advantage of our fear and keep scaring us."

"Don't be angry," wailed his mother unhappily. "How should I not be afraid? All my life I've been afraid. My soul is all grown over with fear!"

"Forgive me, but it's the only way," he said softly.

And he went away.

For three days her heart trembled, dying away every time she remembered that those strange and terrible people would come to her house. It was they who had pointed out to her son the path he was travelling....

Saturday evening Pavel came home from the factory, washed up, changed his clothes, and again went out.

"If anyone comes, say I'll be right back," he said, without looking at his mother. "And for goodness' sake don't be afraid."

She sank weakly down onto a bench. Pavel glanced at her sullenly.

"Perhaps you'll go away somewhere," he suggested.

His words hurt her.

"No. Why should I?"

It was the end of November. Fine dry snow had fallen on the frozen earth during the day, and she could hear it creak under the feet of her son as he walked away. Darkness clung to the window-panes, hostilely lying in wait. She remained sitting there clasping the bench with both hands and watching the door....

It seemed to her that from all sides evil people in strange clothes were creeping through the darkness. Now stealthy steps were encircling the house, and fingers were feeling the walls.

She heard someone whistling a tune. The sound wreathed thinly through the silence, sad and melodious, wandering in the empty darkness as though in search of something. It drew near and suddenly broke off at the very window, seeming to have plunged into the wood of the wall.

Scuffling footsteps sounded in the entranceway. The mother started and stood up, her brows raised tensely.

The door opened. At first a head in a large, shaggy cap appeared, then a long body stooped through the low door, after which the person straightened, raised his right arm in greeting, and said with a noisy sigh:

"Good evening."

The mother bowed without answering.

"Pavel home?"

The visitor slowly took off his fur jacket, raised one leg as he brushed the snow off his boot with his cap, repeated the action with his other leg, tossed his cap into the corner and ambled across the room. After examining one of the chairs as though to assure himself it would hold him, he sat down and yawned, covering his mouth with his hand. He had a well-formed, close-cropped head. His face was clean-shaven, except for a moustache with drooping ends. He carefully studied the room with large, protruding grey eyes.

"This your own cottage or do you rent it?" he asked, crossing his legs and rocking back and forth on the chair.

"We rent it," answered the mother from where she sat facing him.

"Not much of a place," he observed.

"Pasha will come soon, just wait a bit."

"That's what I'm doing," replied the tall man.

She was encouraged by his calmness and his soft voice and his plain face. His look was frank and friendly, and sparks of amusement played in the depths of his clear eyes. There was something winning about his entire figure—so angular and drooping and long-legged. He was wearing a blue blouse and wide black trousers stuck into the tops of his boots. She wanted to ask who he was and where he came from and whether he had known her son long, but all of a sudden he swung forward and was himself the first to speak.

"Who ever gave you such a blow on the head, *nenko*?"* he asked.

His voice was gentle and his eyes were obviously smiling, but the woman was offended by his question.

"What business is it of yours, young man?" she asked with cool politeness, through tight lips.

"Nothing to get angry about," he said, leaning toward her with his entire body. "I only asked you because my foster mother had the same kind of a scar as yours. It was the man she lived with gave it to her—a shoemaker—struck her with a last. She was a laundress and him a shoemaker. She picked him up somewhere—to her eternal grief—old soak that he was! That was after she had adopted me. How he did beat her! My skin used to crack open with fright!"

The mother was disarmed by his confidence, and she began to fear that Pavel would be angry with her for having answered him so testily.

"I wasn't really sore," she said with a guilty smile. "But you asked me so sudden like. It was my man did it to me too, may his soul rest in peace! Is it a Tatar** you'll be?"

The man jerked his legs and gave such a broad grin that his ears moved. But then he became serious.

"No, not yet," he said.

"Your speech don't sound Russian," explained the mother with a smile, catching the joke.

"It's better than Russian," said the guest merrily. "I'm a *khokhol* from Kanev."

* *Nenko*—affectionate term for "mother" used in the Ukraine.—*Trans.*

** Old-clothes men were commonly called Tatars.—*Trans.*

"Been here long?"

"Lived in the town for a year or so, but moved out to the factory about a month ago. Some fine people here—your son and a few others. So it's here I'll be staying, I guess!" he said, pulling at his moustache.

She liked him, and wanted to repay him somehow for the kind words he had said about her son.

"Maybe you'd have a glass of tea?" she asked.

"Why should I have it all by myself?" he replied with a lift of his shoulders. "Wait until the rest come—then you can treat the lot of us."

His words reminded her of her fears.

"If only the rest would be like him!" she thought.

Once more there were steps out in the entranceway. The door was hurriedly opened and again the mother stood up. But to her surprise a young girl entered the kitchen. She was rather small, had the plain face of a peasant, and wore her blond hair in a single thick braid.

"Am I late?" asked the girl softly.

"No, you're not," answered the *khokhol*, glancing through the doorway. "Walk over?"

"Of course. Are you the mother of Pavel Mikhailovich? Good evening to you. My name is Natasha."

"And your patronymic?" asked the mother.

"Vasilyevna. And yours?"

"Pelagea Nilovna."

"So now we are acquainted."

"Yes," said the mother with a slight catch of her breath as she smiled at the girl.

"Was it cold?" asked the *khokhol* as he helped the girl out of her things.

"Dreadfully crossing the fields. Such a wind!"

Her voice was rich and clear, her mouth small, her lips full, and altogether she was round and fresh as a peach. After taking off her things, she rubbed her rosy cheeks with little hands inflamed with cold, and quickly entered the other room, tapping sharply across the floor with the heels of her shoes.

"She don't wear rubbers," was the mother's mental note.

"Br-r-r-r!" said the girl with a shiver. "You can't imagine how fr-r-rozen I am!"

"Here, I'll put up the samovar," said the mother, hurrying into the kitchen. "Just a minute."

It seemed that she had known this girl for a long time, and loved her with the fine, sympathetic love of a mother. She smiled as she listened to the conversation taking place in the next room.

"What are you moping about, Nakhodka?" asked the girl.

"Nothing special," answered the *khokhol* quietly. "The widow has nice eyes, and I was thinking that maybe my mother's were the same. I often think of my mother, and it seems to me she must be alive."

"But you said she had died."

"It was my foster mother who died. I'm speaking of my own mother. She's probably begging somewhere on the streets of Kiev. And drinking vodka. And the police striking her in the face whenever she gets drunk. . . ."

"Poor boy," thought the mother with a sigh.

Natasha said something quick and soft and impassioned. Once more the voice of the *khokhol* rang out.

"You're still an infant—haven't eaten enough onions yet. It's a hard thing to bring a man into the world, but it's even harder to teach him to be decent."

"Just think of that!" exclaimed the mother to herself, and felt an impulse to say a kind word to the *khokhol*. But the door was suddenly opened and in came Nikolai Vesovshchikov, son of the old thief Danila. Nikolai was known throughout the settlement for his unsociability. He always held himself sullenly aloof, and for that reason people were mean to him.

"What is it, Nikolai?" she asked in some surprise.

"Pavel home?" he asked without greeting her as he wiped his broad, pock-marked face with the palm of his hand.

"No."

He glanced into the room and then went in.

"Evening, comrades," he said.

"Him?" thought the mother disapprovingly, and was amazed to see Natasha offer him her hand as though she were glad to see him.

Nikolai was followed by two others, both of them mere boys.

The mother knew one of them, a sharp-featured, curlyheaded lad with a high forehead named Feodor, nephew of the old factory hand Sizov. The other was shy and had straight hair combed flat to his head. She did not know him, but he also offered no terrors. At last Pavel put in his appearance, accompanied by two young factory workers whom she knew.

"You've put up the samovar?" Pavel said gently. "Thanks a lot."

"Should I go buy some vodka?" she asked, not knowing how to express her gratitude for something undefined.

"No, that's not needed," answered Pavel with an amiable smile.

She was struck by the idea that her son had exaggerated the danger of this gathering in order to have a good laugh on her.

"Are those the—forbidden people?" she asked softly.

"The very ones," answered Pavel, slipping into the next room.

"You don't say!" she called after him affectionately, thinking with condescension, "He's still a mere child."

VI

When the samovar was ready, the mother carried it into the room. The guests were sitting crowded about the table, with Natasha in the corner under the lamp holding a book in her hands.

"In order to understand why people have such a nasty life..." said Natasha.

"And why they themselves are so nasty..." put in the *khokhol.*

"It's necessary to take a look into the origins of their living...."

"Take a look, my dears, take a good look," muttered the mother as she brewed the tea.

Everyone became silent.

"What's the idea, mom?" asked Pavel with a frown.

"The idea?" She glanced up and saw that everyone was looking at her.

"Oh, I was just talking to myself," she murmured in embarrassment. "Thinking as why shouldn't you take a look."

Natasha laughed and Pavel chuckled.

"Thanks for the tea, *nenko,*" said the *khokhol.*

"Better hold your thanks til you've had a taste," she said; then with a glance at her son, "Maybe I'm in the way?"

"How could a hostess be in the way of her guests?" replied Natasha. "But oh, if you'd only hurry up and give me some tea! I'm shivering all over and my feet are like ice." Her tone was plaintive, like that of a child.

"Right away, right away," cried the mother hurriedly.

When Natasha had drunk her tea she gave a loud sigh, tossed her braid over her shoulder and began to read from the illustrated book with a yellow cover. The mother tried to make no noise with the dishes as she poured out the tea and listened. The girl's ringing voice merged with the meditative hum of the samovar, while through the room unwound a fair ribbon of tales about wild men who once inhabited caves and hunted with stones. It all sounded like a fairy tale, and the mother kept glancing at her son, wanting to ask him what could be forbidden about such knowledge. But soon she tired of following the reading and began to study the guests furtively, so that neither they nor her son should be aware of it.

Pavel was sitting next to Natasha, and he was the handsomest of them all. As Natasha leaned over her book, she often pushed back the hair that kept sliding over her temples. With a toss of her head and a lowering of her voice she would make remarks of her own, without looking at the book, glancing affectionately at the faces about her. The *khokhol* sprawled at one end of the table and squinted down his nose to get a look at the ends of the moustache he was plucking. Vesovshchikov sat as straight as a stick on his chair, his palms pushing against his knees, his pock-marked, browless, thin-lipped face as expressionless as a mask. He kept his narrow eyes fixed unwinking on the reflection of his face in the shining brass samovar, and it seemed that he was not even breathing. Little Feodor moved his lips noiselessly as he listened to the reading, as though repeating the words of the book to himself, while his friend sat all bent over, his elbows on his knees, his cheeks in his palms, a thoughtful smile on his lips. One of the chaps who had come with Pavel was redheaded and curlyhaired, with merry green eyes. He kept twisting about restlessly, as though he wanted to say something. The other chap, blond and close-cropped, kept stroking his head with his hand and looking at the floor, so that his face could not be seen. It was pecul-

iarly cosy in the room. The mother felt something which was quite unfamiliar to her, and against the background of Natasha's voice she recalled the noisy evenings of her own youth, the crude language and cynical jokes of the boys, whose breath always reeked of vodka. And as she recalled them, her heart contracted with self-pity.

She remembered how she had become engaged to her husband. At one of those parties he had caught her in a dark entranceway and pressed her body against the wall.

"Going to marry me?" he had asked her gruffly. She had been hurt and offended, but he kept on painfully clutching at her breasts and pouring his hot, moist breath into her face. In her effort to free herself from his grasp she had torn away to one side.

"Where you going?" he had roared. "Give me an answer—you!"

She had said nothing and could scarcely breathe from the hurt and the shame of it.

Someone had opened the door into the entranceway, and he slowly loosened his grip.

"On Sunday I'll send the matchmaker around," he said.

And he did.

The mother closed her eyes and gave a deep sigh.

"I want to know how people *ought* to live, and not how they used to live," came the protesting voice of Vesovshchikov.

"That's right," said the redhead, getting up.

"I don't agree with you," cried Feodor.

An argument arose in which words leaped up like flames. The mother did not understand what they were shouting about. All the faces were flushed with excitement, but no one lost his temper and no one used the crude language she was so familiar with.

"They are ashamed to in front of the girl," she decided.

She liked the serious expression on Natasha's face as she kept watching everyone attentively, as though she found these boys mere children.

"Wait a minute, comrades," she cried suddenly, and they all became silent and looked at her.

"Those of you are right who say that we must know everything. We must kindle in ourselves the light of reason, to shine for those whose minds are dark with ignorance. We must have a true and

honest answer for everything. We must know the whole truth and the whole falsehood. . . ."

The *khokhol* listened and nodded his head in rhythm to her words. Vesovshchikov, along with the redhead, and one of the boys from the factory who had come with Pavel, stood off in one group, and for some reason the mother did not like them.

When Natasha had finished speaking, Pavel stood up.

"Is it only a full stomach we want? Nothing of the sort!" he said calmly, looking at the three. "We must show those who are straddling our backs and holding blinders over our eyes that we see everything. We are not stupid, and we are not beasts to be wanting nothing but a full stomach. We want to live a life worthy of human beings. We must prove to our enemies that the life of drudgery they have saddled us with doesn't keep us from being their intellectual equals and even superiors!"

A feeling of pride trembled in his mother's breast as she listened to him. How well he spoke!

"There are plenty of people who get enough to eat, but few who are honest!" said the *khokhol*. "We must build a bridge across the swamps of this rotten life to the future kingdom of human brotherhood. That's the task facing us, comrades!"

"Once it's time to fight, why sit with folded hands?" objected Vesovshchikov gruffly.

It was after midnight when the gathering broke up. Vesovshchikov and the redhead were the first to leave, and this again displeased the mother.

"What a hurry you're in!" she thought as she bowed to them stiffly.

"Will you see me home, Nakhodka?" asked Natasha.

"Naturally," answered the *khokhol*.

"Your stockings are pretty thin for this kind of weather," said the mother to Natasha as the latter was putting on her things in the kitchen. "Maybe you'd let me knit you a pair of woolen ones?"

"Thank you, Pelagea Nilovna, but woolen ones itch," answered Natasha with a laugh.

"I'll knit you the kind that don't itch," said the mother.

Natasha looked at her through narrowed lids, and her steady gaze made the older woman uneasy.

"You must excuse my foolishness. It was from my heart I said it," she added quietly.

"What a darling you are!" replied Natasha as quietly, with an impulsive pressure of her hand.

"Good night, *nenko*," said the *khokhol*, glancing into her eyes as he ducked through the door in the wake of Natasha.

The mother looked at her son. He was standing in the doorway and smiling.

"What are you smiling at?" she asked uneasily.

"Nothing special. Just in a good mood."

"I may be old and stupid, but even I can appreciate what is decent," she answered huffily.

"That's fine," he said. "But you better be getting to bed, high time."

"I'm on my way."

She fussed about the table clearing away the dishes, very much pleased—so pleased, in fact, that she broke out in a perspiration. She was glad that everything had been so pleasant and had ended so peacefully.

"You were good to think it up, Pasha," she said. "The *khokhol* is very nice. And the girl—what a smart little thing she is! Who is she?"

"A teacher," answered Pavel shortly, pacing the floor.

"She must be very poor. So badly dressed. Don't take much to catch a cold. Where are her parents?"

"In Moscow," answered Pavel, then, stopping in front of his mother he said softly and very seriously, "Her father is rich. He's in the iron business and owns a number of buildings. But he put her out because she chose this path in life. She was brought up in warmth and comfort, used to having everything she wanted. But now she walks seven versts at night all alone...."

His mother was overwhelmed by this information. She stopped in the centre of the room twitching her brows and looking at her son. Then she asked quietly:

"Has she gone into town?"

"Yes."

"Tsck-tsck! And she isn't afraid?"

"You can see for yourself that she isn't," laughed Pavel.

"But why? She could have spent the night here—slept with me."

"Not advisable. She might be seen here in the morning, and we don't want that."

His mother gazed thoughtfully out of the window.

"I don't understand what there is—dangerous—and forbidden—about this, Pavel," she said softly. "You don't do anything wrong, do you?"

"She was not quite sure of this and wanted her son's confirmation.

"We don't do anything wrong," he answered firmly, looking her calmly in the eye. "And yet all of us will land in jail some day. You should know this."

Her hands began to tremble.

"Maybe—God willing—you will escape somehow?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"No," answered her son gently. "I don't want to deceive you. There is no escape."

He smiled.

"Go to bed now. You're tired. Good night."

When she was alone she went to the window and stood looking out. It was cold and cloudy beyond the window. A wind blew the snow off the roofs of the sleepy little houses; it beat against the walls and whispered angrily as it swooped to the ground and chased little clouds of dry snowflakes along the street.

"Have mercy on us, dear Jesus," whispered the mother softly.

Tears surged in her heart, and the anticipation of the misfortune her son had spoken of with such calm confidence fluttered in her breast as blindly as a moth in the night. Before her she seemed to see a snowy plain across which a tattered white wind raced and plunged, shrieking thinly. In the middle of the plain staggered the small dark figure of a girl. The wind whirled about her feet, blowing out her skirts and hurling the stinging snow into her face. She advanced with difficulty, her little feet sinking in the drifts. It was cold and fearful. Her body arched forward like a lonely blade of grass bent under the onslaught of an autumn wind. To her right, the forest wall rose out of the swamp, where thin birches and naked aspens whispered forlornly. Far up ahead glittered the lights of the town.

"Dear Saviour, have mercy," whispered the mother in a shudder of fear....

VII

The days slipped past one after the other like the beads of a rosary, building the weeks and the months. Every Saturday Pavel's friends gathered at his house, and every gathering represented one more step in the long stairway up which people were gradually rising to some distant goal.

New people joined the old ones. The little room in the Vlassovs' house grew crowded. Natasha kept coming tired and frozen, but always cheerful. Pavel's mother knitted her a pair of stockings, and she herself put them on the girl's little feet. At first Natasha laughed, but suddenly she became quiet and serious.

"Once I had a nurse who was also amazingly kind," she said softly. "How strange it is, Pelagea Nilovna—working people have such a hard, unfair life, and yet they are kinder than those..." indicating people far away—very far away from her.

"What a one you are!" said Pelagea. "Deprived of your parents and all...." She sighed and was silent, unable to give expression to her thoughts, but as she looked into Natasha's face she again experienced that feeling of gratitude for something undefined. She sat on the floor in front of her while the girl smiled musingly with her head bent forward.

"Deprived of my parents?" she repeated. "That isn't important. My father is a rough person, and so is my brother. And a drunkard besides. My older sister is unhappy—married a man many years older than herself—very rich but mean and stingy. I feel sorry for my mother. She's a simple woman, like you. As tiny as a mouse, and runs as fast as a mouse and is just as afraid of everything. Sometimes —I want to see her—dreadfully!"

"You poor dear!" said the mother, shaking her head sadly.

The girl quickly threw back her head and stretched out her hand as though pushing away something.

"Oh no! Sometimes I am so glad—so very happy!"

Her face paled and her blue eyes flashed. She placed her hands on the mother's shoulders.

"If you only knew, if you could only understand what a tremendous thing we are doing!" she said softly and impressively.

Something approaching envy touched the heart of Pelagea Vlassova.

"I am too old for that. And illiterate..." she said sadly, rising from the floor....

...Pavel talked more often, for a longer time, and with more intensity—and kept getting thinner. It seemed to his mother that when he looked at Natasha and spoke with her, the severe expression of his eyes softened, his voice became more gentle, and his whole attitude was simpler.

"May the Lord help it to be so," she thought. And smiled.

Whenever the arguments at their gatherings became too heated and stormy, the *khokhol* would get up and stand there swaying back and forth like the hammer of a bell while he said a few kind, simple words that quickly calmed everyone. The sullen Vesovshchikov was forever urging the others to do something or other; he and the redhead, whom they called Samoilov, began all the arguments. They were supported by the towheaded Ivan Bukin, who looked as though he had been washed in lye. Yakov Somov, smooth and clean, spoke little, but very seriously. He and Feodor Mazin, of the large brow, always supported Pavel and the *khokhol* in the arguments.

Sometimes Natasha's place was taken by Nikolai Ivanovich, a man in spectacles with a little blond goatee. He had been born in some distant province, which accounted for the peculiar accentuation of the "o's" in his speech. In general he was unique. He would speak of the simplest things—of family life, and children, and trade, and the police, and the price of bread and meat—all matters comprising the daily life of the people, yet he did it in such a way as to expose all that was false and irrational, all that was stupid and even ridiculous, but harmful to the masses. It seemed to the mother that he had come from very far away, from a different realm, in fact, where everyone lived an easy, honest life. Here everything was strange to him; and he could not get used to this life and accept it as inevitable. He disliked it, and this dislike roused in him a calm, persistent desire to change it. He had a yellowish face with fine lines about the eyes. His voice was soft and his hands were always warm. Whenever he shook hands with Pelagea Vlassova, he embraced her whole hand in his fingers, and she always felt calmed and comforted by such a greeting.

Other people from the town appeared at these gatherings—most often a tall, slender girl with enormous eyes in her pale face whose name was Sasha. There was something masculine in her walk and movements. She would draw her thick, dark eyebrows together severely, and the thin nostrils of her straight nose trembled when she spoke.

She was the first to announce in a sharp voice:

"We are—Socialists."

When the mother heard this, she stared in silent fright at the girl. Pelagea had heard that Socialists had killed the tsar. That had been in the days of her youth. At that time it was said that the landed gentry, in their desire to avenge themselves on the tsar for having freed their serfs, took an oath not to cut their hair until they had killed him. For that reason they had been called Socialists. Now Pelagea was at a loss to understand why her son and his friends called themselves Socialists.

When everyone had gone home, she went up to Pavel.

"Are you a Socialist, Pasha?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, standing before her strong and straight. "Why do you ask?"

His mother gave a deep sigh and dropped her eyes.

"Is it really so, Pavel? But they are—against the tsar. They even killed one of them."

Pavel crossed the room, stroking his cheek with his hand.

"We don't need to do things like that," he said with a short laugh.

Then he spoke to her for a long time in a quiet, serious voice. As she looked into his face she thought:

"He won't do anything wrong. He couldn't!"

After that the dreadful word was repeated again and again until the sharp edge was worn off and her ear became as used to it as to the dozens of other incomprehensible words they used. But she did not like Sasha and felt disturbed and uncomfortable in her presence.

One day she spoke about her to the *khokhol*, compressing her lips in displeasure.

"She's such a strict one! Giving everybody orders—you must do this, you must do that!"

The *khokhol* laughed out loud.

"You hit it, all right! Right in the bull's-eye, *nenko*! What do

you think of that, Pavel?" Winking to the mother, he added with a twinkle: "There's the nobility for you!"

"She's a fine person," said Pavel dryly.

"True enough," confirmed the *khokhol*, "only she doesn't understand one thing: for her it's 'must'; for us it's 'can' and 'want to.'"

They argued about something incomprehensible.

The mother also noticed that Sasha was strictest towards Pavel, sometimes even shouting at him. At such times Pavel would say nothing; he would only laugh and look into the girl's face with the same soft glance he had once turned to Natasha. The mother was displeased with this also.

Sometimes Pelagea was amazed by the joyous mood which would suddenly seize all of them. Usually this occurred on those evenings when they read newspaper accounts about the workers' movement abroad. Then the eyes of all of them would shine merrily and they would become strangely, childishly happy, laughing their clear, bright laughter and clapping each other affectionately over the shoulder.

"Hurrah for our German comrades!" shouted someone, as though drunk with his own joy.

"Long live the Italian workers!" they cried another time.

As they sent these cries far away to distant friends who did not know them and could not even understand their language, they seemed confident that these unknown people heard them and understood their delight.

"A fine thing it would be to write to them," said the *khokhol*, his eyes shining with all-embracing love, "so that they would know they have friends living here in Russia who believe in and propagate the same religion as theirs, live with the same purpose and rejoice in their victories."

With smiles on their lips they would speak of the French and the English and the Swedes as of their friends, people who were close to their hearts, whom they respected, and whose joys and sorrows they shared.

In this stuffy little room was born a feeling of spiritual affinity with the workers of the whole world. This feeling moved even the mother, and welded all of them into one great spirit. Though this feeling remained incomprehensible to her, it buttressed her with its intoxicating young strength, with its joy and hope.

"Just look at you!" she once said to the *khokhol*. "All people are your comrades—Jews and Armenians and Austrians. Glad and sorry for all of them!"

"For all of them, my *nenko*! All of them!" exclaimed the *khokhol*. "We know no tribes or nations. Only comrades, only enemies. All workingmen are our comrades; all rich men, all governments are our enemies. When you cast your eye over the earth and see how many of us workers there are, and how strong we are, then there is no end to your joy and the holiday in your heart! The Frenchman and the German feels just the same when he looks at life, *nenko*, and so does the Italian. We are all children of one mother—the invincible concept of the brotherhood of the workingmen of the whole world. This thought warms our hearts. It is the sun shining in a just heaven, and that heaven is in the heart of the worker. Whoever he is, whatever he calls himself, a Socialist is our brother in spirit for all time—yesterday and today and forever!"

This childlike but firm faith manifested itself ever more frequently among them, in an ever more elevated form, growing into a mighty force. And when the mother beheld it, she involuntarily sensed that in very truth the world had begotten something great and good, like the sun which she beheld with her own eyes.

Often they sang. In loud, happy voices they sang the simple songs that everybody knew, but sometimes they sang new songs, serious ones, with lovely harmonies but unusual melodies. These they sang in hushed voices, like church music. The faces of the singers flushed and paled, and great strength was expressed in the resounding words.

The mother was especially stirred by one of the new songs. It did not voice the painful cogitations of an injured soul wandering lonely through a labyrinth of doubt and uncertainty. Nor did it reflect the plaints of creatures crushed by need, petrified by fear, robbed of colour and personality. Nor yet could be heard the mournful sighs of forces blindly groping for space, nor the challenging cries of a reckless daring, ready to fling itself equally at the good and the evil. The song did not sing an undiscriminating sense of hurt and revenge, capable of destroying everything but incapable of building anything. There was nothing of the old slavish world in this song.

The mother did not like its harsh words and stern tune, but

behind the words and the tune was something greater, which drowned out the words and the tune, rousing in the heart a sense of something not to be embraced by thought. She saw this something in the eyes and faces of the young people, she sensed that it lived within their breasts, and she submitted to a force too great to be confined to any words or tune. Always she listened to this song with greater attention and deeper agitation than to any other.

They sang it softer than the others, but it sounded stronger, and enveloped the people like the air of a March day—the first day of approaching spring.

"Time for us to sing that song out on the streets!" Vesovshchikov would say sullenly.

When his father was put in jail again for his latest theft, Vesovshchikov said to his comrades:

"We can meet at my house now."

Almost every evening one of Pavel's friends came home with him after work and they would sit reading and making notes, too hurried and absorbed even to wash up. They had supper and tea with books in their hands and it became harder and harder for the mother to understand what they talked about.

"We need to start a newspaper," Pavel often said.

Life became more rushed and feverish and people moved more swiftly from one book to another, like bees going from flower to flower.

"They're beginning to talk about us," said Vesovshchikov. "They'll begin roping us in soon."

"A herring was born to land in a net," observed the *khokhol.*

The mother grew fonder of him every day. When he called her "*nenko*" it was as if an infant's soft hand had caressed her cheek. If Pavel was busy on a Sunday, the *khokhol* would chop the wood. One day he arrived with a board over his shoulder, and taking up the hatchet, he quickly and skilfully built a new porch step to replace the one that had rotted away. Another time he just as unconspicuously mended the fence. He always whistled some sad and lovely tune as he worked.

"Let's take the *khokhol* in as a boarder," she said to her son one day. "It'll be better for both of you—you won't have to be running to each other's houses."

"Why should you make things harder for yourself?" answered Pavel with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Nonsense," she said. "All my life's been hard for no good reason. Let it be hard for the sake of a good man like him."

"Just as you say," said her son. "I'll be glad if he comes."

So the *khokhol* moved in.

VIII

The little house on the outskirts of the settlement attracted people's attention; its walls had already been carefully examined by dozens of suspicious eyes. The spotted wings of rumour fluttered anxiously above it. People tried to scare out the something mysterious they sensed hiding behind the walls of the house on the embankment. At night they peered through the windows and sometimes even tapped on the glass, immediately running away in fright.

One day Pelagea was stopped on the street by the saloonkeeper Beguntsov, a fine looking old man who always wore a vest of thick purple plush and a black silk kerchief about his flabby red neck. His sharp, shiny nose was saddled by a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, as a result of which he was nicknamed "Bone eyes."

Without stopping for breath or waiting for an answer, he poured a hail of dry, cracked words over the mother.

"How be you, Pelagea Nilovna? And your son? Not thinking of getting married, is he? In full flower for it, I'd be saying. The sooner the sons are married, the easier for the parents. A man keeps up better body and soul in a family—like a mushroom in vinegar. I'd be marrying him off if I was you. The times demand a careful eye on how a body deports himself these days—with people starting to live by their own heads. A mix-up in thinking and a freedom in acting as is worthy of our reproach. The young folks don't go to God's church any more and keep away from public places, sneaking off in dark corners to whisper their secrets. Why for should they whisper, I'd like to know? Why for should they shun people? What can it be a body's scared to say in front of people—in the saloon for example? Secrets! The only place for secrets is in our holy apostolic church! All other secrets as is perpetrated in corners comes from a

mix-up of the mind. Wishing you the best of health, Pelagea Nilovna!"

Elaborately taking off his cap, he flourished it in the air and was gone, leaving the mother nonplussed.

Another time the Vlassovs' neighbour, Maria Korsunova, a blacksmith's widow who earned her living by peddling food at the factory gates, met her at the market and also said:

"Keep an eye on that son of yours, Pelagea!"

"What do you mean?" asked the mother.

"Rumours is going around," said Maria secretively. "Bad ones, mother o' mine. Like as if he's forming a secret organization, like the *khlisti*.* A sect they call it. Going to thrash each other like the *khlisti*. . . ."

"Enough of such nonsense, Maria!"

"Where there's smoke, there's sure to be a fire," observed the peddler.

The mother reported these conversations to her son, but he only shrugged his shoulders, while the *khokhol* laughed in his deep, soft way.

"The girls are also offended," she said. "Fine lads as you are, good enough for any girl, all hard working and no drunkards, but it's not a bit of attention you're paying them. They say that girls of doubtful reputation come visit you from the town. . . ."

"Oh, of course!" exclaimed Pavel with a frown of disgust.

"In a bog, everything stinks," said the *khokhol* with a sigh. "It'd be better if you'd explain to the little fools what married life means, *nenko*. Then they wouldn't be in such a hurry to break their necks."

"Ah, me!" said the mother. "They see everything well enough, and they understand, but what else lies in store for them?"

"If they understood, they'd find a way out," observed Pavel.

His mother glanced at his stern face.

"Why shouldn't you teach them? Invite the smarter ones to come here."

"It wouldn't do," said her son dryly.

"What if we tried?" asked the *khokhol*.

* *Khlisti—khlist* in Russian means *whip*, and this name has been applied to a fanatic religious sect.—*Trans.*

Pavel was silent before he answered.

"They'd just begin going off in pairs, some of them would get married, and that'd be the end of it."

His mother became thoughtful. She was disturbed by Pavel's ascetic severity. She could see that everyone, even older comrades like the *khokhol,* took his advice, but it seemed to her that they feared him and that no one loved him because of this severity.

One evening when she had already gone to bed and her son and the *khokhol* were still reading, the sound of their lowered conversation came to her through the thin partition.

"I like that Natasha," exclaimed the *khokhol* suddenly.

"I know it," answered Pavel after a pause.

She could hear the *khokhol* get up slowly and begin pacing the floor in his bare feet. He began to whistle softly and forlornly. Once more he spoke.

"I wonder if she has noticed."

Pavel did not answer.

"What do you think?" asked the *khokhol,* lowering his voice.

"She has," answered Pavel. "That's why she stopped coming here."

The *khokhol* drew his feet heavily across the floor and once more his soft whistling throbbed in the room.

"What if I tell her?" he asked.

"Tell her what?"

"Tell her—that I—" began the *khokhol* softly.

"Why should you?" interrupted Pavel.

The mother heard the *khokhol* stop his pacing, and she sensed that he was smiling.

"I figure that if you love a girl you ought to tell her, or nothing will come of it."

Pavel snapped his book shut.

"What do you expect to come of it?" he asked.

Both of them were silent for a long time.

"Well?" asked the *khokhol.*

"You must give yourself clearly to understand what you want, Andrei," said Pavel slowly. "Suppose she loves you—I doubt it, but just suppose—and you get married. A fine match! She's an intellectual—you're a workingman! Children will come and you'll be the

only one to support them—and what a lot of work it will take to do that! Life will become a grind for the sake of a loaf of bread, for the sake of the children and the rent. You'll be lost to the cause. Both of you."

The room became quiet. Then Pavel spoke again, and his tone seemed less downright.

"It would be better to give up all that, Andrei. Don't make it hard for her."

Silence. The pendulum of the clock sounded distinctly as it beat out the seconds.

"Half my heart loves, half of it hates. Do you call that a heart?" said the *khokhol.*

The pages of a book rustled—Pavel must have gone on with his reading. His mother lay with her eyes closed, afraid to breathe. She pitied the *khokhol* with all her heart, but she pitied her son even more.

"The poor dear," she thought.

"So you think I shouldn't say anything?" burst out the *khokhol* suddenly.

"That's the honest thing to do," said Pavel quietly.

"So that's what we'll do," said the *khokhol.* In a few seconds he added softly and sadly, "It'll be hard for you, Pavel, when you get like this."

"It's already hard."

The wind scraped at the walls of the house. The pendulum kept precisely marking the passage of time.

"It's no joke—this," said the *khokhol* slowly.

The mother buried her face in the pillow and wept noiselessly.

In the morning it seemed to her that Andrei had shrunk in stature and become even more likeable. Her son was as straight and thin and silent as ever. Heretofore she had always addressed the *khokhol* as Andrei Onisimovich, but today without noticing it she said:

"Andryusha, you better have your boots mended or you'll be catching cold."

"I'll buy myself a new pair next pay day," he replied with a laugh. Then he flung his long arm across her shoulders and said, "Maybe you're my real mother after all! Only you don't want to admit it because I'm so ugly, that it?"

She slapped him on the hand without answering. She wanted to say many loving words, but her heart was constricted with pity and the words would not leave her lips.

IX

People in the settlement began to speak about the Socialists who were distributing leaflets written in blue ink. These leaflets harshly criticized the management of the factory, told about strikes in Petersburg and in the south of Russia, and called the workers to unite in the defence of their own interests.

Middle-aged people who were making good money at the factory became angry.

"Troublemakers!" they said. "Need to have their mugs smashed for such things!" And they took the leaflets to their bosses.

The young people read them with enthusiasm.

"It's all true!" they said.

The majority of the workers, worn out by their labour, responded apathetically.

"Nothing will come of it. As though you could get away with a thing like that!"

But the leaflets caused a stir, and when in the course of a week no new issue appeared, the workers began to say to each other, "Looks like they've quit printing them."

The following Monday, however, new ones were issued, and once more the workers began to buzz among themselves.

At the factory and in the saloon appeared people whom nobody knew. These people kept looking about and asking questions and sticking their noses into everyone's business, rousing suspicion either by their excessive caution or by the manner in which they forced themselves on people.

The mother realized that all this excitement was caused by the work of her son. She saw how people were drawing in about him, and anxiety for his welfare mingled with pride.

One evening Maria Korsunova knocked at the Vlassovs' window, and when the mother opened it, said in a loud whisper:

"Take care, Pelagea! They've got it coming now! There's to be

a search made of your house tonight, and the Mazins' and the Vesovshchikovs'."

Maria's thick lips slapped together quickly, she sniffled through her fleshy nose, blinked and glanced from side to side as she kept her eye on someone out in the street.

"And I don't know nothing and didn't tell you nothing and didn't see you today, hear?"

She disappeared.

After closing the window, the mother slowly sank down onto a chair. But a realization of the danger threatening her son brought her quickly to her feet. She dressed hastily, swathing her head in a shawl, and ran to Feodor Mazin's. He was ill, and for that reason had not gone to the factory. When she entered he was sitting at the window reading a book and nursing his right hand, the thumb of which was sticking up unnaturally. He paled on hearing the news and jumped up.

"That's a fine how-do-you-do!" he muttered.

"What shall we do?" asked Pelagea, wiping the sweat off her brow with a trembling hand.

"Wait a minute—don't get scared," answered Feodor as he pushed back his curly hair with his well hand.

"You're scared yourself!" she cried.

"Me?" He blushed and smiled self-consciously. "Hm-m, devil take it! . . . We must let Pavel know. I'll send somebody. But you go home and don't worry. They won't beat us, will they?"

When she got home she gathered up all the books and began pacing the floor, clutching them to her breast as she glanced into the stove, under the stove, even into the water barrel. She imagined that Pavel would immediately rush home from the factory, but he did not come. At last, exhausted, she sat down on a bench in the kitchen with the books under her, and there she remained, afraid to move, until Pavel and the *khokhol* came home.

"Do you know?" she cried on seeing them.

"Yes, we know," smiled Pavel. "Are you afraid?"

"I'm so afraid, so afraid. . . ."

"You mustn't be," said the *khokhol*. "That won't help any."

"Hasn't even put up the samovar," observed Pavel.

"On account of these," said the mother guiltily, getting up and pointing to the books.

Her son and the *khokhol* burst out laughing, and that made her feel better. Pavel selected a few of the books and took them out in the yard to hide.

"There's nothing to get frightened about at all, *nenko*," said the *khokhol* as he lighted the samovar. "Only it's disgraceful that people should waste their time on such nonsense. Grown men with swords at their belts and spurs on their boots will come here and rummage through everything. They'll look under the bed and under the stove, go down into the cellar if you've got one and climb up into the attic. They'll get cobwebs in their faces and snort in disgust. They'll be annoyed and ashamed, and for that reason they'll pretend to be very ferocious and very angry. They realize very well what a loathsome job theirs is. Once they felt so embarrassed at raking over all my things that they just quit and went away. Another time they took me with them. They threw me in jail and kept me there for about four months. You don't do anything in jail but sit on and on. Then you get a summons—soldiers lead you through the streets—some big chief asks you questions. They're not a very smart lot, the chiefs—talk a lot of twaddle, then order the soldiers to take you back to jail. So they keep yanking you back and forth like that—after all, they've got to do something to earn their pay! And in the long run they let you go free, and that's all!"

"What a way you have of talking, Andryusha!" exclaimed the mother.

He raised his red face from where he was kneeling to blow up the samovar and asked, twisting his whiskers:

"What kind of a way?"

"As if nobody ever hurt you."

"Is there a soul unhurt anywhere on earth?" he said with a smile, getting up and shaking his head. "They've hurt me so much I don't notice it any more. What can you do about it, once people are like that? It just interferes with your work if you notice it, and it's a waste of time to brood over your hurts. That's the way life is! I used to get mad at people, but then I saw it wasn't worth while. Everybody's afraid his neighbour's going to wallop him, so he tries to catch him on the nose first. That's the way life is, *nenko* mine!"

His words flowed smoothly, driving away her fears of the coming search; his prominent eyes smiled, and she noticed how agile he was, in spite of his clumsiness.

The mother sighed.

"May God give you happiness, Andryusha," she said fervently.

The *khokhol* strode over to the samovar and once more squatted down before it.

"If I get presented with a bit of happiness I won't refuse it," he muttered, "but I'll not go begging for it."

Pavel came in from the yard.

"They'll never find them," he remarked confidently, and began to wash up. While he was drying his hands he turned to his mother:

"If you show them you're afraid they'll think: must be something in this house to make her tremble so. You know that we're not doing anything wrong; justice is on our side, and we'll work all our lives for the sake of this justice. That's the only thing we're guilty of, so why should we be afraid?"

"I'll pull myself together, Pasha," she promised. But in the next breath she burst out miserably: "If they'd only hurry up and get it over with!"

They did not come that night, and the next morning the mother anticipated the boys' jibes by being the first to laugh at herself.

"Got scared before the scare," she said.

X

The gendarmes put in their appearance almost a month after that alarming evening. Nikolai Vesovshchikov had come to see Pavel and Andrei, and the three of them were discussing their newspaper. It was late—almost midnight. The mother had already gone to bed, and as she dozed off she could hear their quiet, anxious voices. Then Andrei stealthily crossed the kitchen and closed the door behind him. There was the sound of a pail crashing, the door was thrown open, and the *khokhol* strode into the kitchen.

"Spurs are clanking!" he whispered loudly.

The mother jumped out of bed and snatched up her clothes in trembling fingers, but Pavel appeared in the doorway and said calmly:

"Go back to bed. You are—not well."

A rustle was heard in the entranceway. Pavel went to the door and pushed it open, saying:

"Who's there?"

Immediately a tall grey figure appeared, behind it another, while two gendarmes pushed Pavel away and took up positions on either side of him.

"Not the ones you were expecting, eh?" said a high, mocking voice.

The speaker was a tall, thin officer with a measly black moustache. One of the local policemen named Fedyakin went over to the mother's bed.

"That's his mother, Your Excellency," he said, one hand touching his cap and the other pointing into Pelagea's face. "And that's him," he added, waving toward Pavel.

"Pavel Vlassov?" asked the officer, narrowing his eyes.

Pavel nodded.

"I am to make a search of your house," continued the officer with a twist of his moustache. "Get up, woman! Who's in there?" After a glance through the door he went into the other room.

"Your name?" came his voice.

Two witnesses came through the door of the entranceway. One of them was the old foundry hand Tveryakov and the other the stoker Rybin, a heavy, dusky fellow who rented a room in Tveryakov's house.

"Evening, Nilovna," he said to the mother in a gruff bass voice.

As she put on her clothes she kept muttering to herself to keep up her courage:

"Never heard of such a thing! Coming in the middle of the night like this—people in bed already, and in they come!"

The room was crowded and for some reason smelled strongly of shoe polish. Two gendarmes and the local chief of police noisily removed the books from the shelves and piled them on the table in front of the officer. Two others pounded the walls with their fists, glanced under the chairs, and one of them even climbed clumsily on top of the stove. The *khokhol* and Vesovshchikov stood close together in one corner. Nikolai's pock-marked face broke out in red blotches, and he did not take his little grey eyes off the officer. The *khokhol* stood twisting his moustache, and when the mother

entered the room he gave a short laugh and nodded his head to her encouragingly.

In order to conquer her fear she did not move sidewise as usual, but straight forward with her chest high, and this gave her figure an amusing air of pompousness. She walked with noisy bravado, but her eyebrows trembled.

The officer grabbed up the books with the thin fingers of his white hands, quickly paged through them and tossed them aside with a deft movement. Some of the books fell softly to the floor. No one said a word. The only sounds were the panting of the sweating gendarmes, the clanking of spurs and the occasional question:

"Have you looked here?"

The mother stood against the wall next to Pavel, her arms folded like his, her eyes following the gendarmes. She felt weak in the knees, and a dry film dimmed her eyes.

"Why do you have to throw the books on the floor?" suddenly came Nikolai's harsh voice through the silence.

The mother started. Tveryakov jerked his head as though someone had pushed it; Rybin grunted and gave Nikolai a steady look.

The officer narrowed his eyes and darted a look at Nikolai's stony, pock-marked face. He began to finger the pages of the books more quickly. Sometimes he opened his large grey eyes very wide. as though he were suffering unbearable pain and were about to cry out in impotent protest.

"Hey you soldier!" said Vesovshchikov again. "Pick up the books!"

All the gendarmes turned around and looked at him, then at the officer. The latter raised his head and swept Nikolai's broad figure with a withering gaze.

"Hm-m-m!" he drawled through his nose. "Pick them up."

One of the gendarmes stooped down and began to gather up the tattered books.

"Nikolai better keep his mouth shut," whispered the mother to Pavel.

He shrugged his shoulders. The *khokhol* dropped his head.

"Who reads this Bible?"

"I do," answered Pavel.

"Whom do all these books belong to?"

"To me," said Pavel.

"Very well," said the officer, lounging back in the chair. He cracked the fingers of his slender hands, stretched his legs under the table, stroked his moustache and said to Nikolai:

"Are you Andrei Nakhodka?"

"Yes," said Nikolai, stepping forward. The *khokhol* took him by the shoulder and pushed him back.

"He is wrong. I am Andrei...."

The officer raised his hand and shook his little finger at Vesovshchikov.

"You better watch your step there!"

Then he began searching through his papers.

The moon-bright night looked through the window, cold and indifferent. The snow crunched under the feet of someone who slowly passed the house. "Nakhodka. Hm. Aren't you the bird who has already done time for political offences?" asked the officer.

"Yes. Once in Rostov and another time in Saratov. Only there the gendarmes were more polite."

The officer shut his right eye and rubbed it. Then he said, baring his small teeth:

"Do you happen to know the scum who are spreading criminal proclamations at the factory?"

The *khokhol* grinned, rocked on his toes, and was about to answer. when once more the voice of Nikolai rang out:

"We're getting our first look at scum."

There was a deep silence, everything was suspended for a second.

The scar on the mother's face grew white and her right brow shot up. Rybin's black beard began to tremble strangely; he combed his fingers through it and dropped his eyes.

"Take that dog out of here!" said the officer.

The two gendarmes grabbed Nikolai's arms and pushed him roughly into the kitchen, where he halted, his feet digging into the floor.

"Stop!" he cried. "I got to put on my things!"

The chief of police entered from the yard.

"Nothing out there. We looked everywhere."

"Naturally," scoffed the officer. "We're dealing with an experienced man."

The mother listened to his weak, brittle voice and looked fearfully into his yellow face, sensing that here was a merciless foe who felt a lordly contempt for the common people. She had rarely come into contact with such individuals and had almost forgotten their existence.

"So that's the sort that get upset by the leaflets," she thought.

"Andrei Onisimov, illegitimate son bearing the name of Nakhodka, you are under arrest!"

"What for?" asked the *khokhol* calmly.

"You'll find that out later," said the officer with honeyed malice. "Are you literate?" he asked, turning to Pelagea.

"No, she isn't," answered Pavel.

"I'm not asking you!" retorted the officer sharply. "Speak up, woman!"

The mother was overwhelmed by hatred for this man. Suddenly she was seized by a fit of trembling as though she had jumped into cold water; she straightened up, her scar became livid and her brows drew low over her eyes.

"You needn't shout," she said, holding out her hand. "You're still too young to know what trouble is."

"Calm yourself, mom," said Pavel, trying to stop her.

"Wait, Pavel," she cried, and rushed to the table. "Why should you take these people?"

"That's none of your business! Silence!" shouted the officer, getting up. "Bring in Vesovshchikov, who is also under arrest!"

Then he began to read some paper which he held close to his nose.

Nikolai was brought in. The officer interrupted his reading to cry:

"Take off your hat!"

Rybin came up to Pelagea and nudged her with his shoulder.

"Don't get upset, mother."

"How can I take off my hat when they're holding my arms?" asked Nikolai, drowning out the reading of the record of proceedings.

"Sign it!" cried the officer, throwing the paper on the table.

As the mother watched them sign, her fury subsided, her spirit drooped, and her eyes filled with tears of hurt helplessness. She had shed such tears throughout the twenty years of her married life, but

during the last few years she had almost forgotten their hot sting. The officer looked at her and said with a fastidious grimace:

"Better save your tears, ma'am, or you won't have any left for future use."

Another wave of anger seized her.

"A mother always has enough tears for everything—for everything! If you have a mother, she's sure to know this!"

The officer hastily put his papers away in a new brief case with a shining lock.

"March!" he commanded.

"Good-bye, Andrei; good-bye, Nikolai!" said Pavel warmly and quietly as he shook their hands.

"You'll probably be meeting soon!" said the officer with a short laugh.

Vesovshchikov breathed heavily. The blood rose to his thick neck and his eyes glittered with hard anger. The *khokhol* flashed a smile and nodded his head, whispering something to the mother. She crossed him and said:

"God sees who is right. . . ."

At last the people in grey uniforms crowded out into the entranceway and disappeared with a clanking of spurs. Rybin was the last to leave. He gave Pavel a lingering look.

"We-e-l-l—good-bye," he said thoughtfully, and went through the door, coughing into his beard.

Pavel clasped his hands behind his back and slowly paced the floor, stepping over the books and linen scattered there.

"See? That's how they do it," he said gloomily.

His mother glanced incredulously at the chaos.

"Why did Nikolai have to be so pert?" she asked regretfully.

"Because he was scared, I guess," answered Pavel.

"In they come—grab them up and take them away—just like that!" she murmured, wringing her hands.

Her son had not been arrested, so her heart beat more calmly. But her thoughts stood paralyzed before the incomprehensible fact of what she had witnessed.

"He sneered at us, that yellow-faced one, tried to scare us. . . ."

"All right, mother," said Pavel with sudden determination. "Come on, let's clear this away."

He called her "mother," and his tone was the one he used when he felt drawn to her. She went over to him and looked into his face.

"Have they hurt you?" she asked quietly.

"Yes," he answered. "It's hard. Better if they'd taken me along with the others."

It seemed to her there were tears in his eyes, and in the effort to alleviate the pain which she vaguely sensed, she said with a sigh:

"Just wait. They'll take you too."

"That they will!" he replied.

She became silent a moment.

"What a hard one you are, Pavel," she said at last. "You might comfort your mother just for once. Here I go saying such dreadful things and you make it all the worse!"

He glanced up and moved towards her.

"I don't know how, mother. You'll have to get used to it."

She sighed and tried to keep her voice from breaking as she asked after a short pause:

"Do you think they torture people? Tear their bodies and break their bones? Whenever I think of that—oh, my dear—it's so awful! . . ."

"They break your soul. That hurts worse—when they lay their filthy hands on your soul. . . ."

XI

The following day it became known that they had also arrested Bukin, Samoilov, Somov and five others. Feodor Mazin dropped in during the evening. His house had been searched too, and he was very much pleased, feeling himself quite the hero.

"Were you afraid, Feodor?" asked the mother.

He paled, his features sharpened, and his nostrils trembled.

"I was afraid that the officer would strike me. He was fat, with a black beard and hairy fingers and black glasses on his nose, like he had no eyes. He shouted and stamped his feet. 'I'll throw you in jail!' he shouted. Nobody ever beat me, not even my mother or father. I was their only son and they loved me."

He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and pressed his lips tight,

pushing back his hair with a quick movement of both hands. Then he said, looking at Pavel with reddened eyes:

"If anybody ever dares strike me I'll throw myself into him like a knife—I'll bite him with my teeth! Let them kill me straight off and get it over with!"

"You're too skinny for that!" exclaimed the mother. "Not much of a fighter I'd say!"

"But I'll fight anyway," answered Feodor under his breath.

"He'll be the first to break," she said to Pavel when Feodor had gone.

Pavel remained silent.

In a few minutes the door to the kitchen opened slowly and Rybin came in.

"Hello," he said with a short laugh. "Here I am again. Last night they brought me, and today I've come of my own accord." He shook Pavel's hand warmly and took Pelagea by the shoulder.

"How about a glass of tea?" he asked.

Pavel silently studied his broad, swarthy face with its thick black beard and dark eyes. There was something significant in his calm glance.

The mother went into the kitchen to put up the samovar. Rybin sat down, leaned his elbows on the table, and looked at Pavel.

"Well," he said, as though continuing an interrupted conversation, "I have to speak out frank with you. Been keeping an eye on you for some time. Live almost next door. I could see that a lot of people kept coming to your house but no drinking or brawling. That's the first thing. You're sure to notice people who behave themselves. Wonder what's wrong. I myself am an eyesore—keeping to myself the way I do.

His speech flowed on smooth and heavy as he stroked his beard with a dark hand and gazed intently into Pavel's face.

"People've started talking about you. My landlord, for instance. Calls you a heretic because you don't go to church. I don't either. Then those leaflets. That your doing?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"What are you saying?" cried his mother in alarm, thrusting her head through the kitchen door. "You aren't the only one!"

Pavel laughed and so did Rybin.

"All right," said Rybin.

The mother sniffed and went away, somewhat offended by the way they ignored her words.

"A good idea, those leaflets. Stir the people up. Nineteen of them, weren't there?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"That means I read them all. Some of the things in them aren't clear, some are unnecessary, but when a person has a lot to say it's hard not to put in an extra word or two."

Rybin smiled, revealing strong white teeth.

"Then came the search. That won me over most of all. You and the *khokhol* and Nikolai—all of you showed...."

In groping for the right words he became silent, staring out of the window and tapping the table with his fingers.

"Showed the stand you had taken—so to say—'You go ahead and tend to your business, Your Excellency, and we'll go ahead tending to ours!' The *khokhol*'s also a fine chap. Sometimes when I hear him talking at the factory I think to myself—no breaking him. Only death will down him. Made all of gristle. Do you trust me, Pavel?"

"Yes, I do," said Pavel, nodding his head.

"Good! Look at me—forty years old—twice as old as you and seen twenty times as much. Soldiered it for more than three years. Got married twice—the first one died, I chucked the second. Been in the Caucasus and seen the Dukhobortsy.* They don't know how to cope with life, brother, not them!"

The mother eagerly listened to his rough speech; it pleased her that this middle-aged man should unbosom himself to her son. But she felt that Pavel's manner was too dry, and she tried to compensate this by offering her hospitality.

"Maybe you'd like a bite to eat, Mikhailo Ivanovich?" she said.

"Thank you, mother. I've had my supper. So you think life's not what it should be, Pavel?"

Pavel got up and began pacing the floor with his hands behind his back.

"It's taking the right course," he answered. "Didn't it bring you to me with an open heart? Little by little it's uniting those of us who

* A religious sect.—*Trans.*

spend our lives working, and the time will come when it will unite everybody! Life is hard and unfair to us, but life itself is opening our eyes to its bitter meaning and showing us how to hasten the solution of its problems."

"That's the thing!" put in Rybin. "People need a good overhauling. If a fellow gets lousy, take him to the bathhouse, give him a good scrubbing and put him into clean clothes. Then he'll be presentable again, right? But how can you clean up a fellow inside? That's the thing!"

Pavel spoke excitedly about the factory and the bosses and how the workers abroad were fighting for their rights. Sometimes Rybin struck the table as though punctuating Pavel's speech. Often he exclaimed:

"That's the thing!"

And once he laughed and remarked quietly:

"You're young yet! Haven't learned to know people."

"Let's not talk about being old or young," said Pavel seriously, coming to a halt in front of Rybin. "Let's see whose ideas are right."

"So you think they've tried to fool us about God too? Hm. I also think our religion's no good."

Here the mother broke in. Whenever her son spoke about God and things associated with her faith in Him, a faith she held dear and sacred, she tried to catch his eye, silently pleading with him not to wound her heart with his sharp words of unbelief. But behind his unbelief she sensed a faith, and this comforted her.

"How can I understand his thoughts?" she would muse.

It had seemed to her that this middle-aged man must be equally offended by her son's words. But when Rybin calmly put this question to Pavel, she could not restrain herself.

"When it comes to the Lord, you better mind what you say!" She took a deep breath, and went on with added fervour. "You can think what you like, but for me, an old woman, there'll be nothing to turn to for support in my grief, once you take the Lord God away!"

Her eyes filled with tears and her fingers trembled as she washed the dishes.

"You didn't understand us," said Pavel gently.

"Excuse us, mother," said Rybin in his deep, slow voice. He gave a short laugh and glanced at Pavel.

"I forgot you were too old to have your warts cut out!"

"I wasn't talking about the kind and merciful God you believe in," continued Pavel, "but about the one the priests threaten us with like a club—the one in whose name they try to make all people bow down to the evil will of the few."

"That's the thing!" exclaimed Rybin, striking the table. "They've even pawned a false God off on us! Fight us with everything they can lay their hands on! Just think for a moment, mother! God created man in His own image, which means He resembles man, once man resembles Him. But we're more like wild beasts than gods. The churches shake a scarecrow at us. Got to change our God, mother. Got to clean Him up too! They've dressed Him up in lies and slander; mutilated the face of Him to kill our souls!"

He spoke softly, but every one of his words was a stunning blow to the mother. And she was frightened by his large, funereal face in the black frame of his beard. She could not bear the dark shine of his eyes, which aroused an aching fear in her heart.

"No, no, I shall go away," she said, shaking her head. "It's beyond my strength to listen to such things."

Quickly she went out into the kitchen as Rybin said to Pavel:

"See, Pavel? Not the head, but the heart—that's the thing! The heart's a very special spot in the human soul where nothing else will grow."

"Only reason can free man," said Pavel firmly.

"Reason don't give him strength!" insisted Rybin loudly. "It's his heart gives him strength, not his head!"

The mother undressed and went to bed without saying her prayers. She was gripped by a cold and disagreeable sensation. Rybin, who at first had seemed so clever and impressive, now roused only her hostility.

"The heretic! The rebel!" she thought as she listened to his voice. "Why did he have to come here!"

But he continued speaking with calm confidence.

"Can't leave the holy place empty. The place God holds in the human heart is the sorest spot. But if you cut it out, it'll leave a wound this big. Have to think up a new faith, Pavel. Have to create a God who is a friend to man, that's what!"

"There was Christ!" exclaimed Pavel.

"Christ had no spiritual courage. Let this cup pass from me, he said. And he recognized Caesar. How could God recognize human authority over his creatures? He Himself is all power! He couldn't divide up His soul—this is God's, this is Man's. But Christ accepted trade and he accepted marriage. And he was wrong to curse the fig tree—was the fig tree to blame for not bearing fruit? Neither is the human soul to blame for not bearing forth goodness. Have I myself planted this evil in my soul?"

The two voices kept coming to grips in the room, wrestling in excited contest. The floor creaked as Pavel walked back and forth. When Pavel spoke, all other sounds were drowned out, but when Rybin spoke in his calm, deep voice, the mother could hear the swinging of the pendulum and the clawing of the frost at the walls of the house.

"I'll put it in my own words—a stoker's words: God is a flame. And he lives in the heart. It's been said: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.' So the Word is the Spirit."

"The Word is Reason!" insisted Pavel.

"All right. Then God is in the heart and in the Reason—but not in the church. The church is the grave of God."

The mother fell asleep and did not hear Rybin leave.

But he became a frequent visitor thereafter. If any of Pavel's comrades were there when he came, Rybin would sit in a corner and say nothing, except to occasionally put in a "That's the thing!"

One day he swept the company with his dark glance and said sullenly, "Have to speak about things as they are, and not as they will be. Who knows that? Once the people get their freedom, they'll decide what's best for them. They've had enough stuff pounded into their heads without their asking. Time they had a chance to do their own thinking. Maybe they'll want to reject everything—the whole of life and learning. Maybe they'll see it's all levelled against them, like the church god. Put the books in their hands and they'll find their own answers. That's the thing!"

But if he and Pavel were alone, they immediately entered into endless discussions, during which they never lost their tempers. The mother anxiously listened to them, following every word, striving to grasp what they were saying. Sometimes it seemed to her that both the broad-shouldered, black-bearded man and her strong, tall son had

become blinded. They groped first in one direction, then in another, searching for a way out, grasping everything in their strong but sightless fingers, moving from one place to another, dropping things on the floor and crushing them underfoot. They bumped into things, felt them, then tossed them away without losing their faith and their hope....

They taught her to listen to words frightening in their frankness and daring, but these words no longer struck her with the same force as they had that first time—she had learned to push them away. Sometimes behind the words denying God, she could detect a firm faith in Him. Then she smiled a quiet, all-forgiving smile. And while she did not like Rybin, he no longer roused her hostility.

Every week she took books and clean clothes to the jail for the *khokhol*. Once she was allowed to see him.

"Hasn't changed a bit," she recounted tenderly when she returned. "So good to everybody, and everybody joking with him. It's hard for him, awfully hard, but he don't show it."

"That's right," was Rybin's comment. "Grief's a hide and we're inside. We're used to such clothing. Nothing to be proud of. Not everybody has had blinders put on his eyes. Some people close them themselves. That's what! So if we're stupid, nothing to do but grin and bear it!"

XII

The settlement paid more and more attention to the Vlassovs' little grey house. This attention was tinged with suspicion and unconscious hostility, but a trusting curiosity was also aroused. Sometimes Pavel would be approached by a stranger who, after glancing surreptitiously about, would say:

"Listen, brother, you read books and know the law; couldn't you explain to me...."

And the petitioner would recount some tale of injustice on the part of the police or the factory management. In complicated cases, Pavel would give the person a note to a lawyer of his acquaintance in the town. But whenever possible, he would explain the matter himself.

Gradually people came to respect this serious young man who

spoke so simply and daringly, who kept his eyes open and his ears alert to everything, who stubbornly went to the bottom of every disagreement, always and everywhere finding the common thread linking all people.

Pavel won particular prestige after the incident with the "swamp kopek."

A large swamp overgrown with firs and birches stretched about the factory, nearly encircling it in a festering ring. In the summer this swamp effused thick yellow vapours and bred clouds of mosquitoes that sowed fever in the settlement. The swamp belonged to the factory, and the new director decided to drain it in order to extract the peat and make profit from the land. On the pretext of doing this for the sake of improving living conditions for the workers, the director gave an order to deduct one kopek from each ruble paid in wages for the draining of the swamp.

The workers became indignant. They especially objected to the fact that no deductions were made from the wages of white collar employees.

Pavel was home on sick leave the Saturday when the announcement of the kopek deduction was posted by the director, so he knew nothing about it. On the next day he was visited by Sizov, a respectable old foundry hand, and Makhotin, a tall, grouchy mechanic, who told him about the director's decision.

"The older ones of us got together," said Sizov impressively, "and talked the matter over. The comrades decided to send us to you as a knowing person to find out whether there's any law letting a director fight mosquitoes with our kopeks."

"Just think!" said Makhotin, his narrow eyes flashing. "Four years ago the skinflints took our money for a bathhouse. Three thousand eight hundred rubles they collected! And where is it now? We never saw the bathhouse!"

Pavel explained the injustice of the deduction and the obvious profit the draining would bring the factory. The two men went away frowning. When the mother had seen them out, she said with a short laugh:

"Even the old men have started using you for their brains."

Without answering her, Pavel sat down and began to write. In a few minutes he said:

"I have a request to make of you, mother. Go into town and deliver this note."

"Is it dangerous?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm sending you to the place where they print our newspaper. It's absolutely essential that the story about the kopek get into the next issue."

"Well—" she said. "Right away."

This was the first task her son had ever entrusted to her. She was made happy by the fact that he frankly explained the situation.

"I understand, Pasha." she said as she was getting dressed. "They're robbing them all right! What's that man's name—Yegor Ivanovich?"

She returned home late in the evening, tired but pleased.

"I saw Sasha," she told her son. "Sends her greetings. That Yegor Ivanovich is a simple sort, and very jolly. Has a funny way of speaking."

"I'm glad you liked them," said Pavel softly.

"They're simple people, Pasha. It's a good thing when people don't put on airs. And they think a lot of you...."

On Monday Pavel stayed home again since he had not fully recovered. But at dinner time Feodor Mazin came running in all out of breath, but happy and excited.

"Come on!" he cried. "The whole factory's up in arms. They sent me for you. Sizov and Makhotin said you could explain things better than anyone else. You should see what's happening!"

Without a word Pavel began putting on his clothes.

"The womenfolks have come and they've added their squeals."

"I'm coming too," said the mother. "What are they up to? I'm coming too!"

"Come ahead!" said Pavel.

They walked swiftly and silently down the street. The mother could scarcely breathe in her excitement; she felt that something of the greatest importance was about to happen. At the factory gates stood a crowd of women who were shouting and quarrelling. When the three of them slipped into the yard, they found themselves in the midst of a dark throng roaring with excitement. The mother noticed that all heads were turned to the wall of the foundry where Sizov, Makhotin, Vyalov and some five or six more influential workers were

standing on a pile of old iron against the background of the brick wall.

"Here comes Vlassov!" someone shouted.

"Vlassov? Let him come over here!"

"Quiet!" shouted voices from several places.

From somewhere close at hand came the level voice of Rybin, "It's not for the kopek we have to fight, but for justice, that's what! It's not our kopek we hold so dear—it's no rounder than any other, though it's heavier—has more human blood in it than the director's ruble! The value lies not in the kopek, but in the blood, in the justice —that's the thing!"

His words fell among the crowd and chipped off sharp exclamations:

"Right you are, Rybin!"

"Well put, stoker!"

"Here's Vlassov!"

The voices merged in a tornado of sound which drowned out the roar of the machines, the hissing of steam and humming of wires. People came running from all directions, waving their arms, inciting each other with hot, sharp words. The discontent always latent in weary breasts now came to life and demanded an outlet; it soared triumphantly into the air, spreading its wings ever wider, tightening its hold on people and dragging them in its wake, striking them against each other and enveloping them in the vengeful flame of its transformation. Above the throng rose a cloud of dust and soot, sweaty faces glowed with excitement, cheeks wept black tears, eyes and teeth flashed in dark faces.

Pavel appeared on the pile of iron where Sizov and Makhotin were standing.

"Comrades!" he cried.

The mother noticed how pale his face was and that his lips were trembling; involuntarily she moved forward, pushing through the crowd.

"Who you shoving?" they shouted at her irritably.

She was pushed in her turn, but this did not stop her. She worked herself forward with shoulders and elbows, urged by the desire to stand next to her son.

When Pavel had emptied his breast of the word which to him

was full of profound significance, he felt his throat contract in a spasm of militant joy. He was seized by the desire to throw his heart to these people, a heart aflame with dreams of justice.

"Comrades!" he exclaimed, drawing from this word his strength and his ecstasy. "We are the people who build churches and factories, who forge chains and money. We are that living force by which all are fed and sustained, from the cradle to the grave!"

"That's what!" cried Rybin.

"Always and everywhere we are the first to work and the last to get any consideration. Who cares about us? Who has ever done the slightest thing for our welfare? Does anyone even regard us as human beings? No one!"

"No one!" came a voice like an echo.

As he got under way, Pavel began to speak more simply and calmly, and the crowd slowly drew closer, merging into a single, thousand-headed body which looked up into his face with its myriad of attentive eyes, drinking in his every word.

"We'll never win a better lot for ourselves until we realize that we're all comrades, a family of friends tightly bound by the single desire to fight for our rights."

"Come to the point!" cried someone standing near the mother in a rough voice.

"Don't interfere!" came two voices from different sides.

The grimy faces frowned with sullen scepticism, but many eyes searched Pavel's face thoughtfully.

"A Socialist, but no fool!" observed someone.

"Talking up bold, all right," said a tall, one-eyed worker as he nudged the mother's shoulder.

"It's time for us to realize, comrades, that no one but ourselves will help us. All for one and one for all—that's our motto if we want to beat our enemies."

"He's speaking the truth, fellows!" called out Makhotin, shaking his fist in the air.

"Call the director!" continued Pavel.

It was as though a sudden blast of wind had swept the crowd. It swayed, and dozens of voices cried out:

"Call the director!"

"Send a delegation for him!"

The mother pushed even further forward and glanced up at her son, her face full of pride. Her Pavel was standing there among these old, respected workers and everyone was listening to him and agreeing with what he said. She was pleased by the fact that he did not become angry and swear like the others.

Like hail on a tin roof came the oaths and exclamations and biting words. Pavel looked down on the people and seemed to be searching for something with his large, wide eyes.

"Delegates!"

"Sizov!"

"Vlassov!"

"Rybin! He's got a mean set of teeth!"

Suddenly hushed exclamations were heard among the crowd.

"He's coming of his own accord!"

"The director!"

The crowd made way for a tall man with a pointed beard and a long face.

"Allow me," he said, waving the workers out of his path with a slight gesture, designed not to touch them. His eyes were narrowed and he searched the faces of the workers with the experienced glance of a master of men. People snatched off their caps and bowed to him, but he continued on his way without returning their bows, sowing silence and confusion among the people who smiled in embarrassment and gave hushed exclamations expressing the repentance of children who have been caught in mischief.

He passed the mother, his stern eyes sliding over her face, and stopped in front of the pile of iron. Someone extended a hand to help him, but he rejected it; with a strong movement he climbed up and stood in front of Pavel and Sizov.

"What sort of gathering is this? Why have you stopped work?"

There was silence for a few seconds. The heads of the people swayed like ears of corn. Sizov waved his cap, shrugged his shoulders and dropped his head.

"Answer my question!" shouted the director.

Pavel came up to him and said in a loud voice, pointing to Sizov and Rybin:

"We three have been delegated by our comrades to demand that you change your decision about the deducting of kopeks."

"Why?" asked the director without glancing at Pavel.

"Because we consider such a tax unfair!" said Pavel loudly.

"Do you think my intention of draining the swamp is prompted by the desire to exploit the workers, rather than to improve their living conditions? Is that it?"

"Yes," answered Pavel.

"And you too?" asked the director, turning to Rybin.

"All of us think the same."

"And you, my good man?" turning to Sizov.

"Me too. It'd be better if you'd leave us our kopeks."

Sizov once more dropped his head and smiled guiltily.

The director slowly swept the crowd with his eyes and shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned to Pavel and looked at him intently.

"You seem to be a person of some education. Is it possible that you too do not realize the advantages of such a measure?"

"If the factory drained the swamp at its own expense, anyone could realize the advantages," answered Pavel in a voice to be heard by all.

"The factory is not a philanthropic organization," remarked the director dryly. "I order all of you to go back to your jobs!"

He started to climb down, carefully feeling the iron with his foot and not glancing at anyone.

A hum of discontent rose from the crowd.

"What is it?" asked the director, stopping where he was.

Only one voice broke the silence.

"Go work yourself!"

"If you are not back on the job in fifteen minutes, I shall order that all of you be fined," said the director dryly and impressively.

Once more he made his way through the crowd, but a dull roar rose as he retreated, and the further he went, the louder it became.

"Try and talk to him!"

"There's your justice for you! What a life!"

They turned to Pavel and shouted:

"What're we supposed to do now, smarty?"

"You made a fine speech, but a lot of good it did when the boss showed his face!"

"Come on, Vlassov, tell us what to do."

As the cries became more insistent, Pavel said:

"I propose that we quit work until he promises not to deduct the kopeks, comrades."

The comments leaped up excitedly:

"Take us for a bunch of fools?"

"That means a strike!"

"For the sake of a couple of measly kopeks?"

"Why not strike?"

"We'd all get fired!"

"Who'll do the work for him?"

"He'll find plenty who are willing!"

"Stinkers!"

XIII

Pavel climbed down and stood beside his mother.

The crowd was stirred up; everyone was arguing and shouting excitedly.

"You'll never get them to strike," said Rybin, coming over to Pavel. "They're a greedy lot, but yellow, that's what! No more than three hundred'll back you up. Too big a pile of manure to lift on one pitchfork. . . ."

Pavel was silent. The huge dark face of the crowd swayed before him, searching his eyes in insistent demand. His heart beat in alarm. It seemed to him that his words had disappeared without leaving a trace, like single drops of rain falling on parched soil.

He returned home tired and crestfallen. His mother and Sizov walked behind, while Rybin strode beside him and kept buzzing in his ear.

"You speak well, but not to the heart! That's what! You have to speak to their hearts—throw the spark in the very centre. You can't convince people with your reasoning. The shoe doesn't fit the foot—too thin, too narrow!"

"Time for us old people to be finding a place for ourselves in the graveyard, Pelagea!" Sizov was saying. "A new sort of people is growing up now. How did we live, you and me? Crawling on our

knees, knocking our foreheads against the ground, bowing to our betters. But nowadays—I don't know—maybe folks've come to their senses—maybe they're making an even worse mistake—but anyway they're not like us. Take the young folks, now—talk to the director like they were his equals.... Well, be seeing you, Pavel Mikhailovich. It's good the way you stand up for people, brother. May the Lord help you—maybe you'll find a way out of it all—may the Lord help you!"

He went away.

"Go ahead and die off," muttered Rybin. "People like him aren't even human beings—just putty—something to stop up the cracks with. Notice who shouted to make you a delegate, Pavel? Those who spread the rumours you're a Socialist and a troublemaker. They're the ones! Think to themselves: 'He'll get fired—serve him right.'"

"From their point of view, they did the right thing," said Pavel.

"And the wolves are right when they tear their brothers to pieces."

Rybin's face was clouded and his voice revealed an unwonted agitation.

"People won't listen to bare words—got to suffer—got to drench your words in blood...."

All day Pavel wandered about tired and gloomy and strangely troubled, with burning eyes that seemed to be searching for something. The mother noticed this.

"What's the matter, Pasha?" she asked cautiously.

"Got a headache," he answered.

"Lie down and I'll call the doctor."

"No, don't bother," he hastened to reply. Then he added under his breath:

"I'm too young and weak, that's the trouble! They didn't believe me, didn't take up my cause—which means I didn't know how to put it—I feel rotten—disgusted with myself."

She gazed into his brooding face and sought to comfort him.

"Just wait a bit," she said softly. "What they didn't understand today they will tomorrow."

"They've got to understand!" he exclaimed.

"Even I can see you're right."

Pavel went over to her.

"You're wonderful, mother," he said, and turned away. She started

up as though seared by his quiet words, then turned with her hand pressed to her heart, cherishing his tenderness.

That night when she was already asleep and he was lying in bed reading, the gendarmes came and began to rummage angrily through the house, up in the attic and out in the yard. The yellow-faced officer conducted himself just as he had the first time—offensively sarcastic, taking pleasure in jibes aimed at their very hearts. The mother sat silent in a corner without taking her eyes off her son's face. He tried not to show his feelings, but his fingers twitched when the officer laughed; she sensed with what difficulty he kept himself from answering back, and how painful it was for him to bear the gendarme's witticisms. It was not so frightening for her this time as it had been the first; her hate for these grey, nocturnal guests had grown, and this hate consumed her fears.

"They'll take me," Pavel managed to whisper to her.

"I understand," she answered softly, bowing her head.

She realized that they would put him in jail for what he had said to the workers earlier in the day. But everyone agreed with what he had said, so all of them should rise to his defence, in which case he would not be held long. . . .

She wanted to throw her arms about him and cry, but the officer was standing next to her and watching her with narrowed eyes. His lips and his moustache twitched, and it seemed to Pelagea that this man was just waiting for her tears and complaints and entreaties. Gathering all her strength, she gripped her son's hand as she said slowly and softly, with bated breath:

"Good-bye, Pasha. Have you taken everything you need?"

"Yes. Don't be lonely."

"God with you. . . ."

After they had led him away she sank down on a bench and moaned softly. She sat with her back to the wall as her husband had been wont to sit, tight with grief and the painful consciousness of her helplessness. Throwing back her head she gave a long, low cry, into which she poured all the hurt of her wounded heart, while her mind was haunted by the motionless yellow face with its thin moustache and narrowed eyes gleaming with pleasure. Within her breast gathered a dark cloud of bitterness and hatred for people who deprive mothers of their sons simply because the sons seek justice.

It was cold, and the rain beat at the windows. It seemed to her that grey figures with red, eyeless faces and long arms were pacing like sentinels around her house in the night, with spurs clanking faintly.

"If they had only taken me too!" she thought.

The whistle blew, summoning people to work. Its sound rose low and hoarse and uncertain this morning. The door opened and in came Rybin. He stood in front of her and asked, wiping the rain off his beard:

"Did they take him?"

"Yes they did, curse them," she answered with a sigh.

"Might have expected it." He laughed briefly. "They searched my place too—went over everything with their fingers. Did a lot of swearing—but little harm. So they've taken Pavel! The director winks, the gendarme nods, and—another person gone! They work together fine. One of them holds the people by the horns while the other milks them dry."

"You ought to stand up for Pavel!" the mother cried, getting up. "What he did was for the sake of everybody!"

"Who ought to?"

"Everybody!"

"Hm! So that's what you're like! Oh no, that'll never happen!"

With a laugh he lumbered out, and his hopeless words left the mother more miserable than ever.

"What if they beat him—torture him. . . ."

She imagined her son's body bruised and bloody after a beating, and a cold fear gripped her heart. Her eyes hurt.

That day she did not light the stove, did not get dinner, did not even drink tea. Only late in the evening did she eat a piece of bread. When she went to bed that night she felt that life had never before been so empty and lonely. During the last few years she had become used to living in the constant expectation of something fine and important. She had been surrounded by the cheerful, noisy activities of young people, had been accustomed to seeing the face of her son, the instigator of all that good, but dangerous life. Now he was gone, and—everything was gone.

XIV

This day and another sleepless night dragged out interminably, but even more slowly passed the following day. She expected someone to come, but no one did. Evening descended. And—night. The cold rain sighed and rustled against the walls, the wind whistled down the chimney, and something scuttled under the floor. Drops of water dripped off the roof, the sound of their falling merging strangely with the ticking of the clock. The whole house seemed to be softly swaying, while grief had turned familiar surroundings into something alien and lifeless.

Came a knock at the window—once, twice. She was used to such knocks and was not frightened. But this time she started up with a glad prick at her heart. Vague hopes lifted her quickly to her feet. Throwing a shawl about her shoulders, she opened the door.

Samoilov came in, followed by a person whose face was concealed by an upturned coat collar and a cap pulled down over his brow.

"Wake you up?" asked Samoilov, without further greeting. In contrast to his usual manner, his voice was anxious and gloomy.

"I wasn't asleep," she answered and stood watching them expectantly.

Samoilov's companion breathed hoarsely as he took off his cap and held out his stubby hand.

"Good morning, mother! Don't you remember me?" he asked like an old friend.

"Is it you!" exclaimed Pelagea, for some reason suddenly happy. "Yegor Ivanovich?"

"The very one!" he answered, bending his large head with hair as long as a psalm-reader's. There was a smile on his face, and his little grey eyes glanced kindly at the mother. He was for all the world like a samovar—round and small, with a thick neck and short arms. His face shone, and he breathed loudly, with something rattling and wheezing deep down in his chest.

"Go into the other room while I get dressed," said the mother.

"We have something to ask you," said Samoilov anxiously, as he glanced at her from under his brows.

Yegor Ivanovich went into the other room and began speaking from there.

"This morning Nikolai Ivanovich, with whom it seems you are acquainted, came out of jail, mother ..." he began.

"I didn't know he was in jail," interrupted the mother.

"For two months and eleven days. He saw the *khokhol* there and the latter sends his greetings, as does Pavel, who says you mustn't worry. He also said to tell you that anyone who chooses the path he has chosen is sure to be granted the pleasure of periodic vacations in jail—that's guaranteed by the solicitude of our bosses. And now I'll get down to business, mother. Do you know how many people were arrested yesterday?"

"Why—besides Pavel—was there anyone—?" exclaimed the mother.

"He was the forty-ninth," interrupted Yegor Ivanovich calmly. "And the management will probably have another dozen arrested. This young man here, for instance."

"Yes, me too," said Samoilov gloomily.

Pelagea felt that for some reason it had become easier for her to breathe.

"At least he's not alone there," shot through her brain.

When she was dressed she joined her guests, smiling at them cheerfully.

"I don't suppose they'll keep them long, once they took so many."

"Right you are!" said Yegor Ivanovich. "And if we can manage to spoil this show for them, they'll have to retreat with their tails between their legs. Here's the point: if we stop distributing leaflets at the factory, the gendarmes will seize at this sad circumstance and use it against Pavel and ye noble comrades pining in bondage."

"What do you mean?" cried the mother in alarm.

"Simple enough," answered Yegor Ivanovich calmly. "Sometimes even gendarmes think logically. Figure it out for yourself: Pavel was free—there were papers and leaflets; Pavel is jailed—there are no more papers and leaflets. Ergo, he sowed the papers and leaflets, is't not so? And they'll begin gobbling up everybody. Gendarmes have a habit of devouring people in such a way that only the most insignificant vestiges remain."

"I understand," said the mother sadly. "Dear me! But what can we do about it?"

"They've caught almost everybody, devil take them," came Samoilov's voice from the kitchen. "We have to keep the work going now not only for the sake of our cause, but to save our comrades as well."

"And there's no one to work," added Yegor with a short laugh. "We have plenty of first-class literature, all my handiwork; but how to get it into the factory—that remains an unsolved problem."

"They've started searching everybody at the entrance gates," said Samoilov.

The mother sensed that they were expecting something of her.

"How can it be done? How?" she asked hurriedly.

Samoilov appeared in the doorway.

"Are you acquainted with the peddler Korsunova, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Have a talk with her. Maybe she'll take them in."

The mother shook her head in disapproval.

"Oh no! She's a gossip! As soon as they learn that she got them through me—that they came from this house—oh no!"

Then she added with sudden inspiration:

"Give them to me—to me! I'll manage. I'll find a way. I'll ask Maria to take me on as a helper. I have to earn my bread somehow. So I'll take dinners to sell at the factory. I'll manage all right."

Pressing her hands to her breast she hastily assured them that she would do everything very well, without attracting attention, and in conclusion added ecstatically:

"Let them see that Pavel's hands stretch from the jail! Let them see that!"

The three of them brightened up. Yegor rubbed his palms together and said with a smile:

"Wonderful, mother! You don't even know how splendid it is! Simply—stupendous!"

"I'll go to jail like going to bed if this works," observed Samoilov, also rubbing his hands.

"You're the most beautiful damozel in all the world!" cried Yegor hoarsely.

The mother smiled. It was clear to her that if the leaflets kept appearing at the factory, the management could not blame her son for them. She felt that she was capable of coping with this task and twitched all over with joy.

"When you visit Pavel in jail, tell him he has a fine mother," said Yegor.

"I'll be seeing him first," laughed Samoilov.

"Tell him I'll do everything that has to be done—let him know that."

"What if they don't send Samoilov to jail?" asked Yegor.

"It can't be helped."

Both the men broke out laughing, and when she realized her break, she too began to laugh, in quiet embarrassment and a bit archly.

"Hard to see other people's troubles for your own," she said, dropping her eyes.

"That's natural enough," exclaimed Yegor. "And don't you go getting sad and upset about Pavel. He'll come back from jail even better. You get a good rest there and a chance to study, and people like us have no time to do either when we're at large. I've been in three times, and each time with great profit to heart and mind, even if it wasn't exactly a pleasure."

"You have a hard time breathing," she observed with a friendly glance into his plain face.

"There's a very special reason for that," he replied, lifting a finger. "Well, then, everything's settled I take it, mother? Tomorrow we'll get you that material and once more the wheel will start turning, grinding away the darkness of the ages. Three cheers for freedom of speech and three cheers for the heart of a mother! Till we meet again!"

"Good-bye," said Samoilov, shaking her hand. "I could never have suggested such a thing to my mother."

"They'll all understand some day," said Pelagea, wanting to cheer him up.

When they had left she locked the door and knelt in the centre of the room, mingling her prayers with the sound of the rain. She prayed without words, with only her concentrated anxiety for the people whom Pavel had introduced into her life. They seemed to

move between her and the icons—all these simple people so strangely close to each other, yet so alone.

Early in the morning she went to visit Maria Korsunova.

The peddler, as greasy and noisy as ever, greeted her sympathetically.

"Feeling gloomy?" she asked, slapping the mother over the shoulder with a dirty hand. "Don't give in! Grabbed him and took him away, did they? That's all right. Nothing to be ashamed of! Used to be they put folks in jail for stealing, but nowadays they put them in for sticking up for the right. Maybe Pavel didn't say just what he'd ought to, but what he done was for everybody's sake, and everybody knows it, so don't you worry. Even if they don't admit it, everybody knows who's to blame. I wanted to come see you but there wasn't no time. All day long cooking and peddling, but you'll see—I'll die a beggar yet! It's the lovers eat me up—something awful! Nipping me here, nipping me there like a flock of roaches! Just when I manage to save up ten rubles or so, along comes some bastard and swallows it up. Sad thing to get born a woman! The last thing I'd wish anybody on this earth! Live alone—what for? Get a man—done for!"

"I've come to ask you to take me on as a helper," said Pelagea, interrupting her chatter.

"What's that?" asked Maria. When Pelagea had explained, Maria nodded.

"Sure," she said. "Remember how you used to hide me from my man? Now I'll hide you from hunger. Everybody'd ought to help you, being's as your son got taken up for the general good. He's a fine fellow, and everybody says that, and they all feel sorry for him. Take it from me, no good will come to the bosses for these arrests. Just look what's happening at the factory. Bad business, deary. They think, those bosses, if they snap at a fellow's heels he'll stop running. But it turns out they strike a dozen and set a hundred crazy!"

As a result of this conversation, the mother appeared at the factory at noon the next day with two basketfuls of Maria's food, while the peddler herself went to trade at the market.

XV

The workers immediately spotted the new peddler.

"Gone into business, Pelagea?" they asked, with an approving shake of the head.

Some of them hastened to assure her that Pavel would soon be released. Others moved her with words of sympathy. Still others savagely cursed the director and the gendarmes, and this found an echo in her own heart. There were people who looked at her with a kind of gloating satisfaction, and Isai Gorbov, the timekeeper, muttered through clenched teeth:

"If I was the governor I'd hang your son! Serve him right for leading the people astray!"

This evil threat chilled her to the marrow. She did not answer Isai, merely glancing into his small, freckled face and dropping her eyes with a sigh.

There was no peace at the factory. The workers gathered in little groups and whispered among themselves. The worried foremen poked about everywhere. Oaths were heard, and malicious laughter.

Two policemen led Samoilov past her; he walked with one hand in his pocket and the other pushing back his red hair.

Some hundred workmen trailed them, shouting oaths and jibes at the policemen.

"Off on vacation, Samoilov?" cried someone.

"They're doing honour to our fellows these days," added another. "Give us a guard to accompany us on our strolls."

This was followed by a vicious oath.

"Looks like it don't pay to catch thieves these days," called out a tall, one-eyed worker. "So they've started catching honest people!"

"You'd think they'd have the decency to catch them at night at least," came a voice from the crowd. "But here they go in broad daylight, the bastards!"

The policemen frowned and walked quickly, trying not to notice anything and pretending not to hear the epithets hurled at them. Three workers barged into them with a large sheet of metal, shouting:

"Gangway, fishermen!"

Samoilov nodded to the mother as he passed.

"Off we go!" he observed with a grin.

She bowed to him in silence. She was deeply touched by these honest, sober young people going off to jail with a smile on their lips, and her heart swelled with a mother's love and compassion.

When she returned from the factory she spent the rest of the day with Maria, helping her in her work and listening to her chatter. Late in the evening she returned to her cold, empty, cheerless house. For a long time she wandered from place to place, unable to find peace and not knowing what to do with herself. She was worried by the fact that it was almost night, and Yegor Ivanovich had not yet brought the promised literature.

Heavy grey flakes of autumn snow fell beyond the window. They clung softly to the pane until they melted and silently slid down, leaving wet trails behind them. She thought of her son....

A cautious knock came at the door. The mother quickly ran and removed the hook. Sasha came in. The mother had not seen her for a long time, and the first impression was that she was unnaturally plump.

"Good evening," she said, glad that someone had come and she would not be alone for at least part of the night. "Haven't seen you for a long time. Been away?"

"No. I was in jail," answered the girl with a smile. "Together with Nikolai Ivanovich—remember him?"

"Of course I do!" exclaimed the mother. "Yegor Ivanovich told me yesterday they had let him out, but I didn't know about you.... Nobody told me you was there too...."

"It doesn't matter. Here—I have to change my clothes before Yegor Ivanovich comes," she said, glancing about.

"You're all wet."

"I brought the papers and leaflets...."

"Let's have them, let's have them!" cried the mother eagerly.

The girl unfastened her coat and shook herself, and papers fluttered down like leaves off a tree. The mother laughed as she gathered them up.

"I wondered what made you so fat when I saw you—thought you'd gone and got married and was expecting a baby. Dear me! How many you brought! And all the way on foot?"

"Yes," said Sasha. Once more she was tall and slender. The

mother noticed that her face was drawn, making her eyes look more enormous than ever, and that there were dark circles under them.

"Just look what you're doing, instead of having the rest you need after just getting out!" exclaimed the mother with a sigh and a shake of her head.

"It has to be done," said the shivering girl. "Tell me about Pavel Mikhailovich—was he very much upset when they took him?"

Sasha did not look at the mother as she asked, bending her head, and adjusting her hair with trembling fingers.

"Not very," answered the mother. "He wouldn't be likely to give himself away."

"Is he strong physically?" asked the girl softly.

"Never been sick in his life," answered the mother. "But you're all a-tremble! Here, I'll give you some tea with raspberry jam."

"That would be nice. Only it's so much trouble—so late. Here, let me do it myself."

"Tired as you are?" replied the mother in a tone of reproof as she began to put up the samovar. Sasha also went out into the kitchen and sat there on a bench, one hand behind her head.

"Jail wears one out after all," she said. "That accursed idleness! Nothing could be worse! When you know how much there is to be done and you sit there like a caged animal. . . ."

"Who will ever reward you for all that?" asked the mother.

Then, with a sigh, she supplied her own answer:

"No one but the Lord! But I suppose you don't believe in Him either?"

"No," answered the girl shortly, with a shake of her head.

"I don't believe you," said the mother impulsively. Then, wiping the coal dust off her hands on her apron, she added with deep conviction:

"You don't understand your own faith. How could you live such a life if you didn't believe in God?"

Suddenly someone stamped into the entranceway with a low mutter. The mother started and the girl quickly jumped to her feet.

"Don't open the door," she whispered. "If it's the gendarmes, you don't know who I am. I mistook the house in the dark and fainted on the doorstep. You undressed me and found the leaflets. Understand?"

"You poor darling! Why should I say that?" asked the mother, deeply touched.

"Wait a minute," said Sasha, listening at the door. "Perhaps it's Yegor. . . ."

It was he, all wet and panting with exhaustion.

"Aha! Got the samovar going I see! Nothing like a samovar to cheer you up, mother! You here already, Sasha?"

He kept on talking without pause as he slowly pulled off his heavy coat, filling the kitchen with the sound of his hoarse breathing.

"The authorities don't like this little lady here, mother. When the jail-keeper dared to offend her, she announced a hunger strike until he apologized. For eight days she didn't eat a thing, as a result of which she all but departed from this life. Not bad, eh? Ever see a belly like mine?"

He held on to his ludicrously inflated stomach as he went into the other room, still talking even when he had closed the door behind him.

"Did you really refuse food for eight days?" asked the mother in amazement.

"I had to do something to make him apologize," answered Sasha with a shudder of cold. The mother found a shade of reproach in the girl's severity and imperturbability.

"So that's what she's like!" she thought.

"What if you had died?" asked Pelagea.

"It couldn't have been helped," said the girl softly. "But he apologized. You can't allow people to take advantage of you."

"Hm-m-m!" said the mother slowly. "That's all men do—take advantage of us women all our lives."

"Well, I've got rid of my load," said Yegor, opening the door. "Samovar ready? Here, let me lift it."

He carried it into the next room, saying as he did so:

"My own dear papa drank no less than twenty glasses of tea a day, thanks to which he lived in peace and good health to the ripe age of seventy-three, weighing all of eight poods and serving as deacon in the town of Voskresensk. . . ."

"Are you the son of Father Ivan?" exclaimed the mother.

"That I am! And how might you be acquainted with my honourable sire?"

"I come from Voskresensk too!"

"From my home town? Whose daughter are you?"

"Your neighbour's! The Seregins'!"

"Daughter of lame Nil? I know him very well! More than once I had the pleasure of having him tweak my ear!"

They stood facing each other, laughing and asking a thousand questions. Sasha smiled as she brewed the tea. The rattling of the cups brought the mother back to her surroundings.

"Oh, forgive me! Everything went clean out of my mind. It's such a nice thing to meet someone from your home town!"

"I am the one to apologize for having taken things into my own hands. But it's eleven o'clock already and I have a long walk ahead of me."

"Where are you going? To town?" asked the mother in surprise.

"Yes."

"But why should you? It's so dark and wet and you're so tired. Spend the night here. Yegor Ivanovich can sleep in the kitchen and you and me in here."

"No, I must go," said the girl simply.

"Unfortunately the young lady must go. They know her here. She mustn't be seen on the streets tomorrow," said Yegor.

"But how? All alone?"

"All alone," said Yegor with a short laugh.

The girl poured herself a cup of tea, salted a piece of black bread and began to eat, glancing thoughtfully at the mother.

"How do you ever do it—you and Natasha. I could never make myself—I'd be afraid," said Pelagea.

"She's also afraid," observed Yegor. "You're afraid, aren't you, Sasha?"

"Of course I am," replied the girl.

The mother glanced at her and at Yegor.

"What—hard people you are!" she exclaimed.

When she had finished her tea, Sasha silently shook Yegor's hand and went into the kitchen. The mother followed her out.

"If you see Pavel Mikhailovich, give him my regards," said Sasha. "Please don't forget."

With her hand already on the handle of the door, she suddenly turned and said:

"May I kiss you?"

The mother silently embraced her and kissed her warmly.

"Thank you," said the girl and with a nod of the head went out.

When the mother returned to the room, she looked anxiously out of the window. Wet flakes of snow were falling in the darkness.

"Remember the Prozorovs?" asked Yegor.

He sat with his legs widespread, noisily blowing his tea. His face was red and moist and contented.

"Yes, I remember them," said the mother musingly, sidling up to the table. She sat down and looked at Yegor sadly.

"Tck-tck-tck! That Sasha! How will she ever reach town?"

"She'll be exhausted," agreed Yegor. "Jail sort of took it out of her. She used to be stronger. She was brought up for an easy life.... Seems there's already a spot on her lungs...."

"Who is she?" the mother asked softly.

"Daughter of a country gentleman. Her father's a pig, according to what she says. Did you know they wanted to get married, mother?"

"Who?"

"She and Pavel. But as you see, nothing comes of it. When he's out, she's in jail, and vice versa."

"I didn't know," said the mother after a pause. "Pavel never talks about himself."

Now she felt all the sorrier for the girl, and with involuntary displeasure she turned to her guest.

"Why didn't you take her home?" she asked.

"I couldn't," he replied calmly. "I have a lot of things to do here in the settlement—from early in the morning I'll be going from one place to another, and that's not so easy with a breathing apparatus like mine."

"She's a fine girl," said the mother, her mind occupied with what Yegor had just told her. She was hurt at having heard this from a stranger rather than from her son, and she frowned and pressed her lips tightly together.

"She certainly is," nodded Yegor. "*I can see that you feel sorry* for her. No sense in that. Your heart'll give out if you start feeling sorry for all us rebels. None of us has a very easy life if the truth be told. One of my comrades just returned from exile. When he got to Nizhni-Novgorod his wife and child were waiting for him in Smolensk, but when he got to Smolensk they were already in jail in Moscow. Now it's his wife's turn to go out to Siberia. I also had a wife—as fine a person as they come—five years of that kind of life put her in her grave."

He swallowed his tea in one gulp and continued his story. He told her the years and the months of his jail sentences and his exile. He told her of various misfortunes, of beatings in jail, of starvation in Siberia. The mother watched him and wondered at the calm simplicity with which he recounted the story of a life so full of suffering and persecution....

"But let's get down to business."

His tone changed and his face became more serious. He began to ask her how she intended to get the literature into the factory, and the mother was amazed at his knowledge of details.

When they finished this subject, they once more began to recall their home town; he spoke jokingly, but she wandered meditatively through her past, and it seemed to her that it strangely resembled a swamp where, among clumps of earth, grew small firs and white birches and slender aspens, trembling with fear. The birches grew slowly, and after five years in this putrid soil, fell and rotted away. She beheld this vision, and a great pity welled in her breast. Again she saw before her the figure of a young girl, a girl with a sharp, stubborn face. She was making her way through the wet snowflakes, weary and alone.... And the mother's son was in jail. Maybe he had not yet fallen asleep, but was lying there thinking... not of her, his mother. Now there was someone more dear to him. Like mottled, tattered clouds came her painful thoughts, enveloping her soul in darkness....

"You are tired, mother. Let's go to bed," said Yegor with a smile.

She said good night and sidled cautiously into the kitchen, her heart full of a caustic bitterness.

At breakfast the next morning Yegor said:

"If they catch you and ask where you got those heretical leaflets, what will you say?"

"I'll say it's none of their business," she answered.

"I'm afraid they won't agree with you," objected Yegor. "They're dead certain it's their business. They'll keep asking you long and hard."

"But I won't tell them."

"They'll put you in jail."

"What of it? Thank the Lord that's something I'm fit for!" she said with a sigh. "Who needs me? Nobody. And they won't put me to torture. They say. . . ."

"Hm!" said Yegor, looking at her intently. "No, they won't put you to torture. But good people should spare themselves."

"You're a fine one to say that!" answered the mother with a short laugh.

Yegor paced the room without answering. Then he went over to her and said:

"It's hard, mother. I know how hard it is for you."

"It's hard for everybody," she replied with a wave of her hand. "Maybe it's easier for those who understand. But little by little I'm beginning to understand what good people are striving for."

"Once you understand that, everybody needs you, mother—everybody!" he said seriously.

She glanced at him and smiled.

At noon she prepared to go to the factory, padding herself with the leaflets so cleverly that Yegor clicked his tongue with satisfaction as he examined her.

" 'Zehr gut!' as all good Germans say after the first barrel of beer. Literature hasn't changed you in the least, mother—you're just the same kind, middle-aged woman, tall and inclined to plumpness. May the numerous gods bless your humble beginning!"

Half an hour later she stood at the gates of the factory, calm and confident, bending under the weight of her baskets. Two guards passed their hands roughly over everyone who entered the yard, for which they were rewarded by the curses of their victims and the jibes of the workers. To one side stood a policeman and a long-legged man with a red face and quick little eyes. The mother shifted her *koromyslo* from one shoulder to the other and watched the

long-legged man from under her brows, for she sensed that he was a spy.

"You devils ought to search our heads and not our pockets," said a tall, curlyheaded workman to the guards who were feeling his clothes.

"Nothing but lice in your head," answered one of the guards.

"So go after the lice and keep off thin ice," retorted the workman.

The spy threw him a swift glance and spat with disgust.

"You might let me through," said the mother. "Can't you see a person's back is like to break under a load like this?"

"Go on, go on!" cried the guard irritably. "Got to have your say too, don't you?"

When the mother had reached her place and put her baskets on the ground, she wiped the sweat off her face and glanced around.

The two Gusev brothers, both of them mechanics, immediately came over to her.

"Got any *pirogi?*" asked Vasili, the elder of the two with a frown.

"Have some tomorrow," she replied.

This was the watchword. The faces of the brothers brightened.

"Oh you mother-o-mine!" burst out Ivan.

Vasili squatted down to glance into the basket, and at that moment a pack of leaflets found its way into the breast of his jacket.

"Let's not go home, Ivan," he said in a loud voice. "We'll buy dinner from her." As he spoke he thrust another pack into his boot-top. "Have to encourage the new peddler."

"That's right!" said Ivan with a laugh.

The mother glanced cautiously around.

"Soup! Hot noodles!" she cried.

Furtively removing the leaflets pack by pack, she handed them over to the brothers. Every time a pack disappeared from her hands, the yellow face of the officer flashed before her like the flare of a match, and she gloated to herself:

"Here, take that, my fine fellow!"

Then the next pack:

"And that!"

The workers came with bowls in their hands; whenever one of

them would approach, Ivan Gusev would begin to laugh loudly and the mother would stop handing over the leaflets and turn to her noodles.

"You're a slick one, Pelagea Nilovna!" laughed the brothers.

"It's need drives her to it," sullenly observed a stoker standing nearby. "They took her breadwinner away from her, the bastards! Here, let's have three kopeks' worth of noodles. Never mind, mother, you'll manage somehow!"

"Thanks for the kind words," she answered with a smile.

"Don't cost much to say a few kind words," he muttered, going off to one side.

"Hot soup! Noodles! Porridge!" cried Pelagea.

She kept thinking how she would tell her son about her first experience with the leaflets, while in the back of her mind hovered the puzzled, angry yellow face of the officer. His black moustache kept twitching in consternation and his clenched teeth flashed whitely from under his curled lip. Happiness sang in her breast like a bird. She moved her eyebrows archly and kept saying to herself as she carried on her business:

"Here, take that!"

XVI

That evening while she was having tea she heard hoofs squashing through the mud and then a familiar voice. She jumped up and rushed through the kitchen to the door. A quick step sounded in the entranceway. Everything went dark before her eyes and she pushed open the door with her foot while she leaned against the jamb for support.

"Evening, *nenko*!" came the familiar voice, and long, thin arms were thrown about her shoulders.

Her heart twinged with disappointment and—joy at seeing Andrei. The two sensations merged into one great, consuming emotion, which caught her up in a warm wave, lifting her until she fell with her face against Andrei's shoulder. He held her tight in trembling arms; the mother cried softly and he stroked her hair, saying:

"Don't cry, *nenko*, don't burden your heart. Honest to good-

ness they'll let him out soon! They can't get a thing on him—all the fellows are keeping mum as boiled fish. . . ."

With his arm about the mother's shoulders, he led her into the other room. She pressed close, greedily drinking in his every word as she wiped the tears from her eyes with movements quick as a squirrel's.

"Greetings from Pavel. He's as well and happy as possible. Crowded there! Hauled in over a hundred fellows—fellows from the town as well as ours—and locked them up three and four to a cell. The heads of the jail are good enough chaps, and they're worn out from all the work those devilish gendarmes have given them. The heads aren't so strict: they keep saying, 'just keep quiet, gentlemen, so's not to get us in trouble.' And everything goes along very nicely. The fellows talk together, lend each other books and share their food. It's a fine jail—old and dirty, but easy on a fellow. The criminal prisoners are a good lot and give us plenty of help. Bukin and me and four others have been let out. I'm certain Pavel's turn will come soon. Vesovshchikov'll be the last—has them all down on him for cussing them out the way he does. The gendarmes can't bear the sight of him! They'll put him on trial or give him a beating one of these days! Pavel keeps saying, 'Stop it, Nikolai! They won't improve any for all your swearing.' But he just shouts, 'I'll scrape them off the earth like a scab off a sore!' Pavel behaves himself fine—firm and steady. I'm positive they'll let him out soon. . . ."

"Soon!" repeated the mother with a tender smile, comforted. "I'm sure it'll be soon!"

"So that makes everything just right! How about pouring me a glass of tea and telling me how you've been getting along?"

He looked at her smiling all over, so soft and kind, with a spark of love shining in eyes shadowed by sadness.

"I'm so fond of you, Andryusha," she sighed, studying his thin face, amusingly overgrown with dark bushes of beard.

"Just a little bit would be enough to make me happy," he said, rocking back and forth on his chair. "I know you're fond of me. Your heart's big enough to love everybody."

"But I love you especially!" she insisted. "If you had a mother, everybody would envy her for having such a son."

The *khokhol* shook his head and rubbed it briskly with both hands.

"I have a mother somewheres or other." His voice was low.

"Know what I did today?" she exclaimed, and launched on an excited description of how she had taken the leaflets into the factory, enhancing the tale and getting her tongue twisted in her joy and eagerness.

At first he opened his eyes wide in amazement, then burst into laughter.

"Oho!" he cried happily, "That's something all right! That's the thing! Won't Pavel be happy though? That's marvellous, *nenko*—for Pavel and everybody else!"

His whole body rocked back and forth. He cracked his fingers and whistled in transport, radiating joy and calling forth a strong and full response from the mother.

"You blessed Andryusha!" she said as though her heart had opened up to let out the stream of words that rushed forth, splashing and sparkling in quiet delight. "When I think of my own life—oh merciful Jesus! What did I live for? Work . . . beatings . . . never saw anyone but my husband . . . never knew anything but fear! Never noticed how Pavel grew up, and I don't even know whether I loved him or not while my husband was alive. All my thoughts and all my worries was about one thing—to stuff that brute of mine with good food, to do his pleasure without keeping him waiting, so's he shouldn't get angry and threaten to beat me—so's he'd take pity on me just for once! But I don't remember as he ever did. He used to beat me like it wasn't his wife he was beating, but everybody he had a grudge against. For twenty years I lived like that, and I don't even remember what it was like before I got married. When I try to think back, I go blind like, can't see anything. Yegor Ivanovich was here—we're both from the same town. He spoke about this and that while I—I remember the houses and I remember the people, but I don't remember how they lived and what they said and what happened to different ones of them. I remember a fire. Two fires. Looks like everything was licked out of me and my soul was all sealed up tight—deaf and blind. . . ."

She gasped for breath like a fish snatched out of the water. Leaning forward, she continued in a lowered voice:

"My husband died. I turned to my son—but he was taken up with this business. It was hard for me, and I pitied him. How could I go on living if anything happened to him? How I feared and trembled—my heart fairly burst when I thought of what might happen to him. . . ."

She was silent a moment, then with a shake of her head she added with great significance:

"It's not a pure love, our woman's love. We love what we need for our own sakes. But when I look at you, grieving so for your mother—what's she to you? And all these other folks suffering so for the sake of the whole people, going to jail and to Siberia . . . dying. . . . Young girls walking so far alone, at night, through the mud, through the rain and the snow—seven versts from the town to our house! Who makes them? Why do they do it? Because they have a great, pure love. And they have faith—a deep faith, Andryusha. But as for me—I can't love like that! I love only my own! What's close to me!"

"Yes, you can," said the *khokhol*, turning away and rubbing his head and cheeks and eyes briskly, as was his habit. "Everyone loves what's close to him, but a big heart makes far-away things close. You can do great things—because you have a great mother love in you."

"God grant it," she breathed. "I feel this is a good way to live. I love you now, Andrei—maybe even more than Pasha. He keeps so to himself—just look, wants to marry Sasha, but not a word to me, his mother. . . ."

"That's not true," objected the *khokhol*. "I know for sure it's not true. He loves her and she him—that's true. But they'll never get married. She'd like to, but he doesn't want to."

"So that's how it is," said the mother thoughtfully, her sad eyes on the *khokhol's* face. "So that's how it is—people refusing their own happiness. . . ."

"Pavel's a rare person." The *khokhol*'s voice was soft. "A person of iron will."

"And now he's sitting in jail," continued the mother thoughtfully. "That's frightening—but not so very. Life is different, and my fears are different. Now I'm afraid for everybody. And my heart's different because my soul has opened up the eyes of my heart, and

it looks out and feels sad, but glad. There's lots of things as I don't understand and it's a bitter thing to me that you don't believe in the Lord God. But what can I do about it? I see that all of you are truly good. You've set yourselves a hard life for the sake of the people, a difficult life for the sake of the truth. And now I understand your truth: as long as there are rich people, the common people will never be able to get anything—no joy, no justice—nothing! Now that I'm living among you folks, sometimes at night I think back over the past, think of my young strength crushed under a boot, my young heart pounded under a fist, and a great pity for myself and a bitterness arises. But it's easier for me to live now. Little by little I can see myself as I am. . . ."

The *khokhol* got up—tall, thin, thoughtful, and began pacing the floor with an effort to make no noise.

"How well you've put it," he exclaimed softly. "How very well! In Kerch there lived a young Jew who wrote poetry, and one day he wrote this:

And those so innocently murdered,
The force of truth will resurrect.

"He himself was killed by the police there in Kerch, but that isn't important. He understood the truth and sowed its seeds among the people. You too are one of those 'innocently murdered.' . . ."

"But now I speak up," continued the mother. "I speak up and listen to my own words and scarcely believe my own ears. All my life I thought of only one thing—how to get rid of each new day, how to live it unnoticed, so's nobody would touch me. But now I'm filled with thoughts of other people. Maybe I don't quite understand your cause, but all of you are dear to me, I feel for all of you and want all of you to be happy. Especially you, Andryusha."

He came up to her.

"Thanks," he said. He took her hand in his and pressed it tightly, then quickly walked away. Worn out by her emotion, the mother slowly and silently washed up the cups, brooding over the quiet joy in her heart.

As the *khokhol* walked back and forth, he said to her:

"You might show some affection to Vesovshchikov, *nenko*. His father's in jail—the worthless old drunk! Whenever Nikolai catches

a glimpse of him at the window, he begins cursing. That's a bad thing! Nikolai's kind by nature—loves dogs and mice and all sorts of animals, but he hates people! Just see what can happen to a person!"

"His mother gone... his father a thief and a drunkard..." mused the mother.

When Andrei left to go to bed, she secretly made the sign of the cross above him, and when he had been in bed for half an hour, she asked softly,

"Are you asleep, Andryusha?"

"No, why?"

"Good night."

"Thanks, *nenko*. Thanks," he said gratefully.

XVII

The next day, when Pelagea came to the gates of the factory, the guards stopped her and ordered her to put down her baskets so they could search them.

"Everything'll get cold!" she protested calmly while they roughly felt her clothes.

"Shut up!" said the guard sullenly.

"I'm telling you, they throw them over the fence," said another guard, pushing her lightly on the shoulder.

Once inside the yard, the first one to come up to her was the old man Sizov.

"Have you heard, mother?" he asked quietly, with a glance around.

"What?"

"Them papers. Put in their appearance again. Sprinkled everywhere like salt on your bread. There's your searches and arrests for you! They threw my nephew Mazin in jail—what for? They took your son too, but now everybody can see it wasn't them."

He grabbed hold of his beard and looked at her quizzically.

"You might pay me a visit—must be lonely all by yourself...."

She thanked him and began calling out her wares, taking note of the unusual bustle at the factory. Everybody was excited. The

men came together and separated, running from one shop to another. She sensed something brave and courageous in the sooty air. Now here, now there could be heard sarcastic remarks and exclamations of encouragement. The older workers smiled furtively. The bosses walked past with worried looks on their faces. Policemen ran about, and when groups of workers caught sight of them they either slowly broke up or stopped talking, silently fixing their eyes on the angry, irritated faces.

All the workers seemed to have just had a bath. The tall figure of the elder Gusev walked past, with his laughing brother waddling at his heels.

Vavilov, foreman of the carpenter shop, and Isai, the timekeeper, also passed. The puny little timekeeper had his head screwed around, looking up into the foreman's formidable face as he chattered away with jerks of his stringy beard.

"They make a joke of it, Ivan Ivanovich. They seem to take pleasure in it, though it means the ruination of the state, as the honourable director pointed out. It's not weeding, but ploughing under as has to be done here...."

Vavilov walked on with his hands behind his back, his fingers tightly clenched.

"Go ahead and print whatever you like, you son-of-a-bitch!" he said in a loud voice. "But don't dare say a word about me!"

Vasili Gusev came up to the mother.

"Think I'll try another one of your dinners, mother! Good food you've got!" he said, adding with a lowering of his voice and a narrowing of his eyes, "Hit 'em right in the sore spot! Good work, mother!"

She nodded to him affectionately. She was pleased by the fact that this fellow, who was considered the biggest mischief-maker in the settlement, addressed her with such respect. She was also pleased by the excitement at the factory, and kept thinking to herself:

"If it wasn't for me...."

Three unskilled labourers stopped not far away and she heard one of them say softly, in a tone of vexation:

"Couldn't find it nowhere...."

"Like to hear what's in it. Don't know how to read myself, but it's clear the shot went home!" observed another.

The third glanced around and whispered:

"Let's go into the boiler room."

Gusev looked at the mother and winked.

"See what's happening?" he said.

Pelagea came home in the best of moods.

"The people are sorry they don't know how to read," she said to Andrei. "When I was young I knew how to read, but I've forgotten."

"Why not learn?" suggested the *khokhol.*

"At my age? Just to make a laughingstock of myself?"

But Andrei took a book off the shelf and pointed to one of the letters on the cover.

"What's that?" he asked.

"'R,'" she answered with a smile.

"And that?"

"'A.'"

She was self-conscious and ashamed. It seemed to her that Andrei's eyes were secretly laughing at her and she avoided their glance. But his voice was calm and gentle and his face serious.

"Are you really thinking of teaching me, Andryusha?" she asked with a short, involuntary laugh.

"Why not?" he replied. "If you used to know how, it'll come back easy. 'If the miracle works—we win; if not—no sin.'"

"But there's another saying: 'You can't become a saint by staring at the icon.'"

"Hm!" said the *khokhol* with a shake of his head. "There are lots of sayings. What's wrong with 'The less you know the sounder you sleep'? But it's only the belly that thinks like that, harnessing the soul with such sayings in order to drive it along the easier. What letter is this?"

"'L.'" said the mother.

"Good. See how nice they stand. all in line? And this one?"

She strained her eyes and knitted her brows in the effort to recall the forgotten letters, becoming oblivious of everything else. But soon her eyes tired. At first she shed tears of exhaustion, then of despair.

"Learning to read!" she whimpered. "Forty years old and just learning my ABC's!"

"Don't cry," said the *khokhol* soothingly. "You couldn't choose your life, but at least you realize what a rotten one it's been. Thousands of people could live better if they wanted to, but they go on living like brutes and even boast of it. What's good about the fact that today a man works and eats, and tomorrow he works and eats, and so on all the days of his life—working and eating. In between times he manages to bring children into the world who amuse him until they begin demanding too much to eat, when he gets angry and curses them—hurry and grow up, you pigs—time to get jobs! He'd like to turn his children into domestic animals, but they begin working for the sake of their own bellies—stretching out their lives like a piece of gum. The only people worthy the name are those who devote themselves to tearing the chains off the mind of man. You too, to the extent of your ability, have now undertaken this job."

"Me?" she breathed deprecatingly. "What can I do?"

"Why should you say that? We're like the rain, every drop of which waters the seeds. And when you start reading. . . ."

He broke off with a laugh, got up and began pacing the floor.

"You must be sure to learn. Soon Pavel will come home, and then you—oho!"

"Ah, Andryusha!" said the mother. "Everything's simple when you're young. But later—so much trouble, so little strength, and no brains at all. . . ."

XVIII

That evening when the *khokhol* had gone out, the mother lighted the lamp and began to knit a stocking. But presently she got up, walked irresolutely about the room, went into the kitchen, locked the door, and came back with her eyebrows twitching. After drawing the curtains over the windows, she took a book from the shelf and again sat down at the table. In spite of her precautions, she could not help glancing furtively about before she leaned over the book and began moving her lips. At every sound coming from the street she started, covered the book with her hand and strained her ears. Then again she began her whispering, opening and closing her eyes:

" 'L' for letter; 'b' for box. . . ."

Someone knocked at the door and the mother jumped up, thrusting the book back on the shelf and asking in alarm:

"Who's there?"

"Me."

Rybin came in stroking his beard.

"Didn't used to ask 'who's there,'" he said. "Alone? Thought the *khokhol* would be in. I saw him today. Jail don't seem to have done him any harm."

He sat down and turned to the mother.

"Let's have a talk."

His enigmatic glance filled her with vague alarms.

"Everything costs money," he began in his heavy voice. "Costs money to get born, costs money to die. Books and pamphlets cost money too. Do you know where the money for these books comes from?"

"No, I don't," said the mother softly, sensing something wrong.

"Neither do I. And the next question—who writes them?"

"Those with book learning. . . ."

"The gentlefolk," said Rybin, a dark flush sweeping over his bearded face. "In other words, the gentlefolk write the books and pass them out. But the books are written against the gentlefolk. Now you just try and explain to me what sense there is in them spending their money to stir up the common folk against themselves, eh?"

The mother gave a frightened cry and blinked her eyes.

"What are you thinking?"

"Aha!" said Rybin, turning like a bear. "There you are. Me too —as soon as that thought struck me—everything went cold."

"Have you found out something?"

"Tricked!" answered Rybin. "I feel we've been tricked. I have no facts, but there's treachery here. That's what! Your gentlefolk are sly. I'm after the truth. And now I understand the truth, and I'm not going along with the gentlefolk any more. Whenever it suits them, they'll push me down and walk over my bones like over a bridge. . . ."

His words gripped the mother's heart like a vice.

"Dear Jesus!" she cried in sorrow. "Can it be that Pasha don't understand? And all those who. . . ."

Before her passed the serious, honest faces of Yegor, Nikolaï Ivanovich, and Sasha. Her heart protested.

"No, no!" she said, shaking her head. "I can't believe it! They're people with a conscience."

"Who do you mean?" asked Rybin thoughtfully.

"All of them. Every last one of them I've seen."

"You're not looking in the right place, mother. Look further away," said Rybin, dropping his head. "Those that've joined up with us—maybe they don't know anything themselves. They—have faith—and that's right. But maybe—behind them—stand others—people who are only interested in their own good. A person don't turn against himself for nothing. . . ."

Then he added, with a peasant's laboured conviction:

"Nothing good'll ever come of the gentlefolk."

"What are you thinking of doing?" asked the mother, once again seized by doubt.

"Me?" Rybin glanced at her, became silent, and then repeated, "The farther from the gentlefolk, the better. That's what."

Again he was gloomy and silent.

"I wanted to join up with the comrades and go along with them. I'm fit for that sort of thing. I know what to say to the people. But now I'm going away. I've lost faith and so I have to go."

He dropped his head and became lost in thought.

"I'll go off all by myself through the villages and countryside, stirring up the common folk. They've got to take things in their own hands. Once they understand, they'll find their own way. It'll be my job to help them understand. Their only hope is in themselves; their only brains are their own. That's what."

She began to pity this man and to be afraid for him. He who had always seemed unpleasant to her, now for some reason became very dear, and she said to him softly:

"They'll catch you. . . ."

Rybin looked at her.

"They'll arrest me. Then they'll let me go, and I'll start all over again."

"The *muzhiks* themselves'll tie you up. They'll throw you in jail."

"I'll serve my term—and come out. And begin again. As for the *muzhiks*—they'll tie me up once, twice, and again, and then they'll

begin to realize it'd be better to listen to what I have to say than go tying me up. I'll say: 'Don't believe me—just listen.' And once they listen, they'll believe me."

He spoke slowly, as though weighing every word before pronouncing it.

"I've swallowed a lot lately. And learned a thing or two. . . ."

"This'll be the end of you, Mikhailo Ivanovich," she said, shaking her head sadly.

He gazed at her enquiringly and expectantly with his dark, deep-set eyes. His strong body leaned forward, his hands grasped the seat of his chair, and his swarthy face was pale in the dark frame of his beard.

"Remember what Christ said about the seed? It has to die to be born again. But death won't catch me very soon. I'm a sly old fox."

He stirred on his chair and rose unhurriedly.

"I'll go down to the saloon and sit around with the men awhile. The *khokhol* don't seem to be coming. Back at the old business?"

"Yes," answered the mother with a smile.

"Good. You tell him about me. . . ."

They walked slowly into the kitchen, shoulder to shoulder, passing remarks without looking at each other.

"Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye. When you giving notice at the factory?"

"Given it already."

"And when you leaving?"

"Tomorrow. Early in the morning. Good-bye."

Clumsily and reluctantly Rybin stooped through the door into the entranceway. For a minute the mother stood listening to his heavy steps and to the doubts stirring in her own breast. Then she turned quietly, went into the other room and raised the curtain of the window. The darkness stood motionless beyond.

"I live at night," she thought.

She felt sorry for that somber *muzhik*, so broad and strong.

Andrei returned in high spirits.

When she had told him about Rybin, he exclaimed:

"Let him go ahead and wander through the villages, shouting of justice, stirring up the people. It's hard for him to go along with us. His head's full of *muzhik* ideas—no room there for ours."

"He talked about the gentlefolk—there's something in what he said," observed the mother cautiously. "See they don't fool you!"

"They rub you the wrong way?" laughed the *khokhol*. "Eh, *nenko*, money! If only we had it! We're still carrying on at other people's expense. Nikolai Ivanovich, for instance, gets seventy-five rubles a month; he gives us fifty. The same with the others. Sometimes half-starved university students send us a donation collected kopek by kopek. To be sure, there are all kinds of gentlefolk. Some leave you, some deceive you, but the very best of them join their lot with ours. . . ."

He clapped his hands together and continued eagerly:

"Our final triumph's further away than an eagle could fly, but still we'll put on a show for our First of May holiday. It's going to be fine!"

His enthusiasm dispersed the doubts sown by Rybin. The *khokhol* walked up and down, rumpling his hair and gazing at the floor.

"Sometimes your heart's so full—it's just wonderful! It seems no matter where you go, everyone's your comrade. They're all alight with the same fire, they're all good and kind and jolly. You don't have to talk to understand each other. You live together like one great chorus in which every heart is singing its own song. And all the songs are like streams pouring into one river, and the river flows broad and free into the joyous sea of the new life."

The mother tried not to move for fear of interrupting his thoughts and cutting off his speech. She always listened more attentively to him than to anybody else—he spoke simpler than the others and his words went more directly to the heart. Pavel never spoke of what he visioned for the future. But the *khokhol* always seemed to be living in that future. His speeches told of the rejoicing that would come for all peoples on the earth. And for the mother, this was what gave meaning to the life and work of her son and of all his comrades.

"Then suddenly you come to your senses," continued the *khokhol* with a shake of his head, "glance around, and everything is cold and dirty; everybody's tired and irritable. . . ."

He continued with great sadness:

"You mustn't put your faith in people. That hurts, I know, but you must be afraid of them and even—hate them. A man has two sides to him. You'd like only to love him, but how can you? How

can you forgive a person for rushing at you like a wild beast, for failing to see the living soul in you and smashing the human face of you? You can't forgive that! Not because of yourself—you could stand anything yourself—but because you can't let them think you approve—you can't let them use your back for learning how to beat others."

His eyes were burning with a cold flame, his head was lowered stubbornly and he spoke more firmly:

"I have no right to forgive anything wrong, even if it doesn't hurt me. I'm not the only one on this earth! Today I may let someone do me an injury, even laughing at it because it's not worth noticing—but tomorrow, having tried out his strength on me, he may go skin somebody else. You can't look at everybody the same; you have to coldly pick and choose: this is my kind, this is not. All this is true enough—but not much comfort."

For some reason the mother thought of Sasha, and then of the officer.

"What kind of bread can you expect from unsieved flour?" she said with a sigh.

"That's the whole trouble!" exclaimed the *khokhol.*

"Yes," said the mother. In her memory rose the figure of her husband—as heavy and cheerless as a great stone overgrown with moss. She imagined how it would be if the *khokhol* married Natasha, and her son—Sasha.

"And why is it so?" asked the *khokhol,* warming up to his subject. "It's as plain as the nose on your face. It's all because people don't stand on the same level. Let's even them up! Let's divide up all that the mind has conceived and the hand has made. Let's not make people slaves of fear and envy, prisoners of greed and stupidity. . . ."

They had many such talks after this.

Nakhodka was taken back at the factory, and he gave the mother all his wages. She accepted them from him as simply as she had from Pavel.

Sometimes Andrei would say to her, with a twinkle in his eye:

"How about reading a little bit, *nenko?*"

She would laugh, but firmly refuse. That twinkle in his eye hurt her.

"If you consider it such a joke, why bother?" she would think to herself.

But more and more often she would ask him to explain to her the meaning of some literary word, glancing to one side as she asked and assuming a tone of indifference. He guessed that she was secretly studying, and in appreciation of her reticence he stopped asking her to read to him.

"My eyes are growing weak, Andryusha. I need glasses," she said to him one day.

"That's easily remedied," he replied. "On Sunday I'll take you to a doctor in town and you will get your glasses."

XIX

Three times she went to ask if she might be allowed to see Pavel, and each time she was gently refused by the general of the gendarmes, a grey-haired old man with purple cheeks and a big nose.

"You'll have to wait at least another week, mother. In a week's time, we'll see. But now it's impossible."

He was round and fat and reminded her of a ripe plum which has lain around long enough to be covered with a furry mould. He was forever digging at his sharp little white teeth with a yellow pick; his small green eyes smiled kindly, and his voice was always courteous.

"He's very polite," she told the *khokhol*. "Always smiling. . . ."

"Oh, yes," answered the *khokhol*. "They're all very nice—so gentle and smiling. They're told: 'Here's a clever, honest fellow whom we find dangerous. Just hang him, if you don't mind. And they smile and hang him. And after that—they go on smiling."

"It was different with the one who came here to do the searching," said the mother. "You could see right away what a pig he was."

"None of them are human beings—they're just hammers to stun people with. Mere instruments to chisel down folks like us so they can handle us easily. They themselves have already been put into convenient shape for those who do the bossing. They'll do anything they're ordered without thinking and without asking why."

At last they allowed her to see him, and one Sunday she found herself sitting humbly in a corner of the prison office. There were

several other people in that small, dirty, low-ceilinged room waiting to be allowed to see prisoners. Apparently this was not the first time they had been there, for they knew each other, and they spun a quiet, sticky conversation, like a spider's web.

"Have you heard?" said a plump woman with a flabby face and a traveling bag in her lap. "At early mass today the cathedral sexton ripped the ear off one of the choir boys."

"The choir boys are all hoodlums," observed an elderly gentleman in the uniform of a retired officer.

A little, bald man with short legs, long arms and a protruding chin kept walking nervously about the office, and making comments in a cracked, excited voice:

"Prices keep going up, and that makes people nasty. Second-rate beef costs fourteen kopeks a pound and bread's up to two and a half again. . . ."

Sometimes prisoners came in—all of them the same in their grey uniforms and heavy leather shoes. They would blink as they entered the half-lighted room. One of them had chains on his legs.

Everything about the jail was strangely peaceful and unpleasantly simple. It seemed as though all these people had long since become accustomed and reconciled to their fate. Some of them patiently served their terms; others stood lazily on guard; still others came regularly and wearily to pay visits to the prisoners. The heart of the mother quivered with impatience. She looked uncomprehending at everything about her, amazed by the sad simplicity of it all.

Next to her sat a little old woman with a wizened face and young eyes. She twisted her skinny neck to listen to all the talk, and looked at everyone with a pert twinkle in her eyes.

"Who do you come to see?" Pelagea asked her softly.

"My son. A university student," answered the old woman loudly. "And you?"

"Also my son. A worker."

"What's his name?"

"Vlassov."

"Haven't heard it. Been in long?"

"Almost seven weeks."

"Mine—almost ten months!" said the old woman, and Pelagea detected a note almost of pride in her voice.

"Yes, yes," prattled the bald old man. "No patience left—everyone's irritable, everyone shouts, and prices keep going up. And people keep getting cheaper accordingly. No one raises his voice to put a stop to it."

"You're quite right!" said the officer. "It's the limit! High time somebody commanded in a strong voice—'Silence!' That's what we need. A strong voice. . . ."

Everyone joined in the conversation, which became very animated. Each was anxious to give his opinion of life, but they all spoke in lowered tones, and the mother felt that everything they said was alien to her own ideas. At home the talk was different—more clear and simple, and louder.

A fat jailor with a square red beard called out her name, looked her over from head to foot, and limped out, saying:

"Follow me."

As she went, she felt an urge to push him in the back to make him hurry.

Pavel was standing in a little room, smiling and holding out his hand. His mother grasped it with a little laugh and blinked rapidly.

"Hello . . . hello. . . ." she said, at a loss for words.

"Calm yourself, mother," answered Pavel as he gripped her hand. "It's all right."

"There's a mother for you!" said the jailor with a sigh. "But you better stand further apart, so there's a distance between you," he added with a loud yawn.

Pavel asked about her health, about things at home. . . . She had expected other questions. She searched her son's eyes for them, but in vain. He was as calm as ever, though a bit paler, and his eyes seemed to have grown larger.

"Sasha asked to be remembered," she said.

Pavel's eyelids quivered, his face softened, and he smiled. His mother felt a sharp pang in her heart.

"Do you think they'll let you out soon?" she asked, hurt and irritated. "Whatever did they lock you up for? Those leaflets have put in their appearance again at the factory."

Pavel's eyes shone.

"Really?" he asked quickly.

"It's forbidden to talk about such things!" said the jailor in a sleepy voice. "You can only talk about family affairs. . . ."

"Isn't that a family affair?" protested the mother.

"Can't answer that. Only—it's forbidden," replied the guard indifferently.

"All right, tell me about things at home," said Pavel. "What have you been doing?"

With a youthful gleam of mischief in her eyes she replied:

"Oh, I've been taking all those things to the factory. . . ."

She stopped, then continued with a smile:

"You know, cabbage soup and porridge, the victuals Maria cooks up—and others. . . ."

Pavel understood. He ran his hand through his hair and winced with suppressed laughter.

"It's a fine thing you have something to keep you busy—no time to be lonely," he said tenderly, in a voice she had never heard before.

"When those leaflets began appearing they went and searched me too," she announced, with a shade of boasting.

"Back on that subject!" said the jailor in an offended tone. "I told you once that was forbidden! They lock a man up so's he won't know what's going on, and here you go! High time you understood what's forbidden!"

"Enough, mother," said Pavel, "Matvei Ivanovich is a very nice person and there's no sense in making him angry. We're good friends. It's quite by chance that he's the one to be present during your visit today. Usually it's the assistant head."

"Time's up," said the jailor, glancing at his watch.

"Thanks, mother dear," said Pavel. "Don't you worry. They'll let me out soon."

He embraced her warmly and kissed her, and she was so moved and happy that she cried.

"Break it up," said the jailor, then muttered as he led her away, "Don't cry, they'll let him out. They'll let them all out. . . . Too crowded here."

Once home, she told the *khokhol* all about it, smiling brightly, with quivering brows.

"It was smart the way I let him know. He understood. He must

have understood," she added with a sigh, "else he wouldn't have been so tender like. He's never that way."

"You're a funny one!" laughed the *khokhol.* "People keep wanting all sorts of things, but all a mother wants is love."

"Oh no, Andryusha! You should have seen those people!" she cried with sudden animation. "The way they get used to it! With their children snatched away from them and thrown in jail, and they acting as if nothing had ever happened—coming there and sitting and waiting and talking over the news—eh? If educated people get used to it like that, what can you expect from us dark-minded folk?"

"That's clear," answered the *khokhol* with characteristic irony. "After all, the law's easier on them than it is on us, and they have more use for the law than we have. So if they themselves get socked over the head with it once in a while they make a face, but not much of a one. It's easier to take a beating from your own club than from somebody else's."

XX

One evening when the mother was sitting at the table knitting a sock and the *khokhol* was reading to her about the revolt of the slaves in ancient Rome, somebody gave a loud knock at the door, and when the *khokhol* opened it, Vesovshchikov came in with a bundle under his arm. His cap was shoved to the back of his head and his legs were splashed with mud to the knee.

"Saw a light in here as I was passing by, so I came in to say hello. Straight from jail," he announced in a strange voice. Taking Pelagea's hand, he shook it heartily and added:

"Best regards from Pavel."

He sat down uneasily and swept the room with his gloomy, suspicious glance.

The mother did not like him. She found something frightening about his square, shaved head and his little eyes. But tonight she was glad to see him and smiled affectionately as she spoke to him.

"How thin you are! Andryusha, let's give him a glass of tea."

"I'm already putting up the samovar," called the *khokhol* from the kitchen.

"Well, how's Pavel feeling? Have they let out anybody besides you?"

Nikolai dropped his head.

"Pavel's waiting there patient. I'm the only one they let out." He raised his eyes to the mother's face and said slowly, between clenched teeth:

"I told them, 'I've had enough. Let me go! If you don't, I'll kill somebody and myself as well!' So they let me out."

"Ah!" said the mother, recoiling. Involuntarily she winked when her glance met his sharp, narrowed eyes.

"How is Feodor Mazin?" cried the *khokhol* from the kitchen. "Still writing poetry?"

"Yes. That's beyond me," said Nikolai with a shake of his head. "What's he think he is, a canary? Put him in a cage, so he begins to sing. But there's one thing I do understand—I don't want to go home."

"What's there for you to go home to?" mused the mother. "An empty house, no fire in the stove, everything cold. . . ."

He said nothing, just squinted his eyes. Then he took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, lit up, and gave the mirthless grunt of a sullen dog as he watched the smoke dissolve.

"Yes, probably everything's cold. Frozen cockroaches on the floor. And frozen mice too. Would you let me spend the night here, Pelagea Nilovna?" he asked hoarsely without looking at her.

"Of course, for goodness sake!" she hurried to reply. Somehow she felt uncomfortable in his presence.

"These days fellows get ashamed of their own parents. . . ."

"What?" said the mother with a start.

He glanced at her, then closed his eyes, so that his pock-marked face had the appearance of being blind.

"I say fellows have come to be ashamed of their parents," he repeated with a sigh. "Pavel's never ashamed of you. But I'm ashamed of my old man. I'll never put my foot in his house again. I have no father. And no home. If I wasn't in the custody of the police I'd go off to Siberia. I'd free the people in exile there—help them run away. . . ."

With her sensitive heart, the mother realized that this boy was suffering, but his pain did not rouse her sympathy.

"If that's the way you feel, you'd better go away," she said in order not to offend him by saying nothing.

Andrei came out of the kitchen.

"What is it you're advocating?" he laughed.

"I'll go get us something to eat," said the mother, as she rose.

After looking intently at the *khokhol* for some time, Nikolai suddenly announced:

"I figure some people ought to be killed!"

"Oho! What for?" asked the *khokhol.*

"To get rid of them."

The *khokhol,* tall and lean, stood rocking on his heels in the centre of the room, looking down at Nikolai while the latter sat stolidly on his chair, wreathed in cigarette smoke. Red blotches broke out on his face.

"I'll yank the head off Isai Gorbov, you see if I don't!"

"Why?"

"He's a spy and a squealer. He's the one ruined my father; he's turning him into a stool pigeon," said Vesovshchikov, looking at Andrei with sullen hostility.

"So that's it!" exclaimed the *khokhol.* "But only a fool'd hold that against you. . . ."

"The smart ones and the fools are all the same," said Nikolai stubbornly. "Take you and Pavel for instance. You're both smart, but am I the same in your eyes as Feodor Mazin or Samoilov, or as you for each other? Don't lie. I won't believe you anyway. All of you push me off to one side—keep me in a special place. . . ."

"You've got a sick soul. Nikolai," said the *khokhol* softly and gently, sitting down next to him.

"It's sick all right. But so's yours. Only you figure what ails you is higher quality than what ails me. We're all bastards to each other, that's all I can say. What've you got to say? Come on."

He fixed his sharp eyes on Andrei's face and waited with clenched teeth. His blotched face did not change its expression, but his thick lips began to tremble as though he had a chill.

"I can't say anything," replied the *khokhol,* meeting Vesovshchikov's hostile glance with the warm smile of his blue eyes. "I know it only hurts to argue with a fellow when all the wounds in his heart are bleeding. I know that, brother."

"You can't argue with me—I don't know how," muttered Nikolai dropping his eyes.

"It seems to me," continued the *khokhol,* "that each of us has walked his thorny path, and each of us has groaned like you in his dark hour. . . ."

"There's nothing you can tell me," said Vesovshchikov slowly. "The soul of me is howling like a wolf."

"I don't want to tell you anything. Only I know this'll pass. Maybe not completely, but it'll pass."

He gave a short laugh and continued, slapping Nikolai on the shoulder.

"This is a children's disease like the measles. All of us catch it some time or other—the strong ones get a light case, the weak ones a bad case. It puts us down at the very moment when we're finding ourselves, but haven't yet caught a full vision of life and our place in it. It seems to you you're the nicest little pickle on earth, and everybody wants to take a bite out of you. But after a while you see that others have a hunk of soul no worse than yours in their breasts, and that makes things easier. Then you get a bit ashamed of having climbed up in the belfry with your paltry little bell, too tiny to be heard in the general chiming. But you discover that your bell adds fine to the chorus of bells, even if the big ones drown it out like a fly in oil if you swing it alone. Do you get what I'm trying to say?"

"Maybe I understand," said Nikolai with a shake of his head, "Only I—don't believe."

The *khokhol* jumped up with a laugh and began to walk about noisily.

"I didn't use to, either, you old load of bricks!"

"Why do you call me a load of bricks?" asked Nikolai with a sullen laugh as he glanced at the *khokhol.*

"Because that's what you are."

Suddenly Nikolai began to roar with laughter, his mouth wide open.

"What's the idea?" asked the surprised *khokhol,* halting in front of him.

"I just thought—what a fool anybody'd be to hurt your feelings," answered Nikolai.

"How could anybody hurt my feelings?" The *khokhol* shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," said Vesovshchikov with a patronizing, good-na-

tured grin. "I only meant a fellow must feel pretty rotten if he ever did hurt you."

"So that's what's on your mind," laughed the *khokhol.*

"Andryusha!" called the mother from the kitchen.

Andrei went out.

Left to himself, Vesovshchikov glanced about, then stretched out a leg encased in a rough boot, examined it carefully and felt his thick calf. He raised his hand, studying the fat palm and the backs of his stubby fingers, covered with yellow hair. With a disgusted gesture he got up.

When Andrei brought in the samovar he was standing in front of the mirror.

"First look I've had at this mug of mine for a long time," he said, adding with a wry smile, "Enough to scare anybody away."

"What made you think of your looks?" asked Andrei, glancing at him curiously.

"Sasha say's the face mirrors the soul."

"Nonsense!" cried the *khokhol.* "She's got a nose like a fishhook and cheekbones like knife blades, but her soul's like a star."

Nikolai glanced at him and laughed.

They sat down to tea.

Nikolai took a large potato, heavily salted a piece of bread, and began to chew slowly and steadily, like an ox.

"How are things here?" he asked with his mouth full.

When Andrei had given him a cheerful account of how their propaganda was growing at the factory, he became gloomy again.

"It's taking a long time—too long! We ought to work faster."

The mother looked at him, and a feeling of hostility stirred in her breast.

"Life isn't a horse to be driven with a whip," said Andrei.

Nikolai stubbornly shook his head.

"Too long. I can't wait like this. What shall I do?"

He made a helpless gesture as he looked into the *khokhol's* face in expectation of an answer.

"All of us have to study and teach others, that's what we have to do!" said Andrei, dropping his head.

"And when do we begin to fight?" asked Vesovshchikov.

"I don't know when we begin to fight, but I do know that they'll

beat us up a good many times before then," replied the *khokhol* with a laugh. "The way I see it, we've got to arm our heads before our hands."

Nikolai returned to the food, while the mother stole shy glances at his broad face, trying to discover something there to reconcile her to his square, heavy body.

She met the prickly glance of his little eyes, and this set her eyebrows aquiver. Andrei became restless—he suddenly began to laugh and talk, then interrupt what he was saying by beginning to whistle.

The mother felt that she understood what was worrying him. Nikolai remained sitting there silent, offering curt and obviously reluctant replies to everything the *khokhol* said.

The little room became stuffy and uncomfortable for the mother and Andrei, and first one, then the other would glance furtively at their guest.

At last he got up and said:

"Think I'll go to bed. I kept sitting on and on in that jail, then all of a sudden they let me go, and off I went. I'm tired."

He slouched into the kitchen, and after moving about a bit, might have died for all the noise he made. The mother listened to the silence, then whispered to Andrei:

"He's having dreadful thoughts."

"Yes, he's a difficult person," agreed the *khokhol* with a shake of his head. "But it'll pass. I was like that once myself. The fire makes a lot of soot before it flares up bright in your heart. You go to bed, *nenko*; I want to sit up and read awhile yet."

She went to the corner where a bed was hidden behind cotton curtains, and for a long time Andrei could hear the warm rustle of her sighs and prayers. He quickly leafed through his book, rubbed his forehead, twisted his whiskers in his long fingers, and shifted his feet. The clock ticked. The wind moaned outside the window.

"Ah, me!" came the mother's soft voice. "So many people in the world, and all of them groaning in their own way. Where are the happy ones?"

"There are happy ones, *nenko*!" replied the *khokhol*. "And soon there'll be lots of them. Lots and lots!"

XXI

Life flowed along quickly, in a succession of varied, eventful days. Each one brought something new, and this no longer alarmed the mother. Ever more frequently her house was visited by unknown people who came in the evening to talk with Andrei in anxious, lowered voices, after which they would raise their coat collars, pull their caps down over their eyes, and disappear in the darkness with noiseless caution. She was conscious of the suppressed excitement each of them felt. It seemed that they all wanted to sing and laugh, but they had no time; they were always hurrying somewhere. Some were serious and sarcastic, others were gay and sparkling with youthful energy, still others were quiet and thoughtful. In the eyes of the mother, all of them were characterized by the same purposeful confidence, and while each of them was highly individual in appearance, for her all the faces merged into one:—into a thin, calmly resolute face with deep, clear, dark eyes whose glance was at once gentle and severe, like the glance of Christ on the road to Emmaus.

The mother counted their number, mentally assembling a throng about Pavel, in the midst of which he would be hidden from the eyes of the enemy.

One day a pert, curlyheaded girl came from town with a package for Andrei. As she was leaving, she turned to the mother with a flash of her merry eyes and said:

"Good-bye, comrade!"

"Good-bye," answered the mother, restraining a smile.

When she had seen the girl out, she went to the window and smilingly watched this comrade of hers go down the street with quick little steps, fresh as a spring flower and light as a butterfly.

"Comrade!" murmured the mother. "You dear little thing! God grant that you find a true comrade to go with you all your life!"

In all these people from the town she detected something childlike, and was inclined to smile to herself condescendingly. But she was touched and happily surprised by their faith, whose profundity became more and more evident to her. Her heart was warmed and caressed by their dreams of the triumph of justice, and as she listened to them she sighed with some incomprehensible sadness. But she

was particularly touched by their utter simplicity, and by a lovely, lavish indifference to their own welfare.

She already understood much of what they said about life, she felt that they had discovered the true source of human sorrow and she agreed with most of their claims. But in the depths of her heart she did not believe that they would be able to remake life, or that they would be strong enough to draw all the working people to their cause. Everyone was concerned with filling his belly today; nobody wanted to postpone it until even tomorrow.

Few people would consent to go that long and difficult road; few eyes would catch the fabulous vision of the kingdom of human brotherhood to be reached at the end. For that reason all these good people seemed to be children to her, in spite of their beards and mature faces, often worn with weariness.

"You poor dears!" she thought, shaking her head.

But now all of them were living a fine, serious, sensible life. They spoke of doing good and did not spare themselves in their effort to teach others what they already knew. She realized how one could love such a life in spite of its danger, and with a sigh she glanced back over the dark, narrow ribbon of her past. Little by little there grew within her a calm consciousness that she herself was important to this new life. Formerly she had never felt that anyone needed her, but now she clearly saw that many people needed her, and this was a new and pleasant thing which made her lift her head.

She carried the leaflets regularly to the factory, looking upon this as her duty. The detectives became used to seeing her, and paid her little notice. Several times they searched her, but always on the day after the appearance of the leaflets. When she had nothing with her, she would take pains to arouse the suspicion of the guards, who would seize her and search her, while she argued with them and pretended to be insulted. When she had proved her innocence, she would go away, proud of her ingenuity. This was a game she enjoyed.

Vesovshchikov was not taken back at the factory. He got a job with a lumber merchant hauling logs, boards and firewood. The mother saw him pass with his load almost every day: first came a pair of skinny black horses whose legs trembled from the strain of their effort and whose heads nodded wearily as they blinked their dull and tortured eyes; behind them jerked a long wet log or a pile

of boards which clapped together noisily; alongside walked Nikolai, holding the reins loosely in his hands—dirty, ragged, in heavy boots, his cap pushed to the back of his head, his figure as thick and clumsy as a stump wrenched out of the ground. He also nodded his head as he walked with his eyes bent on the ground. His horses blindly stumbled into carts and people coming in their direction. Sharp cries were directed at Nikolai and angry oaths besieged him like a swarm of wasps. He neither answered nor lifted his head, simply giving a piercing whistle and muttering to his horses:

"Get along there!"

Whenever Andrei called together his comrades to read the latest number of a foreign newspaper or booklet, Nikolai would come and take a seat in the corner, silently listening for an hour or two. After the reading, the young people would carry on a heated discussion in which Vesovshchikov never participated. But he would remain when everyone else had left and talk to Andrei alone.

"Who is most to blame?" he would ask sullenly.

"The person to blame is the first one who ever said—'that's mine!' That fellow died a few thousand years ago, so there's no sense in getting mad at him," answered the *khokhol* jokingly, but his eyes were uneasy.

"How about the rich? And those who back them up?"

The *khokhol* toyed with his hair and pulled at his moustache as he selected simple words in which to tell about life and people. But according to him, it always turned out that all people in general were to blame, and this did not satisfy Nikolai. Compressing his thick lips, he would shake his head and mutter that this was not so. At last he would take his leave, morbid and dissatisfied.

One day he said:

"No, there must be people who are to blame. And they're right here. I'm telling you we've got to plough up the whole of our life, like a field of weeds—without a drop of mercy!"

"That's what Isai the timekeeper said about you one day," recalled the mother.

"Isai?" asked Vesovshchikov, after a pause.

"Yes. He's a mean fellow. He keeps his eye on everybody and asks all sorts of questions. He's started coming over to our street and peeking in the window."

"Peeking in the window?" repeated Nikolai.

The mother was already in bed and could not see his face, but she realized she should not have said it from the way the *khokhol* hastened to put in:

"Let him come peeking if he's got so much time on his hands. . . ."

"Hold on there," said Nikolai. "*He's* one of those who's to blame."

"What's he to blame for?" asked the *khokhol* quickly. "For being stupid?"

Vesovshchikov went out without answering.

The *khokhol* began to walk slowly and wearily about the room, quietly shuffling his long, spidery legs. He had taken off his boots, as he always did so as not to make a noise and disturb Pelagea. But she was not asleep, and said anxiously when Nikolai had gone:

"I'm afraid of him!"

"Hm-m," drawled the *khokhol*. "Yes, he's dead serious all right. Don't mention Isai to him any more, *nenko*. That Isai actually is a spy."

"Nothing strange about that," answered the mother. "One of his relatives is a gendarme."

"Nikolai's capable of beating him up," continued the *khokhol* warily. "See the feelings those honourable gentlemen in power have nurtured in the common folk? What will happen when people like Nikolai realize how they have been wronged and come to the end of their rope? They'll spatter the sky with blood and the earth will froth in it like a cake of soap."

"It's dreadful, Andryusha," exclaimed the mother softly.

"Well, don't eat flies and you won't throw up," said Andrei after a minute. "But every drop of bourgeois blood will already have been washed in the oceans of tears they've made the common people shed."

Presently he laughed softly and added:

"Fair enough but that's not much comfort."

XXII

One Sunday the mother came home from the store, opened the door and stopped on the threshold all drenched in joy as in warm summer rain: from the inner room came the sound of Pavel's voice.

"Here she is!" cried the *khokhol.*

The mother saw Pavel turn quickly, and a light broke over his face full of promise for her.

"Here he is—home at last!" she stammered and sat down, overcome by the unexpectedness of his return.

He bent his pale face over her; his lips were trembling and moisture glistened in the corner of his eye. For a second he said nothing, and his mother also looked at him in silence.

The *khokhol* left them and went out into the yard, whistling softly.

"Thanks, mother!" said Pavel in a low voice, squeezing her hand with trembling fingers. "Thank you, my dearest."

Overwhelmed by the joy of seeing that expression on his face and hearing that tone in his voice, she stroked her son's head and tried to calm the beating of her own heart.

"My goodness! What for?" she said.

"For helping in our great work. Thank you," he repeated. "It's a rare happiness when a fellow can say that he and his mother are kindred spirits."

She was silent, greedily drinking in his words with an open heart and admiring this son who stood before her so good, so beloved.

"I could see how hard it was for you, mother. How much of it was not to your liking. And I thought you would never become reconciled to us, that our thoughts would never become your thoughts, but that you would just go on enduring us in silence as you had endured things all your life. That was hard for me!"

"Andryusha helped me understand many things," she said.

"He told me about you," laughed Pavel.

"Yegor too. He and I are from the same village. Andryusha even wanted to teach me to read."

"And you were ashamed, and started to study all by yourself on the sly."

"So he guessed!" she exclaimed. Restless with the surfeit of joy in her heart, she said to Pavel:

"Let's call him in. He went out on purpose so's not to be in the way. He has no mother of his own...."

"Andrei!" called Pavel, opening the door into the entranceway. "Where are you?"

"Here I am. Want to chop a little wood."

"Come here!"

He did not come immediately, and when he finally entered the kitchen, began to talk about household affairs.

"Have to ask Nikolai to bring around some wood. Not much left. Just take a look at your Pavel, *nenko*. Instead of punishing the rebels, they seem to be feeding them up."

The mother laughed. She was still dizzy with joy and her heart throbbed sweetly, but already a sense of wariness made her anxious to see her son his usual calm self. Everything was too wonderful, and she wanted this first great happiness in her life to be preserved in her heart for all time as strong and living as at this moment. Fearing that it might dissolve, she hurried to cage it up, like a birdman who has unexpectedly caught a rare specimen.

"Let's have dinner. I don't suppose you've had any yet, Pasha?" she said, bustling about.

"No. Yesterday the jailor told me they had decided to let me go, so I couldn't eat or drink a thing.

"The first person I met when I got out was Sizov," Pawel went on. "He crossed the street to say hello when he saw me. I told him he better be careful—I'm a dangerous person these days—under the surveillance of the police. 'That's all right,' he said. And you should have heard how he asked about his nephew. 'Feodor behaving himself all right?' he asked. 'How can you behave yourself all right in jail?' I answered. 'Well,' he said, 'hasn't been squealing on any of his comrades, I hope.' When I told him Feodor was a good fellow—honest and clever—he stroked his beard and said proudly, 'Aren't any black sheep among us Sizovs.'"

"The old man's got brains," said the *khokhol*, nodding his head. "I've had lots of talks with him. A good sort. Are they going to let Feodor out soon?"

"I think they'll let them all out. They haven't anything against them except what old Isai says, and what could that be?"

The mother moved back and forth with her eye ever on her son. Andrei stood at the window with his hands behind his back, listening to what he was saying. Pavel paced the floor. He had let his beard grow, and little rings of fine, dark hair curled thickly on his cheeks, softening his swarthy complexion.

"Sit down," said the mother, bringing in the dinner.

During the meal Andrei told him about Rybin. When he had finished, Pavel exclaimed regretfully:

"If I'd been home, I wouldn't have let him go. What had he to take with him? Nothing but a muddled head and indignation."

"Well, when a fellow's reached the age of forty, and has spent most of that time grappling with the bears in his soul, it's not easy to make him over," said the *khokhol* with a laugh.

One of those arguments began in which most of the words were hard for the mother to grasp. Dinner was over, but they kept on pounding each other with a hail of high-sounding words. Occasionally they spoke simply.

"We have to press on without taking a single step back," said Pavel firmly.

"And bump into some tens of millions of people who will take us for their enemies. . . ."

As the mother listened to them argue, she understood that Pavel had no use for the peasants, while the *khokhol* stood up for them, trying to prove that the *muzhiks* also had to be shown what was right. She understood Andrei better, and it seemed to her that he was nearer the truth, but every time he said something to Pavel. she became tense and on her guard, waiting breathlessly for her son's answer to make sure that the *khokhol* had not offended him. But they kept on shouting at each other without taking offence.

Sometimes the mother would say to her son:

"Is it really so, Pavel?"

And he would answer with a smile:

"Yes, it is."

"Ah, my good man," said the *khokhol* with friendly sarcasm, "You've had a fine meal, but you've chewed your food badly—there's something sticking in your throat. Better take a swig of something!"

"Quit your fooling," said Pavel.

"Jolly as a funeral feast."

The mother laughed softly and shook her head.

XXIII

Spring came, and the snow melted, exposing the mud and dirt beneath. With every day the mud became more and more noticeable; the settlement looked ragged and unwashed and clothed in tatters. During the day the water dripped off the roofs and vapours rose like perspiration from the grey walls of the houses, but at night the icicles still gleamed whitely. The sun more frequently put in its appearance, and there was no mistaking the murmur of the streams running down into the swamp.

Preparations were begun for celebrating May Day.

Leaflets explaining the significance of this holiday were scattered through the factory and settlement. Even the young people who had remained untouched by the propaganda said as they read them:

"We'll have to plan something."

"High time!" said Vesovshchikov with a sullen smile. "We've had enough playing at hide-and-seek!"

Feodor Mazin was full of enthusiasm. He resembled a caged lark, so thin had he become and so nervously tremulous in speech and movements. He was always accompanied by the silent Yakov Somov, a lad too serious for his years. Yakov now had a job in the town. Samoilov (whose hair seemed to have become redder during his term in jail) as well as Vasili Gusev, Bukin, Dragunov and a few others, insisted that they should hold an armed demonstration, but Pavel, the *khokhol*, Somov and some of the others disagreed.

Their arguments were reduced to a joke by Yegor, who was as weary, out of breath, and perspiring, as ever.

"Our labours to change the existing social system are noble indeed, comrades, but in order to facilitate their success, it is imperative that I buy myself a new pair of boots," he said, pointing to his wet and ragged shoes. "My rubbers have also reached a state defying rehabilitation, so that every day I get my feet wet. I have no desire to take up quarters in the bowels of the earth until such time as we make a public and uncompromising denunciation of the old order, and therefore I reject comrade Samoilov's suggestion that we hold an armed demonstration, substituting for it my own suggestion that I be armed with a new pair of boots, for it is my profound con-

viction that such a measure will do more to hasten the triumph of Socialism than even a first-class free-for-all!"

In the same flowery language he told the workers how people in other lands were struggling to ease their lives. The mother loved to listen to his speeches, and they left her with a strange impression: it seemed that the most vicious enemies of the people, those who most often deceived them and were most cruel to them were fat little red-faced men, vicious, greedy, sly and cruel. When they were hard pressed by the ruler of their land, they sicked the common people on him, and when the people had overthrown the ruler, these little men seized the power by subtle deceit, driving the people away, or, if they resisted, killing them by hundreds and thousands.

One day the mother took her courage in her hands and described to Yegor the picture painted in her imagination by his speeches.

"Is that the way it is, Yegor Ivanovich?" she asked with an embarrassed smile.

He laughed and laughed, rolling his eyes and rubbing his chest as he gasped for breath.

"That's exactly how it is, mother! You've taken the bull of history by the horns! There's a little ornamentation there, a little fancy-work woven into the background, but the facts are all in their proper places! It's just these fat little men who are the biggest sinners and the most poisonous insects feeding on the people. The French were right in calling them 'bourgeois'—remember that, mother—*boor*-geois, for it's boors they are, smashing their fists into all those whose ignorance they can take advantage of, and sucking their blood...."

"You mean those who are rich?" asked the mother.

"Exactly. That's their misfortune. If you keep putting copper in an infant's food, it interferes with the growth of his bones and he becomes a dwarf, but if you poison a person with gold, his soul becomes little and grey and lifeless, like one of those rubber balls the children buy for five kopeks."

One day when they were speaking of Yegor, Pavel said:

"The fact is, Andrei, people who do the most joking are usually the ones whose hearts are doing the most aching."

The *khokhol* paused before answering and narrowed his eyes.

"If you're right, then you'd expect the whole of Russia to die of laughing."

Natasha put in her appearance. She had also been in jail—in some other town. The experience did not seem to have changed her any. The mother noticed that the *khokhol* became livelier in her presence. He cracked jokes and made fun of everybody, causing her to laugh gaily. But when she left, he began to whistle that mournful song of his, walking up and down the room, dragging his feet wearily.

Sasha often ran in for a second; she was always frowning and in a hurry, and for some reason she became ever more angular and abrupt.

Once when Pavel went out into the entranceway to say good-bye to her, forgetting to close the door after him, the mother overheard their hurried conversation:

"Are you going to carry the banner?" asked the girl.

"Yes."

"It's decided?"

"Yes. That's my right."

"Back to jail again?"

Pavel did not answer.

"Couldn't you . . ." she began, but broke off.

"What?"

"Let somebody else do it?"

"No," he said firmly.

"Think it over. You have such influence. Everybody likes you. . . . You and Nakhodka are the most popular. Just think how much good you can do here! But for carrying the banner they'll send you away—far away—and for a long time!"

The mother could detect the familiar emotions of fear and longing in the girl's voice. And Sasha's words fell on her heart like drops of ice water.

"No, I've made up my mind," said Pavel. "Nothing can make me change it."

"Not even if I ask you to?"

Pavel's voice suddenly became quick and harsh.

"You have no business speaking like that. You have no right!"

"I'm only a human being," she said softly.

"A wonderful human being!" he replied just as softly, but as though he were choking. "One who is very dear to me. And that's why—that's why—you shouldn't say such things."

"Good-bye," said the girl.

From the patter of her heels the mother could tell that she had oken into a run. Pavel went into the yard after her.

The mother's heart constricted with fear. She did not understand what they had been speaking about, but she sensed that some great misfortune awaited her.

"What is it he wants to do?"

Pavel came back accompanied by Andrei.

"Oh, Isai, Isai! What ever shall we do with him?" said the *khokhol*, shaking his head.

"We better warn him to quit that business," said Pavel with a frown.

"Pavel, what are you planning to do?" asked his mother, lowering her head.

"When? Now?"

"On the first—the first of May."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pavel, lowering his voice. "I'm going to carry our banner—at the head of the column. For that I suppose they'll put me in jail again."

The mother's eyes began to sting and her mouth became dry. He took her hand and stroked it.

"I must. Try to understand, mother."

"I didn't say anything," she replied, slowly lifting her head. But when her eyes met the stubborn light in his, she quailed.

He sighed and dropped her hand.

"It should make you glad instead of miserable," he said reproachfully. "When will we ever have mothers who send their sons to death with a smile?"

"Ho, ho!" muttered the *khokhol*. "'Came the lord mayor with his nose in the air. . . .'"

"I didn't say anything," repeated the mother. "I won't stand in your way. But if it's hard for me—I can't help being a mother. . . ."

He moved away from her, and she felt the prick of his words:

"There is a type of love which keeps a man from living as he'd like. . . ."

"Don't, Pasha," she said with a shudder, fearing that he would say something else that would wound her. "I understand—you can't do anything else—for the sake of your comrades. . . ."

"No!" he said. "For my own sake!"

Andrei appeared in the doorway, which was too low for him, so that he had to bend his knees strangely, with one shoulder against the jamb, his head and other shoulder thrust forward.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to drop this, me lord," he said, sullenly, fixing his prominent eyes on Pavel's face. He resembled a lizard in the crevice of a rock.

The mother was on the verge of tears.

"Dear me, I clean forgot about the wash . . ." she muttered, hurrying out into the entranceway so that her son should not see her crying. Once outside, she huddled in the corner and gave way to silent sobs, as enervating as though her heart's blood flowed with her tears.

Through the half-open door she heard their lowered voices in argument.

"What's the idea? Give you pleasure to hurt her?" asked the *khokhol.*

"You have no right to say that!" cried Pavel.

"A fine friend I'd be if I kept quiet, seeing you make an idiot of yourself. Why did you have to say that? Don't you understand anything?"

"You have to be firm and not afraid to say 'yes' and 'no'."

"In respect to her?"

"In respect to everybody. I don't want love or friendship that hangs onto your legs, holding you back. . . ."

"What a hero! Go wipe your nose! Tell that to Sasha. She's the one. . . ."

"I have already."

"You have? You're lying. You spoke to her gently, you spoke to her lovingly. I know, even if I didn't hear you. But you had to act the big hero to your mother! All your swagger's not worth a snap of your finger if you want to know it!"

Pelagea quickly wiped the tears from her cheeks. In her fear that the *khokhol* would say something too rash, she quickly opened the door and entered the kitchen.

"Br-r-r! How cold it is!" she said loudly, in a voice shaking with fear and grief. "Hardly think it was spring!"

She aimlessly moved things from one place to another, trying to drown out the voices in the next room.

"Everything's changed," she continued even louder. "People have gotten hotter, the weather colder. Used to be warm by this time—sun and a clear sky...."

The voices broke off. She stood listening in the middle of the kitchen.

"Did you hear that?" said the *khokhol* softly. "It's time you understood, damn it all! She's got more than you have!"

"How about some tea?" she asked in a trembling voice, hastening to explain the tremble by adding, "Goodness, I'm frozen!"

Pavel slowly went in to her. His head drooped and a guilty smile hovered about his lips.

"Forgive me, mother. I'm still a youngster—and a fool."

"Leave me alone!" she cried miserably, hugging his head to her breast. "Don't say a word! God knows your life's your own to do with as you please. But—leave my heart alone! How can a mother not love? She has to. I love all of you. All of you are dear to me and all of you deserve to be loved. Who will pity you if I don't? All of you gone—you at the head—the others behind—leaving everything—ah, Pasha!"

Great, burning thoughts beat in her breast. A grievous joy rent her heart, but the mother could find no words to express it, and in the torture of her muteness she looked at her son with eyes glowing with sharp, intense pain.

"It's all right, mother. Forgive me—I see it all now. And I'll never forget it—I swear I won't!" He turned away with a smile, happy but ashamed.

She left him and went to the door of the other room.

"Andryusha," she said in a tone of gentle appeal. "Don't shout at him. You're older...."

"Woo-o-f-f! And how I'll shout at him! I'll beat him up yet!" he exclaimed, remaining with his back to her.

She went up to him and held out her hand.

"Such a good one you are...."

The *khokhol* turned around and went past her into the kitchen with his hands behind his back and his head lowered like a bull. She heard his voice in grim ridicule.

"Get away, Pavel, before I bite your head off! I'm just joking, *nenko*—don't be afraid! Here, I'll put up the samovar. Hm! Fine charcoal you have—all wet!"

He became silent. When the mother entered the kitchen he was sitting on the floor blowing up the samovar.

"Don't be afraid, I won't touch him!" he said without looking up. "I'm as soft as a boiled turnip! And I—hey there, you hero, don't listen—and I'm really very fond of him! But I don't like that vest he's wearing. You see he has a new vest and he thinks it's handsome, so he goes around with his belly sticking out, knocking into everybody and saying, 'Just look what a fine new vest I have!' The vest's all right, but why knock into everybody? Hard enough to avoid people as it is!"

"How long you going to keep this up?" said Pavel with a short laugh. "You gave it to me once—let's call it quits."

The *khokhol*, his legs embracing the samovar, glanced up from where he was sitting on the floor. The mother stood in the doorway gazing affectionately at the back of Andrei's head. He twisted his body around, bracing himself on his arms, and looked at mother and son.

"Pretty nice you are, both of you," he said, blinking his eyes which were a bit reddened.

Pavel bent down and grasped his hand.

"Don't pull," said the *khokhol*. "You'll upset me."

"What are you afraid of?" asked the mother. "Go ahead and kiss each other. Hug each other as tight as tight...."

"How about it?" asked Pavel.

"Come on," said the *khokhol*, getting up.

They embraced strongly—two bodies and one spirit aflame with friendship. Tears flowed down the mother's cheeks, but this time they were tears of happiness.

"Women love to cry," she said shamefacedly as she wiped them away. "Cry when they're happy, cry when they're sad...."

The *khokhol* pushed Pavel gently away.

"Enough," he said, wiping his eyes too. "Once the calf's slaughtered, time to roast it. Damn those coals of yours! I blew so hard I got an eyeful!"

"Nothing shameful about such tears," said Pavel softly, sitting down by the window.

His mother went over and took her place beside him. Her heart was filled with new courage, which made her calm and content in spite of her sadness.

"I'll carry in the dishes—don't get up, *nenko*," said the *khokhol*, going out of the room. "Better rest up a bit—after having the heart squeezed out of you like that...."

The sound of his rich voice came back to them:

"We had a fine taste of life just now—a bit of warm human life!"

"Yes," said Pavel, glancing at his mother.

"And it's made everything different," she said. "Our suffering's different and our joy's different...."

"That's how it ought to be!" said the *khokhol*. "Because a new heart's being born, *nenko* mine. A new heart's being born to life. Man is striding ahead, illuminating everything with the light of reason and calling as he goes—'People of all lands! Unite in one family!' And in answer to his call all sound hearts join into one huge heart as strong and sonorous as a silver bell...."

The mother tightly clamped her lips to keep them from trembling, and tightly closed her eyes to keep them from crying.

Pavel raised his arm as though to speak, but the mother drew him toward her and whispered:

"Don't interrupt him."

The *khokhol* came and stood in the doorway. "People will see a lot of sorrow yet, and a lot of blood is yet to be shed; but all of my suffering and all of my blood is little to pay for what I already hold in my breast and my brain. I am rich as a star, with all its rays. I can bear anything, endure anything, because I have within me a great joy which nothing and no one can ever destroy. And in this joy lies my strength!"

They sat over their tea until midnight, talking intimately of life and people and the future.

Whenever an idea became clear to the mother, she reached with a sigh into her past for some coarse and grievous recollection to serve as a stone for bolstering the idea.

Her fears melted in the warm flow of their conversation; she felt once more as she had felt that day long ago when her father had said to her sternly:

"No sense in making a face! Once somebody's turned up who's fool enough to take you to wife, go ahead and grab the chance! All the hens get married, and they all have children who bring them nothing but a pack of trouble. Who do you think you are?"

After these words she had seemed to see an inevitable path stretching before her which wound futilely about some dark, barren waste. The inevitability of proceeding along that path had filled her breast with blind peace. So it was at present. But as she sensed the approach of new sorrow, she kept saying spitefully within herself, to some unknown person:

"Here, take that!"

This eased her aching heart, which hummed in her breast like a taut string.

But deep down in her soul she nursed the faint but persistent hope that they would not snatch everything away from her—not every last thing! Surely something would remain!

XXIV

Early one morning, when Pavel and Andrei had just left for work, Korsunova knocked at the window and shouted:

"They've killed Isai! Let's go see...."

The mother started, and through her mind flashed the name of the murderer.

"Who did it?" she asked as she threw a shawl about her shoulders.

"He's not sitting there alongside Isai. Knocked him off and made his getaway!"

As they were going down the street she said:

"Now they'll start their searching all over again, trying to find who done it. Good thing your men were home last night. I'm witness to that. I come home after midnight and peeked in your window—you was all sitting around the table...."

"What do you mean, Maria? How could anybody think it of them?" she exclaimed in fright.

"Well, who could've killed him? Must've been someone connected with your fellows," said Korsunova with conviction. "Everybody knows he spied on them...."

The mother stopped, choking, pressing her hand against her breast.

"What's wrong? Don't you fear—he only got what's coming to him! Hurry up or they'll take him away!"

Like a heavy hand deterring her steps were the mother's suspicions of Vesovshchikov.

"There—he's gone the limit!" she thought.

On a clearing not far from the factory where a house had burned down stood a crowd of people, buzzing like wasps, trampling over the charred timber and stirring up the ashes. There were many women, still more children, shopkeepers, waiters from the inn, policemen and the gendarme Petlin, a tall old man with a fluffy grey beard and a chestful of medals.

Isai was half sitting, half lying on the ground, his back propped up against a charred log, his bared head drooping over his right shoulder. His right hand was thrust into the pocket of his pants, while the fingers of his left clutched at the loose earth.

The mother looked into his face. One eye stared dully at the cap lying between his outstretched legs; his mouth hung half open, as if in surprise, and his red beard was sticking off to one side. His thin body with its pointed head and bony face all covered with freckles had become smaller than ever in the contraction of death. The mother crossed herself and gave a sigh. He had been repulsive to her when alive, but now she felt a quiet pity for him.

"No blood," observed someone in a lowered voice. "Must've struck him with his fist."

"Shut the trap of the squealer once and for all!" said someone else vengefully.

The gendarme shook himself and pushed his way past the women.

"Who said that?" he asked threateningly.

The people scattered before his presence. Some of them ran away, while one man gave a vicious laugh.

The mother went home.

"No one feels sorry for him," she thought to herself.

Before her she seemed to see the thick figure of Nikolai looking at her with his hard, cold, narrowed eyes, his right arm swinging as though he had just hurt it.

As soon as her son and Andrei came home, she asked them about it.

"Has anyone been arrested—for killing Isai?"

"Haven't heard anything," answered the *khokhol*.

She could see that both of them were feeling depressed.

"Has anyone mentioned Nikolai?" she inquired softly.

"No," said her son; his eyes were stern and his tone significant. "And they probably don't suspect him. He's away. Yesterday at midday he went off to the river and hasn't returned yet. I asked about him. . . ."

"Praise the Lord!" sighed the mother with relief. "Praise the Lord!"

The *khokhol* glanced at her and hung his head.

"There he lays looking like he didn't know what to make of it all," mused the mother. "And nobody feels sorry for him, nobody has a kind word to close his eyes with. So little and insignificant. Like something chopped off, fallen and left to lay there."

During dinner Pavel suddenly threw down his spoon and cried:

"That's beyond me!"

"What?" asked the *khokhol.*

"We kill cattle to get food, and that's bad enough. And it's clear you have to kill wild beasts once they become dangerous. I myself could kill a human being who turned into a beast of prey for his fellow men. But to make off with a piteous specimen like him—how could anyone raise his hand to it?"

The *khokhol* shrugged his shoulders.

"He was as harmful as any wild beast," he said. "We kill mosquitoes for sucking only a drop of our blood."

"That's true enough. But I don't mean that. I mean it'd be repulsive!"

"No help for it," replied Andrei with another shrug of his shoulders.

"Could *you* kill such a creature?" asked Pavel after a long pause.

The *khokhol* fastened his large eyes on him, then glanced swiftly at the mother.

"For the sake of my comrades and of our cause, I could do anything," he said, sadly but firmly. "I could kill—even my own son."

"Ah, Andryusha!" exclaimed the mother softly.

"No help for it, mother," he smiled. "Life is like that."

"You're right," said Pavel. "Life is like that."

Suddenly Andrei jumped up in a state of great agitation, as though something within him had snapped.

"What can we do about it?" he cried, waving his arms. "We're

driven to hating people in order to hasten the time when we can only love them. We have to wipe out anyone who stands in the way of progress, anyone who sells people for money in order to buy himself honour or security. If there's some Judas barring the way for honest people and waiting for an opportunity to betray them, I myself would be a Judas if I didn't make away with him! You say I have no right? But those bosses of ours—have they a right to keep their troops and executioners, their brothels and jails, their places of exile and all the other accursed means by which they guard their comfort and security? Is it my fault if sometimes I'm forced to take their club in my own hand? I'll take it, all right, without batting an eye. If they kill us by the tens and hundreds, I have a right to raise my arm and let it fall on the head of one of them, on the hated head which has come closer to me than any of the others and is more harmful than the others to my life's cause. Life is like that. But I'm against such a life; I don't want it to be like that. I know that nothing will ever come of their blood—it's a barren, fruitless blood. Our blood gives birth to the truth when it is scattered like rain over the earth. But their rotten blood is sucked up without leaving a trace. I know that. But I take this sin upon myself—I'll kill if I see it has to be done! Mind, I'm talking only for myself. My sin will die with me. It won't leave a blot on the future—it won't stain anybody but myself—not a soul!"

He walked up and down the room, gesturing as though he were chopping something away—chopping it away from his own self. The mother watched him in sorrow and alarm, sensing that something had broken within him and that it was painful. The dark, dangerous thoughts of the murder had left her—if Vesovshchikov had not committed the crime, none of Pavel's other friends was capable of it. Pavel sat with drooping head, listening to the *khokhol*'s strong, insistent tirade.

"Sometimes you have to go against your own self in order to keep going forward. You have to be able to give everything—your whole heart. It's an easy thing to give your life by dying for the cause. You have to give more—what's dearer than your own life. And when you've given that, then you will see how strong the truth you're fighting for has grown—the truth which is the dearest thing in the world to you!"

He halted in the centre of the room—pale, his eyes half closed, his arm upraised in solemn promise:

"I know the time will come when people will wonder at their own beauty, when each will be like a star to all the others. The earth will be peopled with free men, great in their freedom. The hearts of all will be open; and every heart will be innocent of envy and none will bear malice. Then life will be transformed into the great service of Man, whose image will be elevated to the skies, for all heights are attainable to those who are free! Then people will live in truth and freedom for the sake of beauty, and the best of them will be accounted those whose hearts are most capable of embracing the world and of loving it, those who are most free, for in them lies the greatest beauty! They will be great people, those of the new life!"

He became silent a minute, and then, straightening up, he added in a voice coming from the depths of his soul:

"And for the sake of that life—I am ready to do anything...."

A spasm passed over his face, and large tears flowed down his cheeks.

Pavel paled and raised his head, looking at him wide-eyed. The mother started up from her chair as some dark premonition rose and grew in her.

"What is it, Andrei?" asked Pavel softly.

The *khokhol* gave a shake of his head, drew himself up to full height and looked straight at the mother.

"I saw it happen—I know."

She rushed over and grasped his hands. He tried to wrench his right one free, but she clung to it tightly as she whispered:

"Hush! Oh, my dear! My darling boy...."

"Wait a minute!" muttered the *khokhol* hoarsely. "I'll tell you how it was...."

"No, don't," she whispered, looking at him through her tears. "Don't, Andryusha."

Pavel came over slowly, and his eyes were also moist. He was pale, and said with a short laugh:

"Mother's afraid it was you."

"I'm—not afraid. I don't believe it! I wouldn't believe it if I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Wait a minute!" said the *khokhol,* twisting his head and trying to free his hands. "It wasn't me, but I could have stopped it...."

"Shut up, Andrei!" said Pavel.

He grasped his friend's hand with one of his own and placed the other on the *khokhol's* shoulder as though to quiet the trembling of the tall body. Andrei turned to Pavel and said in a broken voice:

"You know I didn't want it to happen, Pavel. It was like this: when you had gone ahead and I remained on the corner with Dragunov, Isai came along and stood off to one side watching us and sneering at us. Dragunov said, 'See him! He's been following me all night. I'll kill him yet.' Then he went off—home, I thought. After that Isai came over to me...."

The *khokhol* took a deep breath.

"Nobody ever insulted me like he did then, the dog!"

The mother silently drew him toward the table and got him to sit down. She sat next to him, their shoulders touching. Pavel remained standing and pulling unhappily at his beard.

"He told me they knew all our names, that all of us were on the gendarmes' list and would get taken in just before our May Day celebration. I didn't answer—just laughed at him, but I was boiling inside. He began to say I was a smart chap and was making a mistake to choose this path. It would be better if I...."

He stopped and wiped his face with his left hand. His eyes had a dry shine in them.

"I understand," said Pavel.

"It would be better to serve the law, he said."

The *khokhol* shook his fist.

"The law—God damn its soul!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "It'd be better if he'd struck me in the face—it'd have been easier for me—and maybe for him. It was too much for me when he spit in my heart with that stinking spit of his!"

Andrei snatched his hand from Pavel's with a convulsive movement and continued in a low voice, full of repugnance.

"I struck him in the face and walked away. Then I heard Dragunov behind me say softly, 'Caught you at last!' He must have been waiting around the corner."

After a pause the *khokhol* said:

"I didn't turn around—although I had a feeling that . . . I heard the blow.... But I kept on my way as though I had stepped on a toad. At work they came crying, 'They've killed Isai!' I didn't believe it. But my arm began to ache so that I could hardly work. It didn't exactly hurt, but as though it had withered...."

He cast a furtive glance at his hand.

"I suppose I won't be able to wash off that stain all my life...."

"The important thing is that your heart's clean," said the mother softly.

"I don't blame myself for it—oh no!" said the *khokhol* firmly. "Only it's a repulsive thing. I needn't have gotten mixed up in it."

"I don't understand you," said Pavel with a shrug of his shoulders. "You didn't do the killing, but even if you had...."

"Listen, brother—once you know a killing's going on and you don't do anything to stop it...."

"I don't understand," insisted Pavel. "That is, maybe I understand, but I don't feel it."

The whistle blew. The *khokhol* listened to the imperious summons, then shook himself and said:

"I'm not going back to work."

"Neither am I," said Pavel.

"I'm going to the bathhouse." The *khokhol* gave a short laugh and began to collect his clothes. He left the house in low spirits.

The mother followed him with a sympathetic glance.

"You can say what you like, Pavel," she observed when he had left, "I know it's a sin to kill a man, but I don't hold anybody guilty. I feel sorry for Isai, such a nobody he was. When I looked at him today I remembered how he had threatened to hang you, but it didn't make me hate him or rejoice that he was dead. I simply felt sorry for him. But now—I don't even feel sorry...."

She became silent and thoughtful before she added with a smile of surprise:

"Dear me, hear what I'm saying, Pasha?"

Apparently he did not, for he answered sullenly, as he paced the floor with downcast eyes:

"That's life for you! See how people are sicked on to each other? You go striking someone without ever wanting to. And who is it you strike? Some poor creature who has no more rights than you

have. And in this case he's even less fortunate than you, because he's stupid. The police, and the gendarmes and the spies are all our enemies. But all of them are people like us, who have the blood sucked out of them in the same way and are no more considered human beings than we are. Everything—just the same! But the bosses have set people against each other, blinding them with fear and nonsense, tying them hand and foot, squeezing them and sucking their blood, making them beat and crush each other. They've turned people into guns and clubs and stones and say: 'This is Government!' "

He went over to his mother.

"It's criminal, mother! The most abominable murder of millions of people! The murder of human souls.... Do you understand? They are killers of souls! Do you get the difference between them and us? We strike a fellow and it is disgusting, shameful, hurtful—most of all—disgusting! But they kill thousands of people calmly, mercilessly, without any qualms, even with satisfaction! And their only reason for squeezing people to death is to preserve their silver and gold and securities and all the miserable stuff which enables them to maintain power over us. Just think of it—it isn't their own lives they're defending when they murder people and mutilate their souls—it isn't for their own sakes, but for the sake of their possessions! It's not what's within them they're defending, but what's outside...."

He took her hands in his and bent over them, pressing them as he said:

"If you realized all the loathesomeness of it, all the shameful rottenness of it, you would understand the truth we are fighting for. You would see how fine and great it is!"

The mother rose, deeply agitated and filled with the desire to merge her heart with the heart of her son in one bright flame.

"Wait a bit, Pavel," she murmured with difficulty, "wait a bit! I—can feel it—just wait a bit!"

XXV

Somebody came noisily into the entranceway. They both started and looked at each other.

Slowly the door opened and in came Rybin.

"Here I am!" he said, raising his head with a smile. "Doubting Thomas, true to promise, travels here, travels there, pokes his nose in everywhere!"

He was wearing a sheepskin covered with tar, bast sandles, and a shaggy cap. A pair of mittens was thrust into his belt.

"How's your health? So they let you out, Pavel? Good. How you getting along, Pelagea Nilovna?" He bared his white teeth in a broad grin; his voice had become more gentle and his face more heavily overgrown with beard.

The mother was glad to see him, and went over to grasp his huge, blackened hand.

"Goodness!" she said, taking a deep breath of the pungent, wholesome odour of tar. "How glad I am to see you!"

"There's a *muzhik* for you!" said Pavel with a smile as he gazed at Rybin.

Their visitor slowly removed his things.

"That's right—back to being a *muzhik*. You keep getting more like the gentlefolk, while I keep moving in the other direction!"

He walked about the room, examining it as he adjusted his colourful shirt.

"Nothing much new here except books. Hm. Well, tell me about everything."

He sat down with his legs planted far apart and his hands grasping his knees, searching Pavel's face with his dark eyes and smiling as he waited for an answer.

"Everything's fine," said Pavel.

"We plough and we sow and we watch it grow, then brew our beer and sleep out the year—that's how it is, eh friends?" laughed Rybin.

"Tell us how you're getting along, Mikhail Ivanovich," asked Pavel, sitting down opposite him.

"I'm getting along all right. Living in Yegildeyevo—ever heard of it? Yegildeyevo. Nice little town. Two fairs a year. Over two thousand inhabitants—a mean lot. No land of their own—have to rent it. And poor land it is. I've hired myself out to one of the suckers there—the place is as full of them as a corpse is of worms. Burn coal and make tar. Earn a quarter of what I earned here and work twice as hard. Hm. Seven of us working for him—that sucker.

Good fellows—all young, all local fellows except me, and all know how to read and write. One of them, Yefim, is such a hot-head—don't know what to do with him!"

"How do you work—hold discussions with them?" asked Pavel eagerly.

"I don't keep my tongue in my head, you can be sure of that! Took all your leaflets with me—thirty-four in all. But I work mostly with the Bible. Plenty to be got out of the Bible. A thick book and an official one, with the approval of the Synod. That's the thing! You can put your faith in it."

He laughed and gave Pavel a wink.

"Only that's not enough. I've come to ask you for books. There are two of us—that Yefim's with me. They sent us with a load of tar, so we grabbed the chance—made a little detour, and here we are. Give me the books before that Yefim comes—not good for him to know too much."

The mother looked at Rybin, and it seemed to her he had changed something besides his clothes. His manner had become less imposing. His glance seemed more sly, his eyes less frank than they had been.

"Mother," said Pavel, "would you mind going for the books? The people there know which ones. Tell them they're to be sent to the country."

"All right," said the mother. "I'll go as soon as the samovar boils."

"You mixed up in this business too, Pelagea Nilovna?" laughed Rybin. "Hm. Plenty of people out there wanting books. That's the work of the local teacher—say he's a good fellow, though he comes from the clergy. And there's a lady teacher about seven versts away. They don't use forbidden books. Scared of losing their jobs. But it's the forbidden books I need—ones with a little pepper in them. If the police inspector or the priest sees the books I have passed out, who'll they blame but the teachers? Meanwhile I'll bide my time off to one side."

He grinned with the satisfaction he took in his own cunning.

"Aha!" thought the mother. "Look like a bear, but it's a fox you are!"

"If they suspect the teachers of spreading illegal literature, do you think they'll put them in jail?" asked Pavel.

"Sure they will," answered Rybin. "What of it?"

"But you're the guilty one, not they. It's you who should go to jail."

"You're a queer one!" laughed Rybin, slapping his knee. "Nobody'd ever suspect me! *Muzhiks* don't go in for that sort of thing. Books are the business of the gentlefolk, and they're the ones to answer for them."

The mother felt that Pavel did not understand Rybin. She saw her son narrow his eyes, and that meant he was angry.

"Mikhail Ivanovich wants to do the work himself, but have others take the blame . . ." she said cautiously.

"That's it," said Rybin, stroking his beard. "For the present."

"Mother!" said Pavel dryly. "If one of our fellows, take Andrei, for instance, should hide behind my back while he did something for which they put me in jail, how would you feel?"

The mother started.

"How could you play such a trick on a comrade?" she asked, shaking her head.

"Ah-h!" drawled Rybin. "I get you, Pavel!" He turned to the mother with a supercilious wink. "This is a ticklish business, mother." Once more he turned to Pavel, assuming an instructive tone. "Your thoughts are still green, brother! There's no honour when it comes to illegal work. Judge for yourself: first person to get thrown in jail will be the fellow they find with the book, not the teachers at all. That's the first thing. Second is, even if the teachers use only approved books, the idea they teach is the same—only the words are different—less truthful. In a nutshell, they're for the same thing I am, only they take a by-path while I go marching down the main road. From the point of view of the bosses, we're both to blame, right? And the third thing is, I don't give a hang for them, brother! You'll never get the infantry to make friends with the cavalry. Maybe I wouldn't ever do such a thing to a *muzhik*. But to them—one of them the son of a priest, the other the daughter of a landlord—why should they go stirring up the people? It's not for me, a *muzhik*, to understand what's on their minds. I know what I'm doing—haven't the least idea what they're after. For a thousand years the gentlefolk kept properly in their place, skinning the hide off the *muzhiks*. Now

all of a sudden they wake up and start taking the blinders off the *muzhiks* with their own hands! I'm not one to believe in fairy tales, and this is mighty like a fairy tale. That's what! Too much distance between me and your gentlefolk. Like when you're riding across the fields in the winter—suddenly you see something streak across the road a way up ahead. What is it? A wolf or a fox or just a dog? Can't tell. Too far away."

The mother glanced at her son. He looked unhappy.

Rybin's eyes shone with a dark light as he watched Pavel with self-satisfaction, nervously combing his beard with his fingers.

"No time to think about good manners," he continued. "Life's hard. A pack of dogs is not a flock of sheep—every dog will bark in its own way."

"There are gentlefolk who go to their death for the sake of the common people," said the mother, thinking of familiar faces. "Spend all their lives in jail...."

"They're in a special class," answered Rybin. "*Muzhik* gets rich—climbs up to the gentlefolk; gentlefolk get poor—climb down to the *muzhiks*. If your hands are of wood, of course you'll be good. Remember how you explained to me, Pavel: its the way a person lives decides what he thinks? That's the thing! If a worker says 'yes,' his boss says 'no'; if a worker says 'no,' his boss says 'yes.' Well, there's the same difference between the *muzhik* and the landlord. It'd turn a lord's stomach to see his *muzhik* get enough to eat. Naturally, every class has its own sons of bitches, and I'm not defending all *muzhiks*...."

He rose to his feet, strong and dark, his face lowering; his beard shuddered as though he had noiselessly snapped his teeth together, and he continued in a softer tone:

"For five years I shifted from factory to factory—forgot what the village was like. When I went back and had a look I realized I couldn't live like that any more! Understand? Couldn't do it! Living here, you don't see the wrong going on out there. Out there hunger haunts people like their own shadows, and no hope of getting bread—none at all. Hunger swallows up their souls and wipes the human faces off them. They don't live, those people; they simply rot away, while all around the officials watch them like hawks to see they don't happen to lay their hands on an extra piece of some-

thing or other. And if they catch a *muzhik* with anything, they grab it away and give him a sock in the jaw. . . ."

Rybin glanced about, then leaned across the table toward Pavel.

"Turned my stomach to be back in that life again. Thought I couldn't stand it. Then I said to myself—'No you don't! Got to stick it out. Maybe you can't give them bread, but you can cook up a good stew!' And there I stayed, my heart fairly bursting with the grudge I bore. And the grudge is still there, sticking in my heart like a dagger."

Slowly he went over to Pavel and placed his hand on his shoulder. The sweat was pouring from his brow and his hand trembled.

"I need your help. Give me books—the kind that won't let a fellow sleep nights once he's read them. It's a porcupine we want to plant under their skulls—with sharp bristles! Tell the people who do your writing to write something for the village too. Let them write so's the letters sizzle! So's the people'll go to their deaths for the cause!"

He raised his arm and enunciated every word separately and distinctly:

"Death will conquer death! In other words, die to resurrect the people! Let thousands of us die to resurrect the millions of people all over the earth! That's what! Dying's easy—for the sake of the resurrection! For the sake of the risen people!"

The mother brought in the samovar and glanced at Rybin. She felt crushed under the weight and force of his words. There was something about him that reminded her of her husband. Her husband had bared his teeth in the same way and had moved his arms in the same way when rolling up his shirt sleeves. He had been filled with the same sort of impatient wrath—impatient, but inarticulate, whereas this man gave expression to his feelings. This made him less frightening.

"We must do this," said Pavel with a shake of his head. "Give us the facts and we'll publish a newspaper for you."

The mother smiled as she looked at her son. Without a word she put on her things and left the house.

"Good! We'll supply you with everything! Write so simply that even the calves will understand!" cried Rybin.

The door of the kitchen was opened and someone entered.

"It's Yefim," said Rybin as he glanced into the kitchen. "Come

here, Yefim! Here he is—Yefim—and this one is called Pavel. I told you about him."

In front of Pavel stood a tall, fair-haired, broad-faced boy wearing a short sheepskin coat, holding his cap in his hands and glancing at Pavel from under lowered brows. He gave the impression of being very strong.

"Glad to meet you," he said gruffly, and when he had shaken hands with Pavel, ran both his hands through his straight hair. Then he glanced about the room, and when he caught sight of the books, began slowly to edge his way toward them.

"He's found them!" said Rybin with a wink to Pavel. Yefim turned and looked at him, then began to examine the gooks.

"What a lot of stuff to read!" he exclaimed. "But you probably have no time. If you lived in the village you'd have more time to read...."

"But less desire?" inquired Pavel.

"Why? Plenty of desire too," answered the boy as he stroked his chin. "The people have begun to stir their brains. 'Geology.' What's that?"

Pavel explained.

"We don't need that," said the boy, putting the book back on the shelf.

"The *muzhik* don't care about where the earth came from," said Rybin with a loud sigh. "It's how it got parcelled out that interests him. How the landlords stole it from under his very nose. It don't make much difference whether it revolves or stands still. Let it hang from his feet, long as it gives him wheat; let it be nailed to the sky, long as it gives him rye."

"'History of Slavery,'" read Yefim. "Is that about us?"

"Here you'll find a chapter about Russian serfdom," answered Pavel, handing him another book. Yefim took it, turned it over in his hands, and said as he put it down:

"That's a thing of the past."

"Have you any land of your own?" asked Pavel.

"Sure. My two brothers and I own four *dessiatins*.* All sand. Good for cleaning brass, but no good for planting."

* A measure equal to 2.7 acres.—*Trans.*

After a second's pause he continued:

"I've left the land. What's it good for? Don't feed you, only ties you down. For four years now I've been a farm labourer. Have to do army service in the fall. Uncle Mikhailo says not to report. Says they send the soldiers to beat up the people nowadays. But I think I'll go. The soldiers beat up the people in the days of Stepan Razin and of Pugachov too. Time to change things. What do you think?" he asked with a searching look at Pavel.

"High time," answered the latter with a smile. "Only it's not so easy. Have to know what to say to the soldiers and how to say it."

"We'll learn," said Yefim.

"If the officers find out, they may shoot you," observed Pavel with a curious glance at Yefim.

"Can't expect much mercy from them," agreed the boy calmly, returning to his inspection of the books.

"Drink your tea, Yefim," said Rybin. "Have to leave soon."

"All right. Is a revolution a—revolt?"

Andrei came in, red and steaming from his bath, a sullen look on his face. Silently he shook hands with Yefim and sat down next to Rybin, giving a short laugh as he looked him over.

"What you so unhappy about?" asked Rybin, slapping him on the knee.

"Nothing special," answered the *khokhol*.

"Also a worker?" asked Yefim, nodding at Andrei.

"Yes," said Andrei. "Why do you ask?"

"He's never seen a factory worker before," explained Rybin. "He finds them something special."

"In what respect?" asked Pavel.

"You've got sharp bones," answered Yefim after a careful study of Andrei. "A *muzhik*'s bones are more rounded off."

"A *muzhik* stands more quiet on his feet," added Rybin. "Feels the earth under him, even if it isn't his. He feels it—the earth. But a factory hand is like a bird—no native soil, no home—here today, gone tomorrow. Even a woman can't hold him to one spot. Soon as anything goes wrong, he gives her the go-by—off in search of something better. But the *muzhik* wants to make things better without cutting loose. Here's your mother back."

"Would you lend me one of your books?" asked Yefim, coming up to Pavel.

"Of course," said Pavel.

The boy's eyes lighted up eagerly.

"I'll return it," he hastened to assure Pavel. "Our fellows are always hauling tar to these parts and they'll bring it."

"Time to leave," said Rybin, who had already slipped into his sheepskin and belted it tightly.

"Won't I have a grand time reading!" exclaimed Yefim, pointing to the book with a broad smile.

When they had gone, Pavel turned excitedly to Andrei.

"What did you think of them?" he exclaimed.

"Hm-m-m," drawled the *khokhol*. "Like a couple of storm clouds."

"Mikhailo?" said the mother. "It's as though he'd never worked at a factory—a real *muzhik*! And such a frightful one!"

"Too bad you weren't here from the beginning," said Pavel to Andrei, who was frowning into his glass of tea as he sat at the table. "You should have had a look into what's happening in his heart—you're always talking about the human heart! Rybin let off so much steam here he simply knocked me over. I couldn't find a word to say to him. How little faith he has in human beings, and how cheap he holds them! Mother was right—it's a frightful force possessing that man!"

"I could see that," replied the *khokhol* sullenly. "The rulers have poisoned the minds of men. Once the masses rise up, they'll knock down everything! They want the bare land, and they'll make it bare all right. They'll tear down everything!"

He spoke slowly, and it was clear that his mind was occupied with something else. The mother reached out and touched him warily.

"Pull yourself together, Andryusha," she said.

"Wait a bit, *nenko* mine," he replied with quiet tenderness. Suddenly he flared up and struck the table with his hand. "It's true, Pavel! The *muzhik* will strip the land for his own use once he gets on his feet! He'll burn up everything, like after the plague, so's to reduce to ashes all traces of the hurt he's suffered."

"And then he'll stand in our way," observed Pavel softly.

"It's up to us not to allow such a thing! It's up to us to rein him in. We're closer to him than anybody else—he'll trust us and follow us!"

"Rybin has asked us to publish a newspaper for the village," said Pavel.

"Just the thing!"

"Too bad I didn't argue with him," said Pavel with a short laugh.

"Still time for it," said the *khokhol* calmly, running his fingers through his hair. "You go on playing your fiddle, and those whose feet are not planted in the earth will dance to your tune. Rybin was right when he said we don't feel the earth under our feet, and we shouldn't, because it's our job to give it a good shaking up. We'll shake it once and people will get yanked loose; shake it again—they'll get free...."

"Everything's so simple for you, Andryusha," said the mother with a laugh.

"Sure," said the *khokhol*. "As simple as life itself!"

In a few minutes he said:

"I'm going out for a walk in the fields."

"After your bath? It's windy—you'll catch a chill," warned the mother.

"I need an airing," he replied.

"See you don't catch cold," said Pavel affectionately. "Better take a nap."

"No, I'm going."

He put on his things and went out without a word.

"He's having a bad time of it," observed the mother with a sigh.

"I'm glad you've become even more affectionate with him since that happened," said Pavel.

"Have I? I didn't notice. He's become that dear to me, I can't even say!"

"You have a kind heart, mother," said Pavel softly.

"If I could only help you—and all your friends—just ever so little! If only I knew how!"

"Don't worry, you'll learn!"

"If I could only learn—not to worry!" she said with a soft little laugh.

"All right, mother, we better drop this talk. But just remember one thing—I'm very, very grateful to you!"

She went into the kitchen so that he should not see her tears.

It was late in the evening when the *khokhol* returned. He went immediately to bed, saying:

"I must have walked ten miles."

"Did it help?" asked Pavel.

"Shut up. I'm going to sleep."

He himself said not another word.

In a little while Vesovshchikov dropped in, as ragged and dirty and discontented as ever.

"Have you heard who killed Isai?" he asked Pavel as he strode clumsily about the room.

"No," answered Pavel shortly.

"Found somebody who wasn't too squeamish for the job. I myself was getting ready to knock him off. I should have done it—I was just the fellow for it."

"Quit that talk, Nikolai," said Pavel in a friendly tone.

"The very idea!" put in the mother affectionately. "Roaring like a lion with a heart as soft as anything! Why should you?"

At this moment she was glad to see Nikolai. Even his pock-marked face seemed attractive.

"I'm not good for much except such business," said Nikolai with a shrug of his shoulders. "I keep thinking—where's my place? I have no place. You got to speak with people, and I don't know how. I understand everything—see all the wrongs—but can't put it in words. I'm like a dumb beast...."

Crossing over to Pavel, he dropped his eyes and stood digging at the table as he said in a childlike voice, not at all in his wonted tone:

"Give me some heavy work to do, brother. I can't go on living without any point like this. You're all wrapped up in your work and I can see how things are growing, and me standing off to one side! Just hauling logs and boards. That don't give a fellow anything to live for. Give me some heavy work to do!"

Pavel reached for his hand and drew him over.

"All right."

From behind the partition came the voice of the *kholkhol.*

"I'll teach you to be our typesetter, Nikolai. How would you like that?"

Nikolai went in to him.

"If you teach me I'll—make you a present of my knife!" he said.

"To hell with your knife!" shouted the *khokhol* in a burst of laughter.

"It's a good knife," insisted Nikolai.

Pavel also began to laugh.

"You laughing at me?" asked Nikolai, halting in the middle of the room.

"Of course," said the *khokhol*, jumping out of bed. "Listen, let's go for a walk in the fields. Such a fine moon tonight—don't you want to?"

"All right," said Pavel.

"I'll come along, too," declared Nikolai. "I like to hear the *khokhol* laugh."

"And I like to have you promise me presents," said the *khokhol* with a chuckle.

He went out into the kitchen to get dressed.

"Put on some warm clothes," urged the mother.

When the three of them had left, she watched them through the window, then glanced at the icon and murmured:

"Dear God, be good to them—help them!..."

XXVI

The days sped past so quickly that the mother had no time to think about the approach of May Day. But at night, when she lay in bed worn out by the noisy, disturbing affairs of the day, she felt a dull ache in her heart.

"If it would only come soon...."

At dawn the factory whistle blew; her son and Andrei would have a quick breakfast and go out, leaving the mother with a dozen tasks to do for them. All day long she bustled about like a squirrel in a cage, getting dinner, boiling up paste and purple ink for their posters, and receiving the unknown people who would appear mys-

teriously, hand her messages for Pavel, and disappear just as mysteriously, leaving her infected with their own excitement.

Almost every night appeals to the workers to take part in the May Day celebration were posted on fences, and even on the doors of the police station; and every day they were found at the factory. In the morning policemen would walk through the workers' settlement, tearing and scraping them off. But at dinner time new leaflets were blown by the wind about the feet of passers-by. Detectives were sent out from the town and took up their stand on the street corners, searching the faces of the workers who gaily went to and from the factory during their dinner hour. Everyone enjoyed seeing the helplessness of the police in coping with the situation. Even the older workers smiled as they said to each other:

"Just look what they're doing!"

Everywhere could be seen groups of workers heatedly discussing the appeal. Life was seething; it became more interesting that spring, because everyone felt a new impulse. Some experienced only further cause for irritation and they cursed the rebels soundly. Others felt a vague hope and alarm. Still others, the minority, had the keen pleasure of knowing it was they who were responsible for stirring up the people.

Pavel and Andrei got almost no sleep. They would come home at dawn—pale, tired, and hoarse. The mother knew that they were holding meetings in the swamps and forest. She also knew that the mounted police patrolled the territory surrounding the settlement at night, and that detectives crawled everywhere, grabbing separate workers and searching them, breaking up any groups of people they came upon, and sometimes making arrests. She realized that her son and Andrei were in constant danger of being arrested, and she almost desired this, thinking it would be better for them.

For some strange reason the murder of the timekeeper was hushed up. For two days the local police carried on an investigation, but after questioning some dozen people, they lost interest in the murder.

In a conversation with the mother, Maria Korsunova expressed the opinion of the police, with whom she was on as good terms as she was with everybody else.

"A fat chance of finding the murderer! About a hundred people must've seen Isai that morning, and a good ninety of them would've

been only too glad to bump him off. For seven years he kept getting on everybody's nerves."

The *khokhol* changed noticeably. His face became thin and his eyelids swollen, so that they half closed his prominent eyes. Thin lines could be traced from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. He spoke less of usual matters, but more and more often he experienced moments of transport, when he would thrill his listeners with his vision of a future in which reason and freedom would be triumphant.

When talk about Isai's murder had died down, he said with a wry smile:

"They don't give a damn for the people, nor even for the ones they use as their hounds against us. And they don't regret the loss of their hirelings—only of their money!"

"Enough of such talk, Andrei!" said Pavel firmly.

"The rot crumbled at the first touch—that's all," added the mother.

"Fair enough, but not much comfort," replied the *khokhol* gloomily.

He often said this, and when he said it, the words broadened into a generalization which was caustic and bitter.

At last the long-awaited day arrived—the First of May.

The whistle blew as summarily as ever. The mother, who had not closed her eyes all night, jumped out of bed and lighted the samovar which she had prepared in the evening. She was about to knock at the door of the boys' room as usual, but she thought better of it, and sat down at the window, holding her hand to her face as though she had a toothache.

Across the pale blue sky floated a cluster of pink and white clouds like a flock of large birds frightened by the roar of the factory steam. The mother watched the clouds and listened to her own thoughts. Her head was heavy and her eyes were dry and inflamed from her sleepless night. She was filled with a strange calmness. Her heart beat evenly and her mind was busy with simple thoughts.

"I lighted the samovar too soon—the water will all boil away.... They're both so worn out, let them sleep a bit longer this morning...."

A youthful ray of sun glanced merrily in at the window. She

extended her hand to it, and when it came to rest warmly on her skin, she quietly stroked it with her other hand, smiling the while with a gentle, meditative smile. Then she got up and quietly removed the pipe from the samovar. After that she washed herself and began to pray, crossing herself uninterruptedly, and silently moving her lips. Her face shone, and her right eyebrow now rose slowly, now dropped.

The second whistle was not so loud and imperious; there was a slight tremor in its thick, moist tone. It seemed to the mother that it blew longer than usual.

From the other room came the deep, clear voice of the *khokhol*:

"Hear that, Pavel?"

Someone's bare feet slid across the floor, and one of the boys gave a luxurious yawn.

"The samovar's ready," cried the mother.

"We're getting up," replied Pavel merrily.

"The sun's rising," said the *khokhol*. "And there are clouds in the sky. We could do without the clouds today."

He entered the kitchen rumpled and wrinkled with sleep, but in the best of moods.

"Morning, *nenko*! How did you sleep?"

The mother went over to him and said softly:

"You march alongside of him, Andryusha."

"Of course!" whispered the *khokhol*. "You can rest assured, *nenko*, that as long as we're together, we'll always march alongside of each other!"

"What are you two whispering about?" asked Pavel.

"Nothing special, Pasha."

"She's telling me to wash behind my ears! The girls'll be ogling me today!" answered the *khokhol*, going out to wash in the entranceway.

" 'Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!' " sang Pavel softly.

The weather became brighter as the day advanced and the clouds were driven away by the wind. The mother shook her head as she set the breakfast table, thinking to herself how strange it all was: here they were laughing and cracking jokes this morning, while nobody knew what awaited them later in the day. And somehow she herself felt calm and almost joyful.

They took a long time over the meal, trying to lessen the wait. Pavel stirred the sugar in his glass with his usual slow care and sprinkled salt evenly over his bread—the crust, which he always preferred. The *khokhol* shifted his feet about under the table (he never could find a comfortable position for his feet) and watched a sunbeam reflected in the tea dance over the wall and ceiling.

"When I was a kid about ten, I once had an urge to catch the sun in a glass," he said. "So I took a glass and crawled up on a spot of sun and—bang with the glass! I cut my hand and got a good beating besides. After the beating I went out in the yard, and when I caught sight of the sun in a puddle I stamped on it for all I was worth. Naturally I got myself all splashed up, for which I received another beating. The only revenge I could take was to stick out my tongue at the sun and shout, 'It didn't hurt, you redheaded devil! It didn't hurt!' That offered me some consolation."

"Why did you call it redheaded?" laughed Pavel.

"Across the street from us lived a big red-faced smith with a red beard. He was a jolly, kindhearted fellow, and it seemed to me that the sun resembled him."

When the mother could stand it no longer, she said:

"Why don't you talk about how you're going to march today?"

"It would just mix things up to talk about what's already been decided," said the *khokhol* gently. "If by any chance they arrest us all, *nenko*, Nikolai Ivanovich will come and tell you what to do."

"Very well," said the mother with a sigh.

"What if we went for a walk?" said Pavel dreamily.

"Better remain at home for the present," answered Andrei. "Why irritate the eyes of the police ahead of time? They know you well enough as it is."

Feodor Mazin came running in, his face shining, his cheeks burning. His joyous excitement broke the strain of their waiting.

"Things have started!" he said. "The people are stirring! Coming out into the street with their faces like hatchets. Vesovshchikov and Vasya Gusev and Samoilov are standing at the factory gates making speeches. Lots of the workers have turned back home. Come on! It's time to go! Ten o'clock already!"

"I'm going," said Pavel decisively.

"You'll see!" said Feodor. "After dinner the whole factory'll turn out!"

He ran off.

"He's burning up like a wax candle in the wind," said the mother. Then she got up and went out into the kitchen to change her clothes.

"Where you going, *nenko*?"

"Along with you," she answered.

Andrei pulled at his moustache and glanced at Pavel. The latter quickly ran his fingers through his hair as he went over to her.

"I shan't say a word to you, mother, and—don't you say anything to me—all right?"

"All right, all right. May the Lord bless you," she muttered.

XXVII

When she found herself outside and heard the excited, expectant hum of voices in the air, and when she saw the groups of people standing at the gates and in the windows of the houses curiously watching her son and Andrei, vague spots shifting grey to green, danced before her eyes.

The people exchanged greetings with them, and this time there was special significance in the words. She caught snatches of remarks passed in quiet voices:

"There they go, the leaders."

"We don't know who the leaders are."

"I didn't mean any harm!"

From another yard someone shouted irritably:

"The police'll catch them and that'll be the end of them."

"They caught them once!"

A woman's wail leaped from a window down into the street:

"Mind what you're doing! It's not a bachelor you are!"

They passed the house of the legless Zosimov, who received a monthly pension from the factory for having been crippled at work.

"Pavel!" he cried, sticking his head out of the window. "They'll break your neck for you, you scoundrel! You'll get what's coming to you all right!"

The mother shuddered and stood still. A sharp pang of anger shot through her. She glanced up into the fat, puffy face of the cripple, and he drew in his head with an oath. She quickened her steps until she caught up with her son, following at his heels and making an effort not to lag behind.

It seemed as though Pavel and Andrei took no notice of anything and were unconscious of the remarks made as they passed. They walked on calmly and unhurriedly. Once they were stopped by Mironov, a modest, middle-aged man whom everyone respected for his sober, upright way of living.

"You aren't working either, Danilo Ivanovich?" asked Pavel.

"My wife's expecting to give birth. And besides, on a day like this with everyone so uneasy—" He glanced steadily at his comrades as he asked in lowered tones:

"They say you fellows are planning to make trouble for the director today—smash some windows, eh?"

"We're not drunk!" exclaimed Pavel.

"We simply mean to march down the street with our flags and sing some songs," said the *khokhol*. "You listen to our songs. They are our profession of faith."

"I know your faith all right," said Mironov thoughtfully. "I read your papers. Ah, Pelagea Nilovna," he cried, smiling to the mother with his intelligent eyes. "You joining the revolt?"

"Have to march along with justice once before I die!"

"You don't say!" said Mironov. "Looks like they were right in saying it was you brought the forbidden pamphlets into the factory!"

"Who said that?" asked Pavel.

"Hm-m. That's what they said. Well, good-bye. Keep yourselves in hand."

The mother smiled quietly. She found it pleasant that they should say such things of her.

"You'll land in jail yet, mother," said Pavel with a laugh.

The sun kept climbing higher, pouring its warmth into the crisp freshness of the spring day. The movement of the clouds slowed down, and their shadows became lighter and more transparent. They crawled softly along the street and over the roofs of the houses, enveloping the people and seeming to cleanse the settlement, wiping

the dust and dirt from walls and roofs, the boredom from the faces of the people. Everything became more cheerful. The voices sounded louder, drowning out the distant hum of machines.

Once more words came flying and crawling to the mother's ears from windows and yards—words that were vicious and alarming, thoughtful and cheering. But now she was eager to contradict, explain, express her gratitude—in general, to take part in the strangely variegated life of that day.

Around the corner of a narrow by-street a crowd of some hundred people had gathered. The voice of Vesovshchikov rose from among them:

"They squeeze the blood out of us like the juice out of a berry." His words fell clumsily on the heads of the people.

"That's right," said several rough voices at the same time.

"The lad's making an effort," said the *khokhol*. "Think I'll go help."

And before Pavel had a chance to stop him he had twisted his long, supple body into the crowd like a screw into a cork.

"Comrades!" he cried in his rich voice. "They say that different peoples inhabit the earth—Jews and Germans, Englishmen and Tatars. But I don't believe it. There are only two peoples—two incompatible peoples—the rich and the poor. People dress differently and talk differently, but just see how the rich Frenchmen, Germans, and Englishmen treat the working people and you'll realize that for us workers all of them are scalawags, damn their hides!"

Somebody in the crowd laughed.

"And on the other hand, if you have a look you'll see that the French and the Tatar and the Turkish workers all live the same dog's life that we Russian workers live!"

More and more people kept turning into the by-street, craning their necks and standing on their toes without saying a word.

Andrei raised his voice.

"The workers abroad have already grasped that simple truth, and today, on the First of May...."

"The police!" cried somebody.

Four mounted policemen drove straight into the by-street, lashing out with their whips and shouting:

"Break it up!"

The people frowned, unwillingly making way for the horses. A few of them climbed up on the fences.

"Here come pigs on horseback, grunting 'Make Way for the Captains Brave!' " shouted someone brazenly.

The *khokhol* remained standing in the middle of the street, and two horses made for him, tossing their heads. He moved to one side, and at that moment the mother grabbed him by the hand and pulled him along after her.

"You promised to stay alongside of Pavel," she grumbled, "and here you are looking for trouble all by yourself."

"A thousand pardons," said the *khokhol* with a smile.

Pelagea was overcome by a racking, ominous weariness which rose from deep down within her and made her head swim, causing a strange alternation of joy and sorrow. She longed to have the dinner whistle blow.

They came to the church on the square. Some five hundred high-spirited young people and children were gathered in the churchyard. The crowd surged back and forth. People restlessly raised their heads and looked into the distance, impatiently waiting for something. The air was charged with excitement. Some people looked as if they did not know what to do, others assumed a show of bravado. Softly came the subdued voices of women, from whom the men turned in annoyance. Sometimes low oaths could be heard. The mottled crowd was enveloped in a dull rumble of hostility.

"Mitenka!" uttered a woman in a soft, trembling voice. "Take pity on yourself!"

"Leave me alone!" came the answer.

The imposing voice of Sizov sounded calm and convincing:

"No, we don't want to go throwing over the young ones. They've got more sense than us, and more courage. Who was it stood up for our swamp kopeks? It was them, and we mustn't forget it. They got thrown in jail for it, whereas we all got the benefit."

The whistle blew, swallowing up the voices of the people in its black noise. A shudder went through the crowd. Those who were sitting down stood up, and for a moment everyone became hushed and on his guard, the faces of many even paling.

"Comrades!" came the strong, rich voice of Pavel. The mother's eyes were stung by a hot mist, and with a single quick movement

she took up her stand behind her son. Everyone turned to Pavel and surrounded him like bits of steel drawn to a magnet.

The mother looked into his face, noticing only his proud, brave, burning eyes.

"Comrades! We decided that today we would make an open declaration of who we are, that today we would raise our banner, the banner of reason, justice, and freedom!"

A long white staff flashed in the air, then dipped into the crowd, bisecting it and becoming hidden by it until a moment later the broad red banner of the working class unfurled above the lifted faces like the wings of a huge bird.

Pavel lifted his arm and the banner wavered; a dozen hands grasped the smooth white wood of the flagstaff, and among them was the hand of the mother.

"Long live the working class!" cried Pavel.

Hundreds of voices roared back in response.

"Long live the Social-Democratic Workers' Party—our party, comrades—the wellspring of our ideas."

The crowd seethed. Those who understood the significance of the banner made their way toward it, so that soon Mazin, Samoilov, and the Gusevs were standing next to Pavel. Nikolai, with lowered head, pushed his way through the throng, and the mother felt herself being thrust aside by other bright-eyed young people whom she did not know.

"Long live the workers of the world!" cried Pavel.

He was answered by a soul-stirring cry coming from a thousand throats in a crescendo of joy and strength.

The mother grabbed the hand of Nikolai and of somebody else; she was choking with tears, but she did not cry. Her knees trembled, and she murmured through quivering lips:

"You dears. . . ."

A broad smile spread over Nikolai's pock-marked face. As he looked at the banner he muttered something and stretched his hand toward it. Suddenly he threw this same hand about the mother's neck and kissed her, laughing as he did so.

"Comrades!" said the *khokhol*, interrupting the roar of the crowd with the gentle intonations of his Ukrainian speech. "We have launched on a crusade in the name of a new god, the god of light

and reason, of goodness and truth. Our final purpose is far away, but our crown of thorns is close at hand. If anyone lacks faith in the triumph of truth, if anyone lacks the courage to give his life for this truth, if anyone doubts his own strength and is afraid of suffering, let him stand to one side! We appeal only to those who believe in our victory! Those who have not caught our vision have no right marching with us, for they will only come to grief. Join the ranks, comrades! Long live the holiday of free people! Long live the First of May!"

The crowd became more dense. Pavel grabbed up the banner and it spread out in the air as he carried it forward lighted by sun, smiling its broad, bright smile.

Feodor Mazin began to sing:

Forever renouncing the old world....

Dozens of other voices joined him on the second line:

We shake off its dust from our feet!...

The mother walked behind Mazin, a radiant smile on her lips, her eyes straining above Feodor's head toward the banner and her son. All about her were joyful faces and shining eyes, while up in front marched her son and Andrei. She could hear both of them singing, Andrei's sonorous tenor merging with Pavel's deep bass:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!
Arise all who labour and hunger!

People came running to meet the red banner. They shouted as they ran, and their shouts harmonized with the sounds of the song—that same song which had been sung in hushed voices at home, but which swelled forth unrestrained and with tremendous force out here in the street. It resounded with indomitable courage, and while it summoned people to the long path leading to the future, it frankly told them how difficult that path would be. The calm flame of the song consumed the dark coals of all that had outlived its time, all the leaden refuse of traditional emotions, reducing to ashes the fear of the new.

Somebody's face, frightened but happy, bobbed alongside of the mother, and a trembling, sniffling voice exclaimed:

"Mitya! Where you going?"

"Let him go," said the mother without stopping. "Don't worry about him. I was scared myself at first—my son's up there in front—the one with the banner."

"Where you going, you fools? The soldiers are up there!"

Suddenly grabbing hold of the mother with a bony hand, the tall thin woman cried:

"Ah, listen how they're singing, dear! And my Mitya too!"

"Don't you be scared," urged the mother. "This is sacred business. Just think—there wouldn't have been a Christ either if people hadn't gone and died for Him."

This thought suddenly flashed through her mind and overwhelmed her with its simple, clear truth. She glanced into the face of the woman who was tightly clutching her hand.

"There wouldn't ever have been a Christ if people hadn't gone and died for Him, for the Lord," she repeated with a surprised smile.

Sizov came up beside her.

"Marching out openly today, eh?" he said, taking off his cap and waving it in time to the song. "Singing a song. And what a song, mother, eh?"

The tsar needs soldiers to send to the war,
So hand him over your sons....

"Aren't afraid of anything," said Sizov. "And my poor lad in his grave...."

The mother's heart was palpitating so that she had to lag behind. She was quickly thrust to one side and pushed against a fence, while past her rolled the people in a vast wave. There were very many of them, and this made her happy.

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise....

It seemed as though a great brass horn were pouring the song into the air, awakening the people, arousing in some a readiness to fight, in others a burning curiosity, a vague sense of happiness, of something new; here it gave rise to timid hopes, there it opened the floodgates to a long-accumulating anger. Everyone looked ahead to where the red banner was waving in the breeze.

"There they go!" roared someone in an ecstatic voice. "You look fine, fellows!"

And because the person was filled with something too great to be expressed in ordinary words, he let out a mighty oath. But malice, a dark, blind, slave malice, hissed like a snake disturbed by sunlight, and wriggled abroad in vicious words:

"The pagans!" shouted someone with a shake of his fist from a house window.

"Rising against His Majesty the Emperor, against His Majesty the Tsar! A revolt!" The whining voice bored insistently into the mother's ears.

She caught glimpses of perturbed faces as the men and women teemed past. The throng kept pouring on and on like lava, drawn ever forward by the song, which seemed to sweep everything before it, clearing the road by the sheer force of its impact. As she looked at the red banner way up ahead, she envisioned the face of her son without seeing it—his bronze brow and his eyes alight with the bright fire of faith.

Now she found herself at the end of the procession, among people who walked unhurriedly, looking about with the cold indifference of observers who are already aware of the outcome of the spectacle. They spoke in matter-of-fact voices and with utter conviction.

"There's one company stationed at the school and another at the factory."

"The governor's come."

"Really?"

"Saw him with my own eyes. Just arrived."

"No denying they've begun to be scared of us—just think—soldiers and the governor!" The speaker gave a happy oath.

"Ah, you good souls," thought the mother.

But the words she heard sounded cold and dead. She hastened her steps in order to get away from these people. It was not difficult to pass them, so slow and lazy was their stride.

Suddenly the head of the procession seemed to have smashed into something, causing the body to rear back with a low, menacing roar. The song also shuddered, only to be taken up louder and in quicker rhythm than before. But again the sound subsided. One by

one the people stopped singing. Separate voices could be heard trying to lift the song to its former glory, to push it ahead:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!
Arise, all who labour and hunger....

But in this effort there was no longer the common will, the cemented faith. Already the voices were tinged with alarm.

Since the mother could see nothing up front and did not know what had happened, she began pushing the marchers aside and forcing her way ahead. As she advanced, she kept bumping into people who were backing up, some of them frowning and dropping their heads, others smiling in discomfiture, still others whistling ironically. She searched their faces, her eyes filled with inquiry, pleading, appeal....

"Comrades!" came the voice of Pavel. "Soldiers are the same sort of people we are! They won't touch us. Why should they? Just because we proclaim a truth that applies to everybody? They need it just as much as we do. Maybe they don't realize it yet, but the time is not far off when they'll join our ranks under the banner of freedom instead of opposing us under the banner of murder and robbery. And in order to hasten their understanding of the truth, we must continue to march ahead. Forward, comrades! Forward!"

Pavel's voice sounded firm. His words rang out sharp and clear, but the crowd broke up. One after another the people dropped out of line, going off to the houses and leaning against the fences. The procession had now assumed the form of a wedge, with Pavel at the head, the workers' red banner waving brightly above him. Or perhaps the procession more nearly resembled a dark bird with widespread wings ready to take to flight, with Pavel representing the beak of this bird....

XXVIII

At the end of the street the mother saw a monotonous grey wall of people without faces cutting off the entrance onto the square. From the shoulder of each of them came the fine cold glitter of a bayonet. And that silent, motionless wall exuded a cold breath which enveloped the workers and chilled the mother's heart.

She forced her way through the crowd in order to reach the banner and join the people she knew, who had mingled with people she did not know as though depending on them for support. She became pressed tight against a tall, clean-shaven man with only one eye.

"Who are you?" he asked, turning his head half-way around to get a look at her.

"I'm Pavel Vlassov's mother," she said, conscious that her knees were shaking and that she was unable to control her under lip.

"Aha!" said the one-eyed man.

"Comrades!" said Pavel. "All our lives we must keep pressing forward. There is no other direction for us!"

The atmosphere became quiet and expectant. The banner was raised, wavered for a second, then floated out over the heads of the people as it was carried steadily toward the grey wall of soldiers. The mother shuddered and closed her eyes with a gasp: only four people—Pavel, Andrei, Samoilov and Mazin—had separated from the crowd.

Through the air came the clear voice of Feodor Mazin:

You fell, a noble sacrifice....

And like a deep sigh came the response in lowered voices:

In this unequal fight....

The four moved forward in time to the music.

Feodor's voice rolled out like a bright ribbon, full of resolution and proclaiming this resolution:

You gave all that you had....

while his comrades joined him in the second line:

For freedom's cause....

"Aha!" gloated someone off to one side. "Singing a dirge, the sons of bitches!"

"Sock him one!" cried an angry voice.

The mother pressed her hands to her breast and glanced around. She saw that the crowd which formerly had flooded the entire street, was wavering as it watched the four men advance with the banner. A few dozen of the marchers followed them, but with every step

someone else dropped out, as though the pavement were burning the soles of their feet.

An end will come to violence....

sang Feodor prophetically, and he was answered by a chorus of strong voices:

The people will arise....

But cautious whispers mingled with the singing:

"They're about to give the command!"

And sure enough, from up front came a sharp cry:

"Lower guns!"

In a wavy line the bayonets were lowered until they greeted the advancing banner with a cunning steel grin.

"Forward march!"

"Here they come!" said the one-eyed man, thrusting his hands into his pockets and striding off to one side.

The mother watched without the quiver of an eyelash. The grey wave of soldiers spread out across the entire width of the street and advanced with cold persistence, the silver comb of the bayonets gleaming up in front. With a few quick steps she came closer to her son and saw that Andrei had stepped in front of him to protect him with his tall body.

"Get back in your place, comrade!" shouted Pavel sharply.

Andrei was singing with his head thrown back, his hands behind his back. Pavel pushed him with his shoulder and once more cried:

"Get back! You have no right to do that! The banner must go first!"

"Dis-s-s-perse!" commanded a little officer in a thin voice as he flourished his sword. He raised his legs high as he marched, without bending his knees, and slapping the earth hard with the soles of his boots. The mother was aware of the shine of these boots.

A tall man with close-cropped hair and a thick grey moustache walked beside him and a little behind. He was wearing a long grey coat with a red lining, and a wide yellow stripe extended down his trouser legs. Like the *khokhol,* he walked with his hands held behind his back. His eyes, with bushy eyebrows upraised, were fixed on Pavel.

The mother's gaze could not embrace all that she saw. Her breast was full of a loud cry which threatened to break loose at every breath; she was suffocated by the cry, but she clutched at her breast and held it back. People pushed her, so that she swayed on her feet as she pressed forward unthinking, almost unconscious. She sensed that the crowd behind her was thinning out, swept away by the cold wave advancing to meet it.

Ever nearer moved the group with the red banner, and ever nearer moved the solid wave of grey people until she could see its face—a distorted face smashed into a dirty-yellow line unevenly dotted with varicoloured eyes stretching all across the street. In front of them glittered the cruel points of steel levelled at the breasts of the marchers, and without yet touching them, the steel cut them down one after another, thus breaking up the crowd.

The mother heard people running behind her, and agitated voices crying:

"Beat it, fellows!"

"Run, Vlassov!"

"Get back, Pavel!"

"Drop the banner, Pavel!" said Vesovshchikov sullenly. "Give it here, I'll hide it."

He grabbed the staff and the banner swung back.

"Let go!" cried Pavel.

Nikolai wrenched his hand away as though he had been burned. The song died. The people came to a halt and formed a solid wall around Pavel, but he pushed ahead. Suddenly there was an utter silence, as though it had fallen from above and enveloped everyone in a transparent cloud.

There were about twenty people surrounding the banner—not more—but they firmly stood their ground. The mother was drawn to them by her anxiety and by a vague desire to tell them something.

"Take that thing away from him, lieutenant," said the tall old man, pointing to the banner.

The little officer ran over to Pavel and grabbed the flag.

"Hand it over!" he shrieked.

"Take your hands off!" said Pavel in a loud voice.

The banner trembled brightly in the air, then dipped to right

and left until once more it stood upright. The little officer jumped back and fell down. Nikolai rushed past the mother shaking his fist.

"Arrest them!" shouted the old man with a stamp of his foot.

Several soldiers ran forward. One of them swung the butt of his gun—the banner shuddered, fell forward and disappeared in the grey mass of soldiers.

"Ah!" cried someone bitterly.

The mother let out the awful wail of a wounded beast. In reply came the clear voice of Pavel from among the soldiers:

"Good-bye, mother! Good-bye, dearest!"

Two thoughts struck the mother: "He's alive. He remembered me."

"Good-bye, *nenko* mine!"

She strained up on her toes to get a glimpse of them. There above the heads of the soldiers she saw the face of Andrei. He was smiling and bowing to her.

"Ah, dear hearts ... Andryusha! Pasha!" she cried.

"Good-bye, comrades!" they called from the midst of the soldiers.

The many-voiced shreds of an echo answered them. It came from the windows, from somewhere up above, from the very roofs.

XXIX

Somebody hit her in the chest. Through the film before her eyes she saw the red and bloated face of a little officer standing in front of her.

"Get along with you, woman!" he shouted.

She swept him with a glance. At his feet she caught sight of the flagstaff broken in two with a bit of red cloth still fastened to one end. She stooped and picked it up. The officer snatched it out of her hand and pushed her aside as he shouted and stamped his feet:

"Get going, I tell you!"

From the midst of the soldiers rose a song:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise! ...

Everything reeled and swam and shuddered. The air was filled with a menacing roar like the hum of telegraph wires. The officer rushed over.

"Stop your singing!" he squealed in fury. "Sergeant-Major Krainov. . . ."

The mother went unsteadily over to where he had dropped the piece of flag and picked it up again.

"Shut their blasted mouths for them!"

The song struggled, trembled, broke off and was over. Some one took the mother by the shoulder and turned her around, saying as he pushed her in the back:

"Get along, get along."

"Clear the street!" shouted the officer.

A dozen steps away the mother saw another crowd of people. They were shouting and cursing and whistling as they slowly backed down the street and disappeared in the yards of the houses.

"Move on, you she-devil!" shouted a bewhiskered young soldier in the mother's very ear, pushing her up onto the sidewalk.

The mother walked away leaning on the flagstaff, for all the strength had gone out of her knees. With her other hand she held on to walls and fences to keep herself from falling. The people kept backing up in front of her, while behind and alongside walked the soldiers, shouting:

"Get along, get along!"

She let the soldiers pass her by, then she stopped and looked around. At the end of the street she saw more soldiers standing in a line to cut off entrance into the square, which was empty. Up ahead the grey figures kept slowly advancing on the people.

She longed to go back, but involuntarily she began once more to move forward, proceeding until she came to a narrow, empty, by-street into which she turned.

Again she stopped. She gave a deep sigh and listened. From somewhere up ahead came the murmur of a crowd.

Leaning heavily on the staff, she set out once more, now all in a perspiration, her brows quivering, her lips moving, her hand gesticulating as disconnected words flashed through her mind like sparks, ever growing in volume until they burst into the flame of a vast desire to give them utterance, to cry them aloud!

The by-street made a sudden turn to the left, and around the corner the mother caught sight of a large group of people.

"You don't go facing a row of bayonets just for the fun of it, brothers!" said someone in a loud, strong voice.

"My, did you see them though? The bayonets driving right down on them and they standing there! As firm as a mountain, brothers, and not a bit scared!"

"That's Pavel Vlassov for you!"

"And the *khokhol?*"

"Hands behind his back and smiling all the while, the rapscallion!"

"Friends!" cried the mother, pushing her way into their midst. People respectfully made way for her. Somebody laughed.

"Look, she's got the flag! The flag's in her hands!"

"Shut up!" said a gruff voice.

The mother spread wide her arms.

"Listen—in the name of the Lord! All you good people, all you dear people, look without fear at what has happened. Our own children, blood of our blood, have gone forth into the world in the name of justice—for all! For the sake of all of you—and of your unborn children—they have taken up this cross—in search of a brighter day! It's another life they want—a life of truth and justice. It's goodness they want for all people!"

Her heart was bursting in her breast, and her throat was hot and dry. Deep within her great new words were being born—words of all-embracing love which seared her tongue and forced it to speak ever more freely and expressively.

She could see that all were silently listening to her. She felt that these people gathered so closely about her were thinking, and a desire which she clearly comprehended was born within her to urge them to follow her son and Andrei and all those whom they had allowed to fall into the hands of the soldiers, all those whom they had abandoned to their fate.

With a glance at the frowning, attentive faces about her, she continued with gentle strength:

"Our children have gone forth into the world to seek for joy. For the sake of all have they gone forth, and for the sake of Christ's truth, and against everything with which the false and evil and

greedy ones of this world have choked us and bound our hands and lashed our backs. Dear people, it's for the sake of all that our young ones have risen up—for the sake of the whole world—for the sake of working people wherever they are. Don't abandon them, don't renounce them, don't force your children to go a lonely path! Take pity on yourselves! Have faith in the hearts of your children, who have given birth to the truth, for the sake of which they are willing to lay down their lives. Have faith in them!"

Her voice broke, and she swayed, on the verge of fainting. Someone caught her up.

"It's God's truth she's speaking!" cried someone in an agitated voice. "God's truth, good people! Listen!"

"Look how she's torturing herself!" said another sympathetically.

"It's not her as is torturing herself," remonstrated still another, "but us as lets ourselves get tortured, fools that we be! High time we understood that!"

"True believers!" cried a woman in a high, trembling voice. "My Mitya—he's a pure soul! What's he done that's bad? He only followed his comrades, them as he loved. It's true what she says—why should we leave our children in the lurch? What have they done that's wrong?"

The mother began trembling on hearing these words, and wept quietly.

"Go on home, Pelagea Nilovna," said Sizov. "Go ahead, mother. You've had enough for one day."

His face was pale, his beard tousled. Suddenly he straightened up, cast a severe glance around, and said impressively:

"All of you know how my son Matvei was killed at the factory. But if he was alive, I myself would send him after them, after those others. I myself would say to him, 'You go too, Matvei. That's the only true way, the only honest way!' "

He broke off and was silent, and everyone else became gloomily silent, in the grip of something new and enormous, of which they were no longer afraid. Sizov shook his raised fist as he continued:

"It's an old man speaking. You all know me. For fifty-three years I've been living on this earth, and for thirty-nine years I've been working here. Today they arrested my nephew again, a good, clever

boy. He was marching up ahead too, alongside of Vlassov, right next to the banner. . . ."

With a wave of his hand he relaxed and said, taking the mother's arm:

"What this woman said is the truth. Our children want to live honest, and according to reason, and we have left them in the lurch. We went away. There's no denying it. Come on, Pelagea Nilovna."

"Good people," she said, glancing about her with eyes red from weeping. "Life is for our children. The earth is for them."

"Come on, Pelagea Nilovna. Here, take your stick," said Sizov, handing her the remnant of the flag.

They watched the mother sadly and respectfully, and she left in a buzz of sympathetic remarks. Sizov silently cleared the road for her, and people stepped aside without a word. Drawn by some incomprehensible force, they followed her down the street, exchanging brief remarks in undertones as they went.

When they reached the gate of her house, she turned to them, bowed, leaning on the staff, and said softly and gratefully:

"Thank you."

Once more the new idea which seemed to have been born in the depths of her heart came to her mind, and she added:

"There would have been no Lord Jesus if people had not given their lives to bring Him glory."

The crowd looked at her in silence.

Once more she bowed to the people and then entered her house. Sizov bent his head and followed her.

For a while the people remained standing talking at the gate. Then they slowly walked away.

PART TWO

I

THE REST of the day passed in a fog of remembrances, and in the utter weariness which gripped her soul and body. Before her eyes danced the grey spot of the little officer, the bronze face of Pavel, and Andrei's laughing eyes.

She wandered about the room, sat down at the window and looked out into the street, once more got up and walked about with lifted brows, starting at the slightest noise, glancing here and there, or senselessly searching for something. She drank water which could neither quench her thirst nor put out the smoldering hurt and longing in her breast. The day had been cleft in two—there had been meaning to the first half, but all meaning had been drained out of the second half, and she was confronted by an aching emptiness, giving rise to the question:

"What now?"

Korsunova came to see her. She waved her hands and shouted, wept and went into ecstacies, stamped her feet, made threats and promises and proposals. None of them moved the mother.

"Aha! The people's up in arms all right! The whole factory's rose up! The whole factory!" came the peddler's rasping voice.

"Yes," said the mother quietly, nodding her head, but her eyes were fixed on the past, on all that had disappeared along with Pavel and Andrei. She was unable to weep—her heart had contracted and dried up. Her lips were also dry and there was no moisture in her mouth. Her hands trembled and little chills kept running up her back.

That evening the gendarmes came. She met them without surprise or fear. They entered noisily and seemed very cheerful and self-satisfied. The yellow-faced officer bared his teeth in a grin as he said:

"How do you do? This is the third time we have met, if I am not mistaken."

She only ran her dry tongue over her lips. The officer talked a lot, trying to be instructive. She realized that he took pleasure in talking. But his words did not annoy her; they did not even reach her. Only when he said:

"You yourself are to blame, ma'am, if you were unable to instill in your son a proper respect for God and the tsar."

She answered him dully from where she was standing at the door:

"Our children are our judges. They will properly judge us for abandoning them as they tread such a hard path."

"What?" cried the officer. "Speak louder."

"I said our children were our judges," answered the mother with a sigh.

He muttered something quickly and angrily, but his words missed the mother.

Maria Korsunova was brought in as a witness during the search. She stood next to the mother, but did not look at her. Whenever the officer addressed a question to her she would bow deeply and repeat one and the same reply:

"I don't know, Your Honour. I'm an ignorant woman, as earns her living in trade and so foolish as not to know nothing."

"Well, hold your tongue," ordered the officer, wiggling his whiskers. Once more she bowed, but thumbed her nose at him when his back was turned.

"That for him!" she whispered to the mother.

When she was ordered to search Pelagea, she blinked and stared at the officer, saying in a frightened voice:

"Oh, but I don't know how to do a thing like that, Your Honour!"

He stamped and shouted at her. Maria dropped her eyes and said softly to the mother:

"Well, then, you better start unhooking, Pelagea Nilovna."

Her face was scarlet as she rustled and felt through the mother's clothes.

"Phooh! The curs!" she whispered.

"What's that you're saying?" cried the officer with a glance toward the corner where the search was taking place.

"Woman's business, Your Honour," muttered Maria in a frightened voice.

Finally he ordered the mother to sign the papers. Her inexperienced hand printed in large, shining letters:

"Pelagea Vlassova, widow of a workingman."

"What's that you've written there? Why did you write that?" exclaimed the officer with a grimace, adding with a short laugh:

"Barbarians!"

They went away. The mother remained at the window with her hands crossed on her breast gazing before her without blinking, without seeing, her eyebrows raised, her lips compressed, her jaws so tightly clamped that she soon felt the pain. The kerosene lamp went dry, and the wick began to crackle, the light to flicker. She blew it out and remained in the dark. Her breast was so full of vacant longing that it hindered the beating of her heart. Thus she stood for a long time—until her eyes and her feet ached. She heard Maria come to the window and call out in a drunken voice:

"You asleep, Pelagea? Poor thing, suffering that way! Go to bed!"

The mother lay down without undressing and immediately sank into a deep sleep which engulfed her like the waters of a pool.

She dreamed that she was walking past a yellow sand hill beyond the swamps on the road to the town. Pavel was standing on the edge of a cliff from which workmen were hauling sand and he was singing in the quiet, musical voice of Andrei:

Arise to the struggle, oh workers, arise!...

She kept walking past the hill with her hand pressed to her brow looking at her son. His figure stood out clear and sharp on the background of the blue sky. She was ashamed to go up to him because she was pregnant, and in her arms she carried another infant. She kept on until she came to a field in which children were playing with a ball. There were many children and the ball was red. The infant in her arms reached out for the ball and began to cry. She gave it the breast and turned back, but on the hill now stood soldiers with bayonets pointed at her. Quickly she ran to a church standing in the middle of a field—a white, ethereal church which was immeasurably high and seemed to be made of clouds. Someone was being buried, and the coffin was large and black and tight-

ly closed. The priest and the deacon were walking about the church in white vestments and singing:

Hallelujah, Christ is risen....

The deacon bowed and smiled at her as he swung the censer. He had bright red hair and a jolly face like Samoilov's. Broad rays of sunlight fell like white scarfs from up where the cupolas towered in the sky.

In both of the choir lofts, boys were singing:

Hallelujah, Christ is risen....

"Arrest them!" shouted the priest suddenly, coming to a halt in the middle of the church. His vestments vanished and a stern grey moustache appeared on his upper lip. Everyone turned in flight, including the deacon, who threw the censer to one side and clutched his head in the manner of the *khokhol*. The mother dropped her infant at the feet of the running people, but they avoided it, glancing with frightened eyes at its naked body. The mother dropped to her knees and cried to them:

"Don't abandon the child! Take it with you!"

Hallelujah, Christ is risen....

sang the *khokhol*, smiling and holding his hands behind his back.

She bent over and picked up the child and placed it on a cart loaded with boards. Nikolai was walking slowly beside the cart and laughing.

"So they gave me some heavy work to do!" he said.

The streets were dirty and from the windows of the houses leaned people who shouted and whistled and waved their hands. The weather was clear, the sun shone brightly, but nowhere was there a vestige of shadow.

"Sing, *nenko* mine!" cried the *khokhol*. "Such is life!"

He himself began to sing, drowning out all other sounds with his voice. The mother followed in his step. Suddenly she stumbled and fell into a bottomless pit whose emptiness came shrieking up to meet her....

She woke up in a cold sweat. It was as though a rough, heavy hand were clutching her heart and taking pleasure in slowly squeez-

ing it. The factory whistle was insistently summoning the workers; she recognized it as the second whistle. Books were thrown about the room, everything was topsy-turvy, the floor bore the imprint of muddy boots.

She rose and began to tidy up without bothering to wash herself or say her prayers. In the kitchen her eyes fell on the stick with the bit of bunting still fastened to it. She picked it up and was about to thrust it under the stove, but on second thought she sighed and removed the cloth, carefully folding it and putting it in her pocket. She broke the stick over her knee and threw it down on the hearth, after which she washed the windows and floor with cold water, put up the samovar, and got dressed. Then she sat down by the kitchen window and once more faced the question:

"What now?"

Remembering that she had not yet said her morning prayers, she got up and went over to the icons, but after standing in front of them a few seconds she sat down again—her heart was empty.

It was strangely quiet, as though the people who had shouted so vociferously yesterday out on the street, had hidden themselves in their houses today and were quietly thinking over the unusual events.

Suddenly she recalled something she had seen in her youth: In the old park of the manor house belonging to the Zausailovs was a large pond all overgrown with water lilies. On a grey autumn day she had walked past the pond and noticed a boat standing out in the middle. The pond was dark and quiet and the boat seemed to be pasted to the black water with its dismal decoration of yellow leaves. The profound sorrow of some unknown grief was conveyed by the sight of this lonely boat without man or oars, standing motionless on the dull water amid the dead leaves. For a long time she stood on the bank, wondering who could have pushed the boat out into the water and for what purpose. That evening she was told that the wife of one of the employees on the estate, a little woman with unruly black hair and a quick walk, had drowned herself in the pond.

The mother drew her hand across her brow and her thoughts floated tremblingly among the impressions of the preceding day. For a long time she sat under their spell, her eyes fastened to a cold glass of tea, while in her soul grew the desire to see and talk to some wise, simple person who could answer all her questions.

As though in response to her longing, Nikolai Ivanovich visited her after dinner. Yet when she saw him she was suddenly seized with alarm and said quietly, without answering his greeting:

"Why did you come? It was a foolish thing to do! They'll catch you up too if they see you here!"

He gave her hand a tight squeeze, adjusted his glasses, then leaned close to her as he explained in his quick speech:

"Pavel and Andrei and I had an agreement that if they were arrested I would move you into town the next day." His voice was gentle and full of concern for her welfare. "Has there been a search?"

"Yes. They rummaged through everything without shame or conscience!" she exclaimed.

"Why should they be ashamed?" asked Nikolai with a shrug of his shoulders. Then he began to explain why she should move into town.

She listened to his friendly, solicitous voice and smiled a faint smile. She did not understand his reasons, but she was surprised by the affectionate faith he inspired in her.

"If that's what Pasha wanted," she said, "and if I won't be putting you out any...."

"Don't worry about that," he interrupted. "I live all by myself. Sometimes my sister comes to visit me."

"I won't go eating your food for nothing," she said.

"We can find work for you if you want it," said Nikolai.

For her the idea of work was inextricably bound up with the work of her son and Andrei and their comrades. She moved closer to Nikolai and looked into his eyes.

"Can you really?" she asked.

"There isn't much to do in my house, since I'm a bachelor...."

"I wasn't thinking of that—not of housework!" she answered softly.

She gave a sigh, hurt that he had not understood. But he smiled with his nearsighted eyes and said thoughtfully:

"If, when you're allowed to see Pavel, you could somehow find out from him the address of those peasants who asked us to print a paper for them...."

"I know them!" she cried happily. "I'll find them and do every-

thing you tell me to! No one will ever suspect that I'm the one supplying them with illegal literature. Bless your heart, didn't I take the leaflets into the factory?"

Suddenly she was seized with a desire to wander over the roads of the land, past forests and villages, with a knapsack on her back and a staff in her hand.

"Please let me do this! I'll manage to go anywhere, you'll see! I'll find my way along all the roads of all the gubernias! Summer and winter—to the very grave—a wandering pilgrim—is that so bad a lot for me?"

She was filled with sadness as she envisioned herself a homeless pilgrim, begging in the name of Christ at the windows of village huts.

Nikolai gently took her hand and patted it with his warm palm. Then he glanced at the clock and said:

"We'll talk about that later!"

"If our children, the dearest part of our hearts, can give their lives and their wills, dying without a thought for themselves, what can be expected of me, a mother?" she cried.

Nikolai grew pale.

"I have never heard such words before," he said quietly, searching her face with tender attentiveness.

"What can I say?" she asked, with a sad shake of her head and a futile gesture of her hands. "If only I had the words to tell about this mother's heart beating in me. . . ."

She got up, lifted by a great force within her breast which set her head spinning with a rush of indignant words.

"Lots of them would weep then—even the meanest of them, the most shameless!"

Nikolai also got up and once more looked at the clock.

"So it's agreed? You will move into my place in town?"

She nodded.

"When? As soon as possible," he said, adding gently, "I shall be worried about you until you do."

She looked at him in surprise. What was she to him? There he stood with his head bowed, smiling shyly, a bent, nearsighted man in a simple black coat. His appearance contradicted his nature.

"Have you any money?" he asked, dropping his eyes.

"No."

Quickly he reached into his pocket and took out his purse, opening it and holding out the money.

"Here, please take it," he said.

The mother smiled involuntarily and observed with a shake of her head:

"Everything's different with you! Even money don't seem to be worth anything. Some people sell their very souls to get hold of it, but for you—as though it was nothing! As though you consent to keep it about you just to do people a favour."

Nikolai laughed softly.

"It's a nasty thing, money. Always so embarrassing to take, or to give away."

He grasped her hand, squeezed it tightly, and said once more:

"Move as soon as possible!"

Then he went out in his quiet way.

As she saw him to the door she kept thinking:

"Such a kind soul—but he don't pity me."

And she could not understand whether she found this unpleasant or simply surprising.

II

She moved into his house on the fourth day after his visit. When the cart with her two trunks on it drove out to the fields beyond the settlement, she turned around and suddenly realized that she was forever leaving the place where she had passed a dark and difficult stretch of life, and where she had entered upon another, full of new joys and sorrows which caused the days to pass quickly.

The factory with its smokestacks thrusting into the sky spread over the soot-blackened earth like a huge red spider. About it clustered the one-storied houses of the workers. They huddled together, grey and dwarfed, on the very edge of the swamp, looking pitifully at each other out of their dull little windows. Above them rose the church, darkly red like the factory, and its steeple was lower than the smokestacks.

With a sigh the mother adjusted the collar of her blouse, which seemed to be choking her.

"Get along there!" muttered the driver, touching the horse with the reins. He was a bowlegged little man of uncertain age, with thin, faded hair on his head and face, and with colourless eyes. He rolled from side to side as he walked alongside the cart, and obviously it made no difference to him whether he turned to the right or the left.

"Get along!" he said in a colourless voice, ridiculously kicking out his crooked legs in their heavy boots caked with mud. The mother looked about her. The fields were as empty as her soul.

The horse nodded its head monotonously as it ploughed through the deep, sun-warmed sand. The sand rustled, the rickety cart creaked, and all the sounds hung behind with the dust raised by the wheels....

Nikolai Ivanovich lived in a quiet street on the edge of town. His quarters were in a small green wing built onto a two-storied house bloated with age. There was a little garden in front of the wing, so that the branches of lilacs and acacias, and the silver leaves of young poplars glanced into the windows of the three rooms. Inside everything was clean and quiet; silent shadows threw trembling designs on the floor; the walls were lined with bookshelves, above which hung portraits of serious-looking people.

"Will you be comfortable here?" asked Nikolai, leading the mother into a small room, one window of which looked out into the garden while the other looked into a yard overgrown with grass. The walls of this room were also lined with bookcases and shelves.

"I'd rather live in the kitchen," she said. "The kitchen is nice and bright and clean...."

Her words seemed to frighten him. When she succumbed to his clumsy efforts to talk her out of living in the kitchen, he immediately brightened up.

All three rooms were filled with a special atmosphere. It was easy and pleasant to breathe here, but one hesitated to speak in a loud voice, loath to disturb the calm thoughtfulness of the people gazing down from the walls with such concentrated attention.

"The plants need watering," observed the mother, feeling the earth in the flowerpots on the windows.

"Oh, yes," said their owner guiltily. "I am fond of them, but you see I have no time to look after them."

As she watched him, the mother noticed that even in his cosy apartment, Nikolai walked about gingerly, as though his surroundings were alien. He would thrust his face close up to the various articles in the room, adjusting his glasses with the thin fingers of his right hand while he squinted inquiringly at whatever claimed his attention. Sometimes he would lift an object to his face and seem to feel it with his eyes. It was as though he, like the mother, had entered the apartment for the first time, and that for him as for her, everything was new and unfamiliar. This immediately put her at her ease. She followed Nikolai around, taking note of where things stood and asking about the order of his day. He answered in the guilty tones of a man who is aware of the fact that he does not do things as they should be done but is unable to do them in any other way.

She watered the flowers and arranged the music scattered on the piano. With a look at the samovar she said:

"It needs polishing."

He ran his finger over the dull metal and brought it to his nose for inspection. The mother gave a short laugh.

When she went to bed that night and began looking back over the day, she lifted her head from the pillow and glanced about incredulously. This was the first time in her life that she had ever spent a night in somebody else's house, yet she did not feel uncomfortable. She thought solicitously of Nikolai and was filled with the desire to make life more pleasant for him, to show him an affection that would bring warmth and comfort into his existence. Her heart was touched by his awkwardness, his amusing incapability, his contrast to the normal run of people, and the wise, yet childlike expression of his clear eyes. Then her mind turned to her son, and once more the events of the First of May passed before her, now clothed in new sounds, winged with new meaning. There was something special about the grief of that day, as about the day itself. This grief did not bend the head to the earth, like the stunning blow of a fist. It pierced the heart with manifold pain which gave rise to slow wrath, causing the bended back to straighten.

"Our children are going forth into the world," she thought, listening to the unfamiliar sounds of the city at night which crawled in through the open window, rustling the leaves in the garden.

They came from afar, tired and faded, and quietly died within the room.

Early next morning she polished the samovar, boiled the water for tea, noiselessly set the table, and sat down in the kitchen to wait for Nikolai to get up. At last he opened the door with a cough, clutching his glasses in one hand and the collar of his shirt in the other. After exchanging greetings, she carried the samovar into the other room while he began to wash, splashing water on the floor, dropping the soap and his toothbrush, grumbling at his clumsiness.

During breakfast he said to her:

"I have a very unpleasant job at the Zemstvo Board—that of observing how our peasants are becoming ruined."

With a guilty smile he continued:

"Undernourishment is bringing the peasants to the grave prematurely. Their children are born weak and die off like flies in autumn. We know this, and we know the reason for it. We even get paid salaries to observe the process, but that's as far as it goes. . . ."

"Are you a student?" she asked him.

"No, I'm a teacher. My father is a factory manager in Vyatka, but I went in for teaching. In the village I began handing out books to the *muzhiks*, and for that I was put in jail. After serving my sentence I became a salesman in a bookshop, but through my own carelessness I was again put in jail and finally exiled to Archangel. There I also got into the bad graces of the governor and was shipped to a little village on the shore of the White Sea where I lived for five years."

His voice flowed on smoothly in the bright, sunny room. The mother had by this time heard many such stories, but she could never understand why the people who related them were always so calm, as though they were speaking of something inevitable.

"My sister is coming today," he said.

"Is she married?"

"She's a widow. Her husband was exiled to Siberia, but he ran away; two years ago he died in Europe of consumption."

"Is she younger than you?"

"Six years older. I am very much indebted to her. Wait 'til you hear her play! That's her piano. In general, lots of these things are hers. The books are mine."

"Where does she live?"

"Everywhere," he answered with a smile. "Wherever they need a courageous person, that's where she is."

"Does she also go in for—this work?"

"Of course!" he answered.

Soon he went away, and the mother began to think about "this work" and the people who were calmly and persistently devoting themselves to it day after day. They made her feel as insignificant as a person feels when confronted by the awesome majesty of a mountain at night.

At about noon a tall handsome woman in a black dress put in her appearance. When the mother opened the door the woman dropped her little yellow satchel on the floor and grasped the mother's hand.

"I suppose you are Pavel Mikhailovich's mother?" she said.

"Yes," answered the mother, discomfited by the woman's fine clothes.

"You are just as I imagined you would be. My brother wrote me that you were coming here to live," said the woman as she took off her hat in front of the mirror. "I have been a friend of Pavel Mikhailovich's for a long time. He told me about you."

Her voice was husky and she spoke slowly, but her movements were quick and strong. In striking contrast to the youth of her grey eyes were the fine little lines that could be traced at her temples and the grey hair shining above the delicate shells of her ears.

"I'm hungry!" she announced. "I'd like a cup of coffee."

"I shall make it," replied the mother. As she reached into the cupboard for the coffeepot she asked:

"Did you say that Pavel told you about me?"

"Lots."

The woman took out a little leather cigarette case and lighted up.

"Are you dreadfully afraid for him?" she asked as she walked about the room.

The mother watched the little blue flames of the alcohol burner under the coffeepot and smiled. Happiness swallowed up the embarrassment she had felt in the presence of this woman.

"So he told her about me, the blessed boy!" she thought to herself, then said slowly:

"Of course. It isn't an easy thing—but before it would have been even harder. Now at least I know he isn't alone."

With a glance into the woman's face the mother asked what her name was.

"Sophia," came the answer.

Pelagea studied her intently. There was something sweeping about this woman—almost too bold and hurried.

"The most important thing is that they do not remain in jail long," said Sophia decisively. "If only they would hurry up with the trial! As soon as they send them into exile, we'll arrange an escape for Pavel Mikhailovich. He's needed here."

The mother glanced uncertainly at Sophia, who was looking about for something in which to place her cigarette butt. She finally crushed it into the earth of a flowerpot.

"That spoils the flowers," said the mother involuntarily.

"Forgive me," said Sophia. "Nikolai always tells me the same thing." She removed the butt and threw it out of the window.

The mother was immediately overwhelmed by embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon," she said, "I didn't think what I was saying. How dare I tell you what to do!"

"Why not, if I am so untidy?" answered Sophia with a shrug. "Is the coffee ready? Thanks. But why only one cup? Aren't you having any?"

Suddenly she took the mother by the shoulder and drew her over, looking deep into her eyes as she asked:

"Are you feeling shy?"

The mother smiled.

"After I blurted out that about the cigarette, you go asking me if I'm feeling shy." Without attempting to hide her surprise, she added in a tone half inquiry:

"Only yesterday I came here, and already I'm acting as if it was my own house; not afraid of anything, saying whatever I think. . . ."

"That's exactly as it should be!" exclaimed Sophia.

"My head keeps going around and it's like I was a stranger to my own self," continued the mother. "It used to take a long time before you'd dare tell a person something from your very heart, but now your heart's always open and you say things you never would have dreamed of saying before."

Sophia took another cigarette and turned the soft illumination of her grey eyes on the mother's face.

"You say you'll arrange his escape. But how'll he go on living—a runaway?" asked the mother, unburdening her heart of this troublesome question.

"That's nothing," answered Sophia, pouring herself another cup of coffee. "He'll go on living like dozens of other runaways. I just met one of them and took him to the place he was to live. He's also an invaluable person. He was sentenced to five years, but he spent only three and a half months in exile."

The mother looked at her for some time, then smiled, and with a shake of her head observed softly:

"Looks as though that First of May had done something to me. Can't seem to find myself—like I was going down two different roads at the same time. Sometimes it seems as if I understood everything, then again it's all in a fog. Take you, for instance—a gentlewoman, going in for this business.... You know my Pavel and speak well of him, and for that I thank you."

"It's you who deserves the thanks," laughed Sophia.

"What have I done? It wasn't me that taught him all this," sighed the mother.

Sophia crushed her cigarette in her saucer and shook her head so that her golden hair came tumbling down in thick masses to her waist.

"Time for me to take off all this finery," she said, getting up and going out.

III

Nikolai returned in the evening. As they were having dinner Sophia laughingly described how she had met and hidden a man escaped from exile, how she had been afraid of spies, seeing them in every one they met, and how funny the runaway had behaved. The mother detected a certain boastfulness in her tone, like that of a worker recounting the story of a hard job well done.

Now she was wearing a grey summer dress with a full skirt. It made her look even taller, her eyes seemed darker and her movements more composed.

"There's another task waiting for you, Sophia," said Nikolai after dinner. "I told you we had undertaken to publish a paper for the peasants, but as a result of the recent arrests we lost contact with the man who is to distribute it. Pelagea Nilovna is the only one who can help us find him. You must take a trip to the country with her, and do it as soon as possible."

"All right," said Sophia, drawing on her cigarette. "We'll go, won't we, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"Of course."

"Is it far?"

"About eighty versts."

"Fine. And now I'd like to have a little music. Do you think you could stand my playing a bit, Pelagea Nilovna?"

"Don't consider me—go on as if I wasn't here at all," said the mother, withdrawing into a corner of the divan. The brother and sister appeared not to pay any attention to her, but they kept subtlely drawing her into the conversation.

"Listen, Nikolai! It's Grieg. I brought it with me today. Close the windows."

She opened the music and began playing lightly with her left hand. The strings sang out deep and harmonious. With a low sigh another phrase joined in. From beneath the fingers of her right hand flew out a bright flock of golden trills, rushing and careening like frightened birds against the dark background of the bass.

At first the mother remained unmoved by the music, in whose flow she made out only a chaos of sound. Her ear was unable to detect the melody in the complicated harmonic structure. She dreamily watched Nikolai, who was sitting at the other end of the divan with his legs drawn up under him, gazing at Sophia's severe profile crowned by a mass of golden hair. The sun warmly illumined Sophia's head and shoulders, then slipped down to the keyboard to caress her fingers. The music swelled and filled the room, all unnoticeably touching the heart of the mother.

For some reason, from the dark pit of the past rose a great hurt, long forgotten, but now resurrected with bitter clarity.

Late one night her husband had returned home dead drunk. Seizing her by the arm, he had dragged her out of bed onto the floor, and with a kick in the side had said:

"Get out of here, you bitch! I'm sick of you!"

In order to protect herself from his blows, she had grabbed up her two-year-old son, holding him in front of her like a shield as she knelt on the floor. He had cried and struggled in her arms, warm and naked and frightened.

"Get out!" roared Mikhail.

She had jumped to her feet, rushed into the kitchen, thrown a jacket about her shoulders, wrapped the baby in a shawl, and silently, without cry or complaint, barefoot, clothed only in a nightdress and jacket, gone out into the street. The month was May and the night chilly. The dust of the street clung coldly to the soles of her feet and caked between her toes. The child in her arms cried and struggled. She pressed him to her body beneath the jacket and rushed down the street pursued by fear, crooning to the child as she went:

"Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h!"

Toward morning she was ashamed and afraid to have anyone see her on the street half naked, so she went to the swamp and sat down on the ground beneath a clump of young aspens. There she sat for a long time, staring into the darkness with wide open eyes and keeping up the chant to soothe the drowsing child and the hurt in her own heart:

"Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h!"

As she sat there, a black, silent bird flashed by. It startled her out of her apathy and caused her to get up. Shivering with cold, she turned homeward—back to the familiar horror of beatings and insults....

The last chord sounded. With a cold, indifferent sigh the music died away....

Sophia turned to her brother.

"Did you like it?" she asked quietly.

"Immensely," he replied, rousing as though from sleep. "Immensely."

The echo of her reminiscence trembled and sang in the mother's breast, while somewhere off to one side rose the thought:

"See—there are people who live together in a peaceful and friendly way. They don't quarrel, they don't get drunk, they don't fight over every crust of bread like the people in that other dark life...."

Sophia took a cigarette. She smoked a lot, almost without pause.

"That was Kostya's favourite," she said. She inhaled deeply and once more turned to the keys, striking a soft, sorrowful chord. "How I loved to play to him! How sensitive he was, responding to everything, his heart ever full to bursting!"

"She must be thinking of her husband," mused the mother. "And with a smile! . . ."

"How much happiness he brought me!" continued Sophia softly, accompanying her thoughts with a light improvisation. "How well he knew how to live!"

"Yes," agreed Nikolai, stroking his beard. "His was a singing soul."

Sophia threw away the cigarette she had just lighted and turned to the mother.

"I hope my noise is not annoying you," she said.

The mother could not conceal her aggravation.

"Don't you pay any attention to me. I don't understand. I just go on sitting here and listening and having my own thoughts."

"But I want you to understand!" said Sophia. "It is necessary for a woman to understand music, especially when she's sad."

She struck the keys sharply, and the piano gave a cry like that of someone who has received dreadful news. She had struck at the very heart to produce this stunning cry. Frightened young voices leaped up in response, then rushed away. Once more came a loud, wrathful cry, drowning out everything else. Some great misfortune must have happened, but it roused a feeling of wrath rather than pity. Then came a strong voice singing a plain and lovely tune, persuasive and alluring.

The heart of the mother was filled with a desire to say kind words to these people. She was dizzy with the music, and she smiled, convinced that she was capable of helping the brother and sister.

She looked about—what could she do? Quietly she slipped into the kitchen and put up the samovar.

But this did not satisfy her yearning toward them, and as she poured out the tea she said with an embarrassed laugh, as though consoling her heart with words meant as much for herself as for them:

"We people from that dark life—we feel everything, but it's hard to put it in words, and we're ashamed because you see—we under-

stand and can't say it. And often—in our shame—we are angry with our own thoughts. Life keeps beating us from all sides and we'd like to rest, but our thoughts don't let us."

Nikolai wiped his glasses as he listened, and Sophia opened up her enormous eyes and forgot to smoke the cigarette which threatened to go out. She was still sitting at the piano, half-turned towards her brother, occasionally touching the keys lightly with her right hand. The chords merged softly with the simple, heartfelt words in which the mother was giving expression to her feeling.

"Now I can say something about myself and about people in general because—I begin to understand and am able to compare. Before, there was nothing to compare things to. Everybody lives the same in our life. But now when I know how other people live and remember how I lived—it's a bitter thing."

She lowered her voice and went on:

"Maybe I'm not putting it just right, and maybe there's no sense in saying it at all, beings as you already know...."

There were tears in her voice, but her eyes smiled as she looked at them and said:

"But I want to open my heart to you, so's you can know how bad I want things to go right for you!"

"We know that," said Nikolai softly.

She seemed unable to satisfy her desire, and once more told them all that was new to her and incalculably important. She began to tell them about her bitter life and patient suffering, speaking without anger, but with a shade of ironic regret. She unrolled the ribbon of grey days which had made up her former life, telling about the beatings she had received from her husband and marvelling herself at their inconsequential cause and her inability to prevent them....

They listened to her in silence, overwhelmed by the profound meaning behind this simple life story of one who had been looked upon as little more than an animal, one who for long had submissively accepted herself for what she was taken for. It seemed that thousands of lives were speaking with her tongue; all that she had lived through was simple and commonplace—as simple and commonplace as the lives of the numberless majority upon this earth, and her story assumed the significance of a symbol. Nikolai put his elbows on the table, rested his head on his hands, and kept watching

her through his glasses with narrowed eyes. Sophia leaned back in her chair, shuddering occasionally and shaking her head. Her face seemed to become thinner and paler and she did not smoke.

"Once I considered myself unfortunate," Sophia said quietly, dropping her eyes. "It seemed to me that my life was a delirium. That was when I was in exile in a tiny provincial town. There was nothing to do and nothing to think about except myself. For want of anything better to do, I summed up all my misfortunes: I had quarrelled with my father whom I loved; I had been expelled from school and held up as a shameful example; I had been put in jail; a close comrade had betrayed me; my husband had been arrested; again jail and exile; then the death of my husband. It seemed to me that I was the most unhappy creature in all the world. But all my misfortunes, and ten times more, could not equal one month of your life, Pelagea Nilovna. Yours was daily torture drawn out year after year. Where do people ever get the strength to suffer so?"

"They get used to it!" answered Pelagea with a sigh.

"It seems to me that I know life fairly well," said Nikolai thoughtfully. "Yet whenever I get a first-hand view like this—not a book view, and not my own tattered impressions—it seems ghastly. And it's the little things that are ghastly—the insignificant moments from which the years are built...."

The talk continued and expanded, taking in all aspects of this dark life. The mother dipped deep down into her memory, hauling up the chain of daily insults and injuries which had created the horror of her youth. At last she said:

"But here I go on talking and talking when it's time for you to be resting. You can't ever tell all there is to be told."

The brother and sister silently took leave of her. It seemed to her that Nikolai bowed lower than usual and pressed her hand more feelingly. Sophia saw her to her room, saying as she left her at the door:

"Have a good rest. Good night."

Her voice was full of warmth, and her grey eyes fondled the mother's face.

Pelagea squeezed Sophia's hand in both of hers.

"Thank you," she said.

IV

A few days later the mother and Sophia appeared before Nikolai in the garb of poor townswomen. They were wearing worn cotton dresses and jackets, and had sacks on their backs and staffs in their hands. These clothes made Sophia seem shorter and her pale face even more serious.

Nikolai pressed his sister's hand tightly as he said good-bye to her, and once more the mother noticed the calm simplicity of their relationship. They did not kiss or call each other affectionate names, but they were ever deeply concerned and solicitous of each other. Where she had lived, people were always kissing and using endearing terms, but they kept biting each other like hungry dogs.

The women silently went down the streets of the town and out to the fields, walking shoulder to shoulder along a wide, uneven road between two rows of old birches.

"Won't you get tired?" asked the mother of Sophia.

"You think I haven't done much walking in my life? This is all familiar to me."

Sophia began to speak merrily about her revolutionary activities, as though she were recounting the pranks of her childhood. She had lived under different names and with false documents. She had worn a disguise and hidden from spies, she had carted poods of illegal books from town to town, arranged escapes for comrades in exile, and escorted them to cities abroad. Once she had housed a secret print shop in her apartment, and when the gendarmes had found out and come to search the house, she had just managed to disguise herself as a chambermaid and escape, meeting her visitors at the gate. It had been a cold winter day, and in only a light dress, with a cotton kerchief over her head, she had walked the entire length of the city with an oil tin in her hand as though she were going to buy kerosene.

Another time she had arrived in a strange city to visit some friends, and on climbing the steps to their apartment discovered that it was in the process of being searched. It was too late to turn back, so she boldly rang the bell of the apartment downstairs and planted herself, bag and baggage, on these unknown people. After frankly explaining to them the situation, she had said:

"You can hand me over to the police if you wish, but I hardly think you would do such a thing."

They were so frightened that they did not sleep a wink all night, expecting a knock at their door any minute, but they did not give her up, and on the next morning laughed heartily at the adventure.

Still another time she had disguised herself as a nun and ridden in the same car and in the very seat next to the spy who was following her. He had even boasted to her how cunningly he was tracking this woman down. He was sure she was riding in a second-class carriage of the same train; at every station he would get out to look for her, and on returning would say to the nun:

"Nowheres to be seen—probably gone to sleep. They get worn out too—their life's no easier than ours."

The mother laughed and glanced at Sophia affectionately as she listened to these stories. Tall and slender, Sophia stepped along lightly on her well-shaped legs. There was something brave and wholesome in her manner of walking and talking, in her cheerful, husky voice, in all of her straight figure. She had a youthful approach to everything, and wherever she looked she was sure to find something to bring her joy.

"What a lovely pine!" cried Sophia, pointing out one of the trees. The mother stopped and looked—the pine was in no way distinguished from the others.

"Yes, it's a nice tree," she laughed, noticing how the wind blew wisps of grey hair about the other woman's ear.

"A lark!" Sophia's grey eyes glowed with tenderness and her entire body strained toward the invisible music sounding in the clear heaven. Sometimes her supple body would stoop to pick a wild flower whose trembling petals she would stroke with her quick, thin fingers as she quietly hummed a tune.

All this won the mother to the woman with the grey eyes, and she walked close beside her, trying to keep in step. But sometimes Sophia spoke sharply. The mother regretted this, and thought anxiously:

"Mikhailo won't like her."

But the next minute Sophia was once more speaking warmly and simply, and the mother glanced up at her with a smile.

"How young you still are!" she sighed.

"I'm already thirty-two!" exclaimed Sophia.

Pelagea smiled.

"That isn't what I mean. According to your looks I might give you even more. But when I listen to you and look into your eyes I'm always surprised—you're just like a young girl. You've had a hard and even dangerous life, but the heart of you is always smiling."

"I'm never aware of the hardness, and it seems to me that no life could be better or more interesting than mine. I shall call you by your patronymic—Nilovna. Somehow Pelagea doesn't suit you."

"Call me whatever you like," said the mother thoughtfully. "Just whatever you like. I keep looking at you and listening and thinking. It makes me happy to see you've found the way to the human heart. A person tells you all that is going on inside him without fear. Of his own accord he opens up his soul to you. And the thought keeps coming to me—your people will finally conquer the evil in life—they're sure to do this!"

"We're sure to win because we are joined with the working people," said Sophia loudly and confidently. "A great force is hidden in them, and with them everything is possible! It is necessary only to rouse their self-consciousness, so that they shall be free to develop...."

Her words gave rise to mixed feelings in the mother's heart. For some reason she felt sorry for Sophia, in an inoffensive, friendly way, and she wanted to hear her speak other, more simple words.

"Who will ever reward you for your efforts?" she asked quietly and sadly.

"We have already been rewarded," answered Sophia, and it seemed to the mother that the words rang proud. "We have found a way of life which brings us satisfaction. We live with all the powers of the spirit—what else could we ask of life?"

The mother glanced at her and dropped her eyes, once more thinking:

"Mikhailo won't like her."

They walked quickly, but without haste, drinking deeply of the sweet air, and it seemed to the mother that she was going on pilgrimage. She recalled the joy with which in her childhood she had left her village to attend holiday services at a distant monastery where there was a miracle-working icon.

Sometimes Sophia would sing some new song about the sky or about love in a soft melodious voice; or sometimes she would recite poems about the fields and forests and the Volga, and the mother would listen and smile, involuntarily nodding her head in rhythm to the verse, succumbing to its music.

She felt all warm and quiet and thoughtful inside, like in a cosy garden nook on

They arrived at their destination on the third day. The mother asked a *muzhik* who was working in the fields where the tar works were, and soon they were descending a steep woodland path where the roots of the trees had formed convenient steps. This brought them out on a round clearing littered with coal and chips, and caked with tar.

"Well, here we are!" said the mother, looking uneasily about her.

In front of a shelter made of poles and branches stood a table consisting of three boards nailed to posts driven into the ground. Rybin, all black with tar, and with his shirt open all down the front, was having dinner at this table with Yefim and two other young boys. Rybin was the first to notice the women, and with his hand raised to his eyes waited in silence.

"Good day, brother Mikhailo!" cried the mother from a distance.

He got up and walked toward them unhurriedly. When he recognized her, he stopped and smiled, stroking his beard with a dark hand.

"We're on our way to prayers," said the mother, coming over. "So why not stop in and say hello to my brother, thinks I. This is my friend Anna."

Proud of her ingenuity, she glanced out of the corner of her eye into the solemn face of Sophia.

"Good day," said Rybin, with a wry smile as he shook her hand and bowed to Sophia. "Don't lie. You're not in the city now—don't need any lies here. All our own people."

Yefim studied the pilgrims from where he was sitting at the table and whispered something to his companions. When the women came over he got up and silently bowed to them. His companions sat motionless, as though they did not notice the guests.

"We live here like monks," said Rybin, tapping Pelagea lightly on the shoulder. "Nobody ever comes to see us. The boss has gone away, his wife's in the hospital, and I'm more or less in charge. Have a seat. Probably want something to eat. Bring some milk, Yefim."

Yefim sauntered into the shelter while the pilgrims took the packs off their backs. One of the young boys, a tall, thin chap, got up and helped them, while his shaggy, sturdy companion kept sitting with his elbows on the table, watching them thoughtfully as he scratched his head and hummed a tune.

The pungent odour of tar, in combination with that of rotting leaves, made the women dizzy.

"His name's Yakov," said Rybin, pointing to the tall fellow, "and the other's is Ignat. Well, how's your son?"

"He's in jail," answered the mother with a sigh.

"Again in jail?" exclaimed Rybin. "Must like it."

Ignat stopped singing and Yakov took the staff out of the mother's hands, saying:

"Sit down."

"Why you standing there? Sit down," said Rybin to Sophia. Silently she took a seat on a stump, studying Rybin attentively.

"When did they arrest him?" asked Rybin, taking his place opposite the mother and shaking his head. "You have no luck, Nilovna!"

"It's all right," she said.

"Getting used to it?"

"No, I'm not getting used to it, but I see it can't be helped."

"Hm," said Rybin. "Well, tell us about it."

Yefim brought a jug of milk, took a cup from the table, rinsed it, filled it with milk and offered it to Sophia, listening attentively to the mother's story the while. He was careful to make no noise. The mother's brief account was followed by a silence during which no one looked at anyone else. Ignat was sitting at the table drawing on the boards with his fingernail; Yefim was standing behind Rybin with his elbow on his shoulder; Yakov was leaning against the trunk of a tree, his arms crossed and his head lowered; Sophia sat glancing up at the *muzhiks*....

"Hm-m-m," said Rybin slowly and unhappily, "so that's how—openly."

"If we ever held a parade like that," said Yefim with a bitter smile, "the *muzhiks* would beat us to death."

"Sure, they'd kill us," agreed Ignat with a nod. "I'm going off to work in a factory. It's better there."

"You say there'll be a trial for Pavel?" asked Rybin. "And what'll the sentence be? Have you heard?"

"Hard labour or permanent exile to Siberia," she answered quietly.

The three young boys all turned to her at the same time, while Rybin lowered his head and asked:

"Did he know what it would mean when he did it?"

"Yes he did," said Sophia in a loud voice.

Everyone remained silent and motionless, as though frozen by a single thought.

"Hm-m," continued Rybin with solemn importance. "I also think he knew. He wouldn't take a leap in the dark—he's too serious for that. Hear that, fellows? He knew they might stick their bayonets into him, or send him to Siberia, but it didn't stop him. If his own mother'd laid across his path he'd have stepped right over her, wouldn't he, Nilovna?"

"Yes, he would," said the mother, starting up. She sighed and glanced around. Sophia silently patted her hand and looked intently at Rybin with a frown on her brow.

"There's a man for you!" he said quietly, looking at them with his dark eyes. Again the six people became silent. Fine rays of sun hung in the air like golden ribbons. Somewhere a raven cawed. The mother was upset by memories of the First of May, by her longing for Pavel and for Andrei. Empty tar barrels were scattered about the little clearing, and uprooted stumps stuck up all about. Oaks and birches crowded motionless at the edge, casting warm, dark shadows on the earth.

Suddenly Yakov pushed away from the tree and went off to one side.

"Is it against fellows like him they'll send me and Yefim?" he asked loudly, throwing back his head.

"Who'd you think they'd send you against?" answered Rybin. "They use our own hands to choke us with—that's the whole trick!"

"But I'm going to join up with the soldiers anyway," said Yefim stubbornly.

"Who's stopping you?" cried Ignat. "Go ahead. Only," he added with a short laugh, "when you shoot at me, aim at my head—don't make a cripple out of me; kill me right off."

"I've heard that before!" retorted Yefim sharply.

"Wait a minute, fellows," said Rybin, raising his hand. "Here's a woman," indicating the mother, "whose son's probably done for. . . ."

"Why should you say that?" asked the mother painfully.

"It has to be said," he answered gravely. "So's your hair won't have turned grey for nothing. And do you suppose—that they killed her by doing this to her son? Nilovna, have you brought the leaflets?"

The mother glanced at him.

"Yes . . ." she said after a pause.

"See?" said Rybin, striking the table with his fist. "I knew it as soon as I saw you. What else could have brought you here? Get that? They got rid of her son—his mother took his place!"

With a shake of his fist he gave a mighty oath.

The mother, frightened by his cry, glanced into his face and saw that it had changed: it had grown thinner, his beard was shaggy, and beneath it could be felt his protruding cheekbones. Fine red veins had appeared on the bluish whites of his eyes, as though he had not slept for a long time. His nose was pinched and hooked, like that of a bird of prey. His open collar, once red but now stained with pitch, revealed his prominent collarbones and the thick black hair on his chest. His whole appearance was more sombre and funereal than ever. In his inflamed eyes smoldered wrathful fire lighting up his dark face. Sophia sat pale and silent, unable to tear her eyes away from these *muzhiks*. Ignat shook his head and narrowed his eyes, while Yakov, again taking up a position beside the shelter, stood tearing off bits of bark from the poles. Yefim walked slowly up and down the length of the table behind the mother's back. Rybin continued:

"Not long ago the chief of our district called me up and said to me: 'What's that you told the priest, you scoundrel?' 'Why call me a scoundrel?' says I. 'I earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, and I don't do people no harm.' He roared at me and smashed me in the teeth and for three days they kept me in jail. 'So that's how you talk to the common people, is it?' thinks I. 'Then don't expect us to forget it, you old devil! If not me, then someone else will get even with you or your children—remember that! You've ploughed up the

breasts of the people with your iron claws and planted hate there, so don't expect any mercy, you fiends!' That's what!"

His face was scarlet with the rage boiling within him, and there were notes in his voice which frightened the mother.

"And what was it I said to the priest?" he continued more calmly. "After making his rounds of the village he was sitting talking to some *muzhiks*—telling them like as if the common people were a flock of sheep always in need of a shepherd. Hm. So I says, joking like: 'Once they make the fox head of the animals, the feathers'll fly instead of the birds.' He cocks his head at me and says something about how the people have to be long-suffering and pray to God to give them the strength to endure their trials and tribulations. So I says that the people do a lot of praying as it is, but apparently God's too busy to listen to them, seeing's how he doesn't hear their prayers. Hm. So then he asks me what prayers I pray, and I answer: 'One and the same prayer all my life, like all the rest of the common folk: Dear God, please teach me how to eat stones and spit logs and haul bricks for the gentlefolk.' But he don't give me a chance to finish." Suddenly Rybin turned to Sophia. "You a gentlewoman?" he asked.

"Why a gentlewoman?" she asked quickly, starting up in surprise.

"Why?" snorted Rybin. "Because you were born that way, I guess. It's everybody's fate to be what he was born. Hm. Think you could hide the sins of the gentlefolk under that cotton kerchief you've tied on your head? We know a priest when we see him even if he's tied in a sack. You shuddered and made a face when you stuck your elbow in something spilled on the table. And your back's too straight for a workingwoman. . . ."

The mother broke in, afraid he would hurt Sophia with his rough ridicule:

"She's my friend, Mikhailo Ivanovich, and a mighty fine person. Her hair's gone grey for our cause. You're rather sharp. . . ."

Rybin gave a deep sigh.

"Why, have I said anything to hurt anybody?"

"I think you wanted to tell me something," said Sophia dryly.

"Me? Oh yes. A new fellow turned up here not long ago—Yakov's cousin. He's sick with consumption. Shall I send for him?"

"Of course," said Sophia.

Rybin glanced at her through narrowed eyes, then turned to Yefim and said softly:

"Go tell him to come over this evening."

Yefim put on his cap, and without a word or a glance to anyone, disappeared in the forest. Rybin nodded after him and said:

"Having a hard time of it. Be conscripted soon—him and Yakov. Yakov makes no bones about it: can't go, he says. This one can't either, but he will. Thinks he can stir up the soldiers. I hold you can't batter down a wall with your head. Once they get a bayonet stuck in their hands, off they'll go with the rest. He's having a hard time of it all right, and Ignat here keeps harping on the subject. No sense in that."

"Yes there is," said Ignat sullenly, without looking at Rybin. "Before they're through with him he'll be shooting for them as good as anybody else."

"I don't believe it," answered Rybin thoughtfully. "Though it'd be better if he didn't go. Russia's a big place—where'd they ever find him? Get himself a false passport and go from one village to another."

"That's what I'm going to do," said Ignat, slapping his foot with a stick. "Once you've made up your mind to turn against them, you've got to keep going straight ahead."

The conversation broke off. Bees and wasps circled about busily, filling the air with their buzz. Birds chirped, and a song came wandering across the fields. After a pause, Rybin said:

"Well, time for us to get to work. Maybe you'd like to have a rest? There are some bunks there in the shelter. Go fetch some dry leaves, Yakov. And you give us the leaflets, mother."

The mother and Sophia began to untie their packs.

"What a lot you've brought!" exclaimed Rybin happily, as he leaned over the books. "Been mixed up in this business long—a—er—what's your name?" he asked Sophia.

"Anna Ivanovna," she answered. "Twelve years. Why do you ask?"

"No special reason. Probably been in jail?"

"Yes."

"See?" said the mother reprovingly. "And you were so rude. . . ."

"Don't take offence," he grinned after a pause during which he

lifted a bundle of books. "Swells and *muzhiks* are like tar and water—don't mix."

"But I'm not a swell, I'm a human being," objected Sophia with a soft laugh.

"Maybe," replied Rybin. "They say that dogs were once wolves. I'll go hide this stuff."

Ignat and Yakov went over to him with outstretched hands.

"Let's see them," said Ignat.

"Are they all the same?" Rybin asked Sophia.

"No, there are various leaflets as well as the newspapers."

"Really?"

The three men hurried into the shelter.

"The *muzhik* is afire," said the mother quietly, following Rybin with a thoughtful gaze.

"Yes," answered Sophia. "I've never seen a face like his before—that of a martyr! Let's go in there too; I want to watch them."

"Don't let his harshness hurt you," said the mother gently.

Sophia laughed.

"What a darling you are, Nilovna!"

When they reached the entrance, Ignat raised his head, gave them a quick glance, thrust his fingers into his curly hair and bent over the paper spread out on his knees; Rybin was standing holding his paper in a ray of sunlight coming through a crack in the roof, moving his lips as he read; Yakov was on his knees before a pile of leaflets spread on a bunk.

The mother crossed to a corner of the shelter and sat down while Sophia stood behind her with her hand on her shoulder, silently watching the men.

"They're lighting into us *muzhiks*, Uncle Mikhailo," said Yakov quietly, without turning around. Rybin looked at him and laughed.

"That's because they love us," he said.

Ignat took a deep breath and raised his head.

"Here it says, 'The peasant has lost all semblance of a human being.' Of course he has." A shadow passed across his plain, open face, as though he were offended. "Come on, climb into my hide for a while and we'll see what *you* look like, smarty!"

"I'm going to lie down," said the mother to Sophia. "I'm a bit tired and this smell makes me faint. What about you?"

"I don't want to rest."

The mother stretched out on the bunk and began to doze. Sophia sat beside her watching the readers and solicitously driving away any wasps or bees that came to disturb the elder woman's rest. Through half-closed eyes the mother observed this solicitude, and it made her happy.

Rybin came over and said in a hoarse whisper:

"Asleep?"

"Yes."

He stood for a while silently looking into the mother's face, then he sighed and said softly:

"She's probably the first who's ever followed her son down this road."

"We mustn't disturb her. Let's go out," said Sophia.

"Got to be getting to work. Like to have a talk with you, but we'll have to put that off till evening. Come on, fellows!"

All three of them went out, leaving Sophia in the shelter.

"Thank goodness they've made friends," thought the mother.

And she fell asleep with the odour of the woods and the pitch in her nostrils.

VI

The tar workers returned, pleased that the working day was over.

The sound of their voices awoke the mother, and she came out of the shelter yawning and smiling.

"There you were at the job, and me here sleeping like a grand lady," she said, turning a fond look on them.

"You can be excused for that," answered Rybin. Weariness had swallowed up his surplus energy and left him more calm.

"Ignat," he said. "How about some tea? We take turns with the chores here. Today it's Ignat's turn at the food and drink."

"I'd be glad to swap with somebody today," said Ignat as he began to gather twigs and chips for the fire.

"You're not the only one wants to be with the visitors," answered Yefim sitting down next to Sophia.

"I'll help you, Ignat," said Yakov. He went into the shelter and brought out a loaf of bread which he cut into hunks and placed about the table.

"Listen!" said Yefim. "Somebody's coughing. . . ."

Rybin pricked up his ears and nodded.

"It's him all right. The living testimony is coming," he explained to Sophia. "If I had my way I'd take him from town to town and set him up on the squares so's all the people could listen to him. He always harps on the same thing, but everybody ought to hear it."

The twilight and silence deepened; people's voices softened. Sophia and the mother observed that the movements of the *muzhiks* were slow with a heavy wariness, and that they in their turn kept observing the women.

Out of the woods came a tall, bent figure leaning on a stick. They could all hear his laboured breathing.

"Here I am," he said, and went off into a fit of coughing.

He was wearing a worn coat reaching to his heels. Thin locks of straight yellow hair hung limply from under his crushed round hat. His yellow, bony face was graced by a blond beard, his lips remained permanently parted, and his eyes shone feverishly from the dark pits into which they had sunk.

"I hear you've brought books?" he said to Sophia when Rybin introduced her to him.

"Yes," she said.

"Thank you—on behalf of all the people. They can't grasp the truth yet—but I who know it thank you—on their behalf."

He breathed quickly, clutching at the air with short, greedy gasps. His voice kept breaking off and the bony fingers of his feeble hands fingered his breast nervously in the effort to button up his coat.

"It's not good for you to be in the woods so late. The trees make the air damp and heavy," said Sophia.

"Nothing's good for me anymore," he answered, catching his breath. "Only death's good for me now."

It was painful to hear his voice, and his entire figure roused that excessive pity which is conscious of its own futility and gives rise to bitter regret. He took a seat on a barrel, bending his knees with such care that it seemed he was afraid of their breaking, and began to wipe the perspiration from the brow where his hair hung dry and lifeless.

The fire flared up, causing everything around to start and waver. Singed shadows rushed frightenedly into the woods, while above the

fire loomed the round face of Ignat with its inflated cheeks. The fire died down. There was a smell of smoke, and once more darkness and silence settled over the clearing, straining to hear the hoarse voice of the sick man.

"I can still be of use to the common people—serving as living testimony to a great crime.... Here, look at me... dying at the age of twenty-eight! Ten years ago I lifted as much as twelve poods on my shoulders without a grunt. I used to think that with a constitution like mine I could easily live to the age of seventy. But I lived only ten years more—and now—it's the end. My bosses robbed me—robbed me of forty years of life—forty years!"

"That's the song he sings," said Rybin huskily.

Once more the fire leaped up, brighter and stronger than before, and once more the shadows fled to the woods and rushed back to the blaze, cavorting about it in a soundless, hostile dance. The damp logs hissed and crackled. The leaves of the trees rustled excitedly in the current of warm air. Cheerful tongues of red and yellow flame embraced each other in a lively game, scattering showers of sparks as they ascended; a blazing leaf flew into the air, and the stars in the night sky smiled down, trying to lure the sparks to their abode.

"It's not my song. It's the song thousands of people sing without realizing what a good lesson their unhappy lives are to the people. How many people, crippled by work, die silent deaths of starvation...." He bent over in a fit of coughing.

Yakov put a pail of kvass and a bunch of green onions on the table.

"Come here, Savely, I've brought you some milk," he said.

Savely shook his head, but Yakov took him by the arm and led him over to the table.

"Why did you ever bring him here?" said Sophia to Rybin reproachfully. "He may die any moment."

"I know," agreed Rybin. "But let him talk as long as he's able. His life was sacrificed to no good purpose; let him endure a little more for a good purpose. It's all right—don't worry!"

"It's as if you were taking pleasure in it!" exclaimed Sophia.

Rybin glanced at her and replied sullenly:

"It's your gentlefolk take pleasure admiring Jesus Christ groan-

ing up there on the cross. But we want to take a lesson from this man and want you to take it too. . . ."

The mother raised one eyebrow anxiously and said:

"That's enough now!"

Once more the sick man began to speak from where he was seated at the table:

"Why should they kill people with work? Why should they rob a man of his life? Our boss—I worked at the Nefedov Factory—our boss made some singer a present of a golden basin to wash herself in and even a golden chamber to put under her bed. My strength and my life went into that chamber! That's what I gave my life for! A man killed me with work so's he could amuse his mistress with my life's blood! He bought her a golden chamber with my life's blood!"

"Man's made in the image and likeness of God," scoffed Yefim, "and here's what they do to him."

"Don't stand for it!" exclaimed Rybin, bringing his palm down on the table.

"Don't put up with it," added Yakov softly.

Ignat gave a laugh. The mother noticed that these three boys listened with the insatiable curiosity of hungry souls, watching Rybin intently whenever he spoke. The words of Savely brought to their faces a strange expression of mockery, and this was very definite. They seemed to feel no pity for the sick man.

"Is it really true what he says?" whispered the mother softly, leaning toward Sophia.

"Of course it's true," answered Sophia in a loud voice. "They even wrote about such things in the Moscow papers."

"But the criminal was never punished," said Rybin huskily. "And he should have been punished—should have been hauled before the people and chopped to bits and his rotten meat thrown to the dogs! Oh, it's a great punishment the people will mete out once they rise up! They'll shed a lot of blood to wash away the wrongs they've suffered! And it will be their own blood, sucked out of their own veins, so they'll have a right to do with it whatever they see fit!"

"It's cold," said the sick man.

Yakov helped him rise and led him to the fire.

Now the fire was burning brightly, and faceless shadows trembled about it, watching in amazement the cheerful play of the flames.

Savely sat down on a stump and stretched his dry, transparent hands toward the heat. Rybin nodded toward him and said to Sophia:

"He makes it clearer than books. When a machine kills a worker or chops off an arm, they say it was his own fault. But when they suck all the blood out of a fellow and throw him away like garbage, there's no explaining it. I can understand outright murder, but I can't understand torturing a fellow to death just for the fun of it. Why do they torture the people? Why do they torture all of us? Just for the fun of it, for the sake of their own pleasure, so's they can enjoy themselves on this earth, so's they can buy whatever they want at the price of human blood—opera singers, race horses, silver knives, golden dishes, expensive toys for their children. 'You go ahead and work—work a little harder so's I can save up money from your labour to buy my mistress a golden piss pot!'"

The mother watched and listened, and once more the bright path chosen by Pavel and his comrades gleamed before her in the darkness of the night.

When supper was over they all went to sit about the fire. The flames licked greedily at the wood; behind them rose a curtain of darkness, screening woods and sky. The sick man sat staring into the fire with wide open eyes. He coughed constantly and shivered as though the remnants of his life were impatiently struggling to free themselves from a body so wasted by illness. The light of the fire played on his face without animating his lifeless skin. Only his eyes burned with a dying fire.

"Maybe you better go into the shelter, Savely," said Yakov, bending over him.

"Why?" asked the sick man with an effort. "I'll stay here—I haven't much longer to be with people."

He looked about him, and after a short pause said with a shadowy smile:

"It's good to be with you. When I look at you I think, maybe you will avenge those who have been robbed, those who have been killed for the sake of greed."

No one answered him, and soon he fell asleep, his head drooping feebly on his chest. Rybin looked at him and said quietly:

"Comes and sits here and always talks about the same thing—the cheating of a human being. His whole soul's full of it. Like as

if it was pasted over his eyes and he couldn't see anything else."

"What else should he see?" said the mother thoughtfully. "If thousands of people are being killed by their work day after day so that their bosses can throw money around on all kinds of nonsense, what else is there?"

"It's boring to listen to him," said Ignat. "If you hear it once you can't forget it, but he keeps playing the same tune over and over."

"Everything's crammed into this tune, all of life," observed Rybin sombrely. "Got to understand that. I've heard his story a dozen times, and even so I sometimes have my doubts. There are good moments when you don't want to believe man's rotten and stupid, when you like everybody, rich and poor alike—the rich have also been led astray! Some blind from cold, others blind from gold. That's what! 'Ah, my good people!' you think. 'Ah, my brothers all! Shake yourselves, think honestly, think without sparing yourselves!' "

The sick man swayed, opened his eyes, and lay down on the ground. Yakov silently got up and went into the shelter, emerging presently with a sheepskin which he wrapped around his cousin; then once more he sat down next to Sophia.

The frolicsome smile of the fire lighted up the dark figures around it, while the voices of the people merged meditatively with the quiet crackling and rustling of the flames.

Sophia told them about the struggle of the peoples of the whole world for their right to life, about the uprisings of the peasants in Germany, about the misery of the Irish and the heroism of the French workers in their frequent battles for freedom....

Here in the woods clad in the velvet of night, in this little clearing closed in by the trees, ceilinged by the dark heavens, lighted by the fire, encircled by amazed and hostile shadows—accounts were given of events which had shaken the world belonging to the greedy and the well-fed. The names of fighters for truth and freedom were mentioned, and one by one the peoples of the earth filed past, weary and bloody from battle.

The woman's husky voice went on softly. Like a voice from the past, it roused their hopes and inspired their confidence, and the men sat silent as they listened to these tales of their brothers in other

lands. The sacred cause in whose name all the peoples of the earth were struggling—the endless struggle for freedom—became ever more clear and comprehensible to them as they looked into the pale, thin face of this woman. They recognized their own thoughts and longings in peoples of the distant past, from whom they were separated by a dark, bloody curtain, as well as in the lives and activities of people in far lands, of whom they had never even heard. With their hearts and minds they contacted the vast world, finding therein friends who had long since united in their firm resolve to establish justice on the earth, supporting this resolve with the vast suffering they endured and the blood they shed for the sake of a bright, new life. A new sense of spiritual affinity with all peoples was kindled, and a new heart was born to the world—a heart pulsing with the ardent desire to know everything, to encompass everything.

"The day will come when the workers of all countries will raise their heads and say, 'Enough! We have had our fill of such a life!'" said Sophia confidently. "Then the imagined strength of those who are strong only in their own greed will be destroyed, the earth will slip from under their feet and they will be left with nothing to cling to."

"That's what!" said Rybin, bending his head. "There's nothing we can't do if we give all we have, unsparing of ourselves."

The mother listened with a lift of her brows and a smile of happy surprise on her lips. She saw that what had seemed too abrupt and too loud and too wide-sweeping in Sophia—everything unsuited to her nature—had disappeared in the eager, even flow of her story. She liked the quietness of the night, the play of the fire, Sophia's face—but most of all she liked the solemn attention of the *muzhiks*. They sat motionless, trying not to interrupt the steady unfolding of the tale, afraid to break off the bright thread tying them up with the whole world. Once in a while one of them would carefully place fresh wood on the fire, and when this was accompanied by a shower of sparks and a cloud of smoke, he would wave his hand in the air to keep the sparks and smoke away from the women.

Once Yakov got up and said quietly:

"Stop speaking for a minute."

He ran into the shelter and brought out some clothes which he and Ignat silently wrapped about the shoulders and feet of their

guests. Then Sophia continued speaking, drawing a picture of the day of victory, inspiring them with faith in their own strength, arousing in them a consciousness of their oneness with all those who were pouring out their lives in futile labour to satisfy the foolish caprices of the oversated. The mother was not agitated by Sophia's words, but the deep feeling which Sophia's account roused in all of them filled her heart with devout gratitude to people who hazarded their lives in order to bring the gifts of love and truth and honest thinking to those enchained by daily labour.

"God help them," she thought, closing her eyes.

At dawn the weary Sophia stopped talking and smiled at the bright, thoughtful faces around her.

"Time for us to be going," said the mother.

"Yes, it's time," answered Sophia.

One of the boys gave a loud sigh.

"Too bad you have to leave," said Rybin in an unusually mild tone. "You talk fine. It's a great thing, that—to make people feel their oneness. When you know that millions want the same thing you do, it makes your heart feel kinder. And kindness is a mighty force!"

"Be kind so's the other fellow can boot your behind!" laughed Yefim quietly as he got up. "They better be going before anyone sees them, Uncle Mikhailo. Soon as we start handing out those leaflets the authorities will look for the people who brought them. Somebody will say—remember those pilgrims who came here? . . ."

"Thank you for your trouble, mother," interrupted Rybin. "I keep thinking of Pavel when I look at you. It's a fine thing you're doing."

Now he was in a gentler mood, and smiled a broad, warm smile. The air was chilly, but he stood there without any coat on and with his shirt open, baring his chest. The mother looked at his huge figure and said gently:

"You better put something around you. It's cold."

"It's warm inside of me," he answered.

The three boys talked quietly at the fire, while the sick man lay at their feet covered with the sheepskin. The sky paled, the shadows dissolved, and the leaves trembled in expectation of the sun.

"Well, I guess it's good-bye," said Rybin, extending his hand to Sophia. "How can we find you in the town?"

"It's me you're to find," said the mother,

All three boys slowly came up to Sophia and shook her hand with clumsy gentleness. It was clear that each of them was experiencing a secret pleasure, fine and friendly, and this feeling seemed to embarrass them by its novelty. They smiled at Sophia with eyes burning from sleeplessness as they shifted from foot to foot.

"Won't you have a drink of milk before setting out?" asked Yakov.

"Is there any?" put in Yefim.

"No," said Ignat, smoothing back his hair uneasily. "I spilled it."

The three of them laughed.

They spoke of milk, but the mother sensed that they were thinking of something else—that they were full of good will toward her and Sophia and wishing them luck. This obviously touched Sophia, filling her with confusion and a chaste humility which made it impossible to say anything but:

"Thank you, comrades."

The boys exchanged glances, as though the word with which she addressed them had lifted them as gently as a swing.

The sick man gave a racking cough. The coals ceased glowing in the dying fire.

"Farewell," said the *muzhiks* quietly, and this forlorn word sounded long in the women's ears.

They proceeded unhurriedly along the woodland path in the pale light preceding dawn.

"How nice it was," said the mother as she walked behind Sophia. "Like in a dream. People want to know the truth, dear heart. They want to know it bad. And it all takes place like in church, before morning mass on one of the big holidays. The priest hasn't yet come, everything's so dark and quiet it makes your flesh creep, but the people begin gathering already. Here somebody lights a candle in front of an icon, there somebody else, and little by little the darkness is driven away, giving way to the light in God's house."

"How true!" said Sophia joyfully. "Only here God's house is the whole world!"

"The whole world!" repeated the mother thoughtfully, nodding her head. "That's almost too good to be true. And you spoke so well, my dear—just fine. And I was afraid they wouldn't like you!"

Sophia was silent a moment, then said quietly and sombrely:

"Being with them makes you simpler."

They continued on their way talking about Rybin, the sick man, the boys who had been so attentively silent and embarrassed, but who eloquently expressed their gratitude in little services to the women. They came out on the fields. The sun rose to meet them. While still out of sight, it spread its transparent fan of rosy rays across the whole heaven, and the dewdrops on the grass sparkled with multi-coloured glints of brave spring joy. The birds awoke, enlivening the morning with their cheerful song. Fat ravens flew by with a heavy sweep of wings and anxious cawing, while from somewhere came the whistle of an oriole. Distant spaces opened up, greeting the rising sun by lifting night shadows from all the hills.

"Sometimes a person talks on and on and you can't understand what he's driving at until he says some simple word that suddenly makes everything clear," said the mother meditatively. "That's how it was with that sick man. I've heard plenty, and myself know plenty about how they drive the workers at the factories and other places. But you sort of get used to it, so that it don't grip your heart especially. But what he said all of a sudden was such a hurt, and such a shame! Dear Jesus! Can it be that people pour out all their lives into work just so's their bosses can allow themselves such a mockery? There can't be any justifying that!"

The mother's thoughts settled on this man's case, which threw the dull gleam of its affrontery on a whole series of similar cases which she had once heard of and since forgotten.

"Looks like they had had so much of everything it made them sick. I heard of a Rural Administrator who once made all the *muzhiks* bow down to his horse whenever it passed through the village and arrested anyone who didn't bow. Now why should he ever have done such a thing? As though there was any understanding a thing like that?"

Sophia softly began to sing a song as gay as the morning....

VII

The mother's life flowed on with a strange quietude. Sometimes this quietude amazed her. Her son was in jail and she knew that he would receive a cruel sentence, yet every time she thought of this, her mind was involuntarily filled with visions of Andrei and Feodor

and a number of other faces. The figure of her son grew in her eyes until it embraced all the people who shared his fate, rousing in her a contemplative mood, unnoticeably and involuntarily expanding her thoughts of Pavel until they branched out in all directions. Their fine, groping rays reached everywhere and touched everything in their effort to throw light on all phenomena and relate all things in a single pattern. This kept her from concentrating on any one thing; it kept her from concentrating on her longing for her son and her fears for him.

Soon Sophia went away, returning five days later in a lively, cheerful mood, only to disappear again within a few hours and reappear within another two weeks. It seemed as though she travelled through life in wide circles which from time to time brought her back to her brother that she might fill his apartment with her courage and music.

The mother began to love music. As she listened it seemed to her that warm waves were beating against her breast and laving her heart, making it pulse more evenly and give off strong shoots of thought which, like well-watered seeds deeply furrowed in the earth, easily and beautifully blossomed into words under the influence of the music.

It was difficult for the mother to reconcile herself to Sophia's untidiness: the younger woman was always throwing her cigarettes and ashes and belongings about. It was even more difficult to reconcile herself to her impassioned speeches, which formed such a striking contrast to Nikolai's quiet self-assurance and the gentle seriousness which always characterized his words. Sophia seemed to her to be an adolescent who was eager to be considered a grownup and looked upon people as curious toys. She kept talking about the sacredness of labour, yet was forever adding to the mother's work by her untidiness; she spoke eloquently of freedom, yet the mother could see that she kept oppressing others with her intolerance and constant arguments. She was full of contradictions, and, realizing this, the mother always approached her guardedly, and did not feel for her the same unchanging cordiality which she felt for Nikolai.

He was ever filled with concern for others as he went on living his monotonous life from day to day: at eight o'clock he had his

morning tea, during which he read the paper and told the mother the news. As she listened to him, she perceived with startling clarity how mercilessly the vast machine of life ground people into money. She found that Nikolai had much in common with Andrei. Like the *khokhol*, he spoke of people without malice, counting all of them guilty of the wrong organization of life, but his faith in the new life was not so ardent as Andrei's, and not so vivid. He always spoke in the calm voice of a stern and honest judge, and while a quiet smile of regret played about his lips when speaking of even the most dreadful things, his eyes shone hard and cold. As she saw this shine in his eyes, the mother realized that this man would never forgive anyone anything—that he *could* not forgive—and she pitied him, for she knew that he found this hardness difficult. Her fondness for him grew with every day.

At nine o'clock he went to work. When he was gone she would tidy up the apartment, get dinner, wash herself and put on a clean dress and sit in her room looking at the pictures in the books. She had by this time learned to read, but it required such great concentration that she quickly tired and could not grasp the relation of one word to another. Looking at pictures, on the other hand, amused her like a child. They revealed to her a new and wonderful world which she understood, and which she found almost tangible. There rose before her huge cities, beautiful buildings, machines, ships, monuments, the inestimable wealth created by the hands of men and the manifold creations of nature which baffled her mind with their variety. Life kept endlessly expanding, ever opening her eyes to something great and wonderful and hitherto unknown, ever exciting the thirsting soul of this awakened woman with its lavish treasures, its inexhaustible beauty. She especially loved to look at the zoological atlas which, while printed in a foreign language, nevertheless gave her a vivid conception of the riches and beauty and vastness of the earth.

"How large the world is!" she remarked to Nikolai one day.

She was most delighted with the insects, especially the butterflies. She wonderingly studied the drawings and said:

"Aren't they beautiful though, Nikolai Ivanovich? How much of this dear beauty there is everywhere—all shut away from us, flying past unseen. People keep bustling about without knowing anything,

blind to the things that could ease their eyes, having no time to know them, and no desire. How much joy we could fetch for ourselves if we just knew the riches of the earth and how many wonderful things live on it. And everything is for everybody, and each thing is for all—isn't that right?"

"Of course it is," smiled Nikolai as he brought her another illustrated book.

People often came to see him in the evenings. Among his guests were: Alexei Vasilyevich, a handsome man with a pale face and a black beard—very imposing and taciturn; Roman Petrovich, a pimply, round-headed person who was always clicking his tongue regretfully over something or other; Ivan Danilovich, a small, thin man with a pointed beard and a high voice—quick and noisy and sharp as a stiletto; Yegor, who was always laughing at himself, his comrades, and the illness which kept growing in him. There were other people too, coming from distant cities. Nikolai held long, quiet talks with them, always on the same theme—the working people of the world. They argued and got excited, waving their hands and drinking large quantities of tea. Sometimes while they talked Nikolai would think up proclamations which he would then read to his comrades. They would immediately copy them and the mother would carefully gather up the pieces of torn draft copies and burn them.

As she poured tea for them she would wonder at the fervour with which they spoke of the life and fate of the working people, and of how they could improve their efforts to show them the truth and rally their spirits. Often they would become angry and defend different opinions, making sharp accusations against each other, hurting each others' feelings, and holding hot arguments.

The mother felt that she knew the life of the workers better than they. It seemed to her that she more clearly saw the enormousness of the task they had undertaken, and this enabled her to regard them with a certain condescension, with something of the regret with which a grownup regards children playing at husband and wife without comprehending the drama entailed by that relationship. Involuntarily she compared their speeches with those of her son and Andrei, and she was conscious of a difference which at first she could not understand. At times it seemed to her that here they shouted louder than

they used to in the workers' settlement, and she gave the following explanation:

"They know more, so they talk louder. . . ."

But too often it seemed to her that these people were intentionally stirring each other up and making a show of their ardour, as though each of them wanted to prove to his comrades that for him the truth was nearer and dearer than for them, while the others took offence and tried in their turn to prove their closer proximity to the truth, resorting to sharp, harsh arguments. It seemed to her that each of them was eager to leap higher than the others, and this roused in her a disturbing sadness. She would look at them with quivering brows and pleading eyes, thinking to herself:

"They've forgotten all about Pasha and his comrades. . . ."

She listened to all their arguments with the greatest attention, though of course she did not understand them. But she tried to catch the feeling behind the words and comprehended that when the concept of goodness was discussed in the workers' settlement, it was accepted in round terms, as something whole, while here it was broken up into bits and reduced to pettiness. There feelings were deeper and stronger: here they were dominated by keen thinking which cut everything up. Here they spoke more about the tearing down of the old; there they dreamed more of the new, and for this reason the words of her son and Andrei were dearer and more comprehensible to her.

She noticed that whenever some one from among the workers came to see Nikolai, he became too free and easy; a sugary expression appeared on his face and he spoke in an unaccustomed manner—more crude, or offhand.

"He's trying to speak so's they'll understand him," she thought.

But this did not please her. She saw that the worker who had come to visit was also uncomfortable, as though all tied up inside, so that he could not speak as freely and easily with Nikolai as he did with her, a simple workingwoman. Once, when Nikolai went out of the room, she said to a young fellow who had come:

"What are you afraid of? You're not some youngster reciting his lessons to his teacher."

The fellow gave a broad grin.

"Even lobsters get red when they're out of their element... after all, he's not the likes of us."

Sometimes Sasha came. She never stayed long, always spoke in a matter-of-fact way without laughing, and on leaving she would invariably say to the mother:

"How is Pavel Mikhailovich?"

"He's all right—keeping cheerful, thank the Lord!"

"Give him my regards," the girl would say, and disappear.

Once the mother complained to her that they were keeping Pavel so long without holding the trial. Sasha frowned and said nothing, but her fingers twitched.

The mother wanted to say to her:

"I know that you love him, my dear...."

But she lacked the courage. The girl's solemn face, her compressed lips and the dry matter-of-factness of her words repelled any impulse towards affection. With a sigh the mother silently pressed the hand held out to her and thought:

"Ah me, how unhappy!..."

One day Natasha came. She was delighted to find the mother here. She kissed her, and then said quietly, all of a sudden:

"My mother died. She died, the poor darling...."

She tossed back her head and brushed her eyes with a quick movement before continuing:

"Such a pity! She wasn't even fifty years old yet. She could have lived much longer. But on the other hand I can't help thinking that death was probably preferable to the life she led. She was always alone, nobody close to her, nobody needing her, forever cowed by my father. Do you call that living? Other people live in the hope of something better, but there was nothing my mother could hope for but further insults."

"It's true what you say, Natasha," said the mother thoughtfully. "People live in the hope of something better, but if there's nothing to hope for, what kind of a life is it?" She gently patted the girl's hand. "So now you're all alone?"

"All alone," said Natasha lightly.

"That's all right," smiled the mother after a brief pause. "Good people never live alone very long—they always have others hitching on to them."

VIII

Natasha took a position teaching in a school connected with a weaving mill, and the mother began supplying her with illegal pamphlets, proclamations and newspapers.

This became her work. Several times a month she disguised herself as a nun, or a peddler of laces and homespun linen, a well-to-do townswoman or a pious pilgrim, and wandered through the gubernia with a bag over her shoulder or a suitcase in her hand. In trains, on boats, in hotels and inns she was ever the same calm, simple person who spoke the first word to strangers, fearlessly drawing attention to herself with her sociability and the self-assurance of a person who has seen a lot in her time.

She liked to talk to people, to hear their tales and complaints and the things that puzzled them. It always made her happy to meet a person who was deeply dissatisfied—with a dissatisfaction which, in protesting against the blows of fate, persistently sought an answer to clearly-defined questions. Before her kept unfolding the picture of human life with its restless and vainglorious struggle for satiety. Everywhere she could plainly see the brazen attempt to fool people, to do them out of something, to drink their blood and squeeze the last drop out of them for the sake of personal advantage. And she saw that there was an abundance of everything on the earth, while at the same time the masses of the people were in need, living half-starved lives in the midst of plenty. The churches of the city were filled with silver and gold which God had no use for, while at the gates of the temple shivered beggars, patiently waiting for meagre donations to be dropped into their hands. Formerly she had also seen all this—the rich churches and the gold brocaded vestments of the priests which made such a striking contrast to the hovels of the beggars and their shameful rags. But formerly she had accepted this as a natural state of affairs, while now she found it intolerable and an insult to the poor who, as she knew, were closer to the church and had more need of it than the rich.

From pictures of Christ which she had seen and from the stories about Him which she had heard, she knew that He dressed simply and was a friend of the poor. But in the churches she saw His image adorned in flagrant gold and silk which rustled squeamishly at sight

of the beggars who came to Him for comfort. And involuntarily she remembered the words of Rybin:

"They've fooled us about God too!"

Quite unconsciously she began to pray less, but to think more about Christ and about the people who, without ever mentioning His name, without seeming even to know about Him, lived, as it seemed to her, according to His precepts and in His manner, considering the earth to be the kingdom of the poor and wishing to divide all its riches equally among all people. Her mind dwelt much on this and her thoughts grew within her, becoming more profound and embracing all that she saw and all that she heard. They grew and assumed the brightness of a prayer, illuminating with their even glow the whole of the dark world, the whole of life and all of the people. And it seemed to her that Christ Himself, whom she had always loved with a vague tenderness—a complicated emotion in which fear was closely bound up with hope, and joy with sorrow—had become dearer to her. And He had changed, becoming more elevated and accessible, more bright and joyous, as though in actual fact He had become resurrected for life, laved and revived by the blood so generously shed in His name by people who modestly refrained from speaking the name of this friend of man. After each of her trips she returned to Nikolai happy and excited from all that she had seen and heard on the road, and pleased with having fulfilled her duty.

"It's fine to get around like this and see so much," she said to him one evening. "It makes you understand life. The people are swept off to the very edge of life where they grovel around not understanding what has happened, but they can't help wondering why they should be treated like that. Why should they be driven away? Why should they go hungry when there is so much of everything? Why should they be dark and ignorant when there is so much learning everywhere? And where is He, the merciful God, before whom there are neither rich nor poor, but only His beloved children? The people get roused a bit when they think of their lives, feeling that injustice will wipe them out if they don't do something about it."

Ever more often of late she felt that she herself must speak to the people about the injustice of their lives; sometimes she had difficulty in suppressing this urge.

When Nikolai would find her bending over her pictures, he would smile and tell her about some marvel of the world. She would ask him haltingly, overwhelmed by the boldness of the tasks man set himself:

"Is such a thing possible?"

With persistent and unwavering faith in the truth of his prophecies, he would fix his kind, bespectacled eyes on her and draw a picture of the future:

"The desires of man are beyond measure, and his strength inexhaustible! But still the world is very slow to enrich itself spiritually, because now everyone who wishes to become independent must store up money instead of knowledge. But when people do away with greed and free themselves from enforced labour...."

Rarely could she grasp the meaning of his words, but the calm faith inspiring them became ever more accessible to her.

"There are too few free people on the earth—that's the trouble!" he said.

She could understand this. She was acquainted with people who had emancipated themselves from greed and malice, and she knew that if there were more such people, life would cease being so dark and terrible and become simpler, brighter, and nobler.

"People are forced to be cruel," said Nikolai sadly.

She nodded in assent, remembering the words of the *khokhol.*

IX

One day Nikolai, who was always extremely prompt, came home from work later than usual and said as he nervously rubbed his hands without taking off his things:

"One of our comrades escaped from jail today, Nilovna. Who could it be? I wasn't able to find out...."

The mother swayed.

"Could it be Pavel?" she whispered, taking a seat.

"It could," answered Nikolai with a shrug. "But how are we going to help him hide? Where shall we find him? Just now I walked up and down the street in the hope of meeting him. That was silly, of course, but we must do something. And I'm going again...."

"And I!" cried the mother.

"You might go to Yegor's and find out whether he knows anything," suggested Nikolai as he hurried out.

She threw a kerchief over her head and rushed down the street behind him, filled with hope. Red spots danced before her eyes and her heart pounded, driving her almost to a run. With her head bent, oblivious of everything about her, she went to meet a possibility.

"What if I come and find him there!" flashed the hope goading her on.

It was hot and she panted from exhaustion. When she reached the stairs to Yegor's apartment she could go no further. She stopped and turned around and suddenly gave a little cry and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that she had seen Nikolai Vesovshchikov standing with his hands in his pockets at the gate of the house. But when she looked again there was nobody there.

"I just imagined it," she thought, climbing the stairs and listening. In the yard she could hear someone's slow steps. She stopped at the landing and looked down. Once more she saw the pock-marked face, now smiling at her.

"Nikolai! Nikolai!" she cried, running down to meet him, her heart aching with disappointment.

"Go back," he said quietly, waving his hand.

She quickly mounted the stairs and entered Yegor's room, where she found him lying on the divan.

"Nikolai—ran away—from jail!" she panted.

"Which Nikolai?" asked Yegor hoarsely, raising his head from the pillow. "There were two of them."

"Vesovshchikov. He's coming here!"

"Fine!"

At this moment Nikolai himself entered the room. He hooked the door behind him and took off his cap, standing there laughing softly and smoothing back his hair. Yegor raised himself on his elbows, and said with a nod:

"Come here. . . ."

Nikolai approached the mother with a grin and took her hand.

"If I hadn't met you, I might as well've gone back to jail. I don't know anybody in town and they'd pick me up in a minute if I went back to the settlement. So I kept walking around and thinking what

a fool I was ever to have run away. Suddenly I see Nilovna running down the street, and off I go after her."

"How did you ever get out?" asked the mother.

He sat uneasily on the edge of the divan and shrugged his shoulders:

"Just chance. I was out having my airing when the common criminals began beating up their guard. This guard was once kicked out of the gendarmes for stealing—now he spies on everybody and squeals and don't give nobody no peace. So there they were beating him up. Everything topsy-turvy, with guards running around blowing their whistles. I look up and see the gates open, and out there the square and the town. I walk over slow, like in a dream, and when I'm already a good ways down the street I come to my senses and think, where shall I go? I look back and see the gates closed already. . . ."

"Hm," said Yegor. "Why didn't you go back, good sir, knock politely and ask them to take you in—'I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but I made a little mistake. . . .' "

"Sure," laughed Nikolai, "that's silly, but somehow it don't seem right to my comrades, me going off like that without saying anything to anybody. So on I go. I see a funeral procession—burying a baby—so I join up, walking after the coffin with my head down and not looking at anybody. I sat for a while out in the cemetery to give my head an airing, and suddenly a thought struck me. . . ."

"Only one?" asked Yegor, adding with a sigh, "I don't suppose it felt very crowded in that head of yours."

Vesovshchikov laughed good-naturedly and shook his head:

"Oh, my head's not so empty now as it used to be! But you're still ailing, Yegor Ivanovich?"

"Everyone does what he's able," answered Yegor with a dry cough. "Go on with your story."

"Then I drop into the regional museum. I keep walking around and looking and thinking to myself—where shall I go now? I even got mad at myself. And was I hungry! I go out on the street and walk along feeling pretty rotten. The police keep looking close at everybody. Well, thinks I, with a mug like mine I'll soon be dragged before the judge. Then all of a sudden Pelagea Nilovna

comes running toward me. I step to one side and then follow her. That's all."

"I didn't notice you," said the mother guiltily. She gave Vesovshchikov a more careful examination, and it seemed to her he had become thinner.

"The comrades'll be worried," said Vesovshchikov, scratching his head.

"And what about the authorities? Don't you pity them? They'll also be worried," observed Yegor. He opened his mouth and began to work his lips as though he were chewing the air. "But all joking aside, we've got to hide you away somewhere, which won't be easy, though very pleasant. If only I could get up!" He sighed, dropped his hands on his chest and began to rub it weakly.

"You're looking mighty sick, Yegor Ivanovich," said Nikolai, dropping his head. The mother sighed and glanced anxiously about the crowded little room.

"That's my own business," answered Yegor. "You go ask him about Pavel, mother, without putting on any more airs."

Vesovshchikov grinned.

"Pavel's all right. He's well. He's sort of our chief in there. It's him who talks to the heads and in general takes command. Everybody thinks a lot of him."

Nilovna nodded her head as she listened to Vesovshchikov and glanced out of the corner of her eye at the puffy, bluish face of Yegor. It seemed strangely flat and immobile and bereft of all expression. Only his eyes shone lively and cheerful.

"If you could give me something to eat—you can't imagine how hungry I am!" exclaimed Nikolai suddenly.

"There's some bread up there on the shelf, mother," said Yegor. "Then go out into the hall and knock at the second door on the left. A woman will open it and you tell her to come here and bring along everything she can find to eat."

"Why everything?" protested Nikolai.

"Don't worry, it won't be much."

The mother went out and knocked at the door. As she listened to the silence, she thought of Yegor.

"He's dying. . . ."

"Who's there?" asked someone in the room.

"I've come from Yegor Ivanovich," answered the mother quietly. "He asks you to come to his room."

"Right away," the woman answered without opening the door. The mother waited a moment and then knocked again. The door was opened quickly and a tall woman in glasses came out into the hall. Hurriedly smoothing out the wrinkles in her sleeves, she asked the mother coldly:

"What do you want?"

"Yegor Ivanovich sent me."

"Come along. But it seems I know you!" exclaimed the woman softly. "How do you do? It's dark here."

The mother glanced at her and remembered having seen her a few times at Nikolai's.

"They're all our people," she thought.

The woman had Pelagea walk ahead of her.

"Is he feeling bad?" she asked.

"Yes, he's lying down. He told me to ask you to bring something to eat."

"That's not necessary."

As they entered Yegor's room they could hear his hoarse breathing.

"I'm leaving to join my ancestors, friend. . . . Ludmilla Vasilyevna, this young man has had the impudence to walk out of jail without the permission of the authorities. First of all give him something to eat, and then stow him away somewheres."

The woman nodded and said, with an attentive glance at the sick man:

"You should have sent for me as soon as they came, Yegor. And I see you have missed your medicine twice. Shame on you! Follow me, comrade. Presently they will come to take Yegor to the hospital."

"So you really intend to put me in the hospital?"

"Yes. I shall remain there with you."

"There too? Good Lord!"

"None of your nonsense!"

As she talked, the woman adjusted the blanket over Yegor's chest, carefully studied Nikolai, and held up the bottles to see how much medicine was left. She spoke in an even, modulated voice,

and moved gracefully. Her face was pale and her dark brows nearly met at the bridge of her nose. The mother did not like her face. She found it too haughty. The woman's eyes never smiled or sparkled and she spoke in a tone of command.

"We'll leave you now," she continued, "but soon I shall return. Give Yegor a tablespoonful of this medicine. And don't allow him to talk."

She went out, taking Nikolai with her.

"A splendid woman," said Yegor with a sigh. "A simply marvellous woman. I must fix you up with her, mother. She gets so worn out. . . ."

"Stop talking. Take this medicine instead," said the mother gently.

He took the medicine and closed one eye.

"I'll die anyway, even if I keep my mouth shut," he continued.

He watched the mother with his other eye, while his lips slowly parted in a smile. The mother bent her head, and a sharp pang of pity brought tears to her eyes.

"That's all right—it's only natural," he said. "The pleasure of living entails the necessity of dying."

The mother placed her hand on his brow and once more said softly:

"Can't you possibly keep still?"

He closed his eyes as though listening to the rattle in his chest, then continued stubbornly:

"There's no sense in keeping still, mother. What can I gain by it? Some extra seconds of dying, while I forfeit the pleasure of having a few words with a splendid woman like you. I'm sure the people in the other world can't be as nice as those here."

The mother interrupted him anxiously:

"That fine lady will come back here and scold me for letting you talk."

"She's no fine lady. She's a revolutionary, a comrade, and a wonderful woman. Of course she'll scold you. She scolds everybody."

With an obvious effort to move his lips, Yegor began to tell her the story of his neighbour's life. His eyes were smiling, and the mother realized that he was intentionally teasing her, and as she looked into his moist, blue face, she thought with alarm:

"He's dying."

Ludmilla came back, and when she had carefully closed the door behind her, she turned to the mother:

"Your friend must change his clothes and leave my room as soon as possible, so you must immediately go and get some things for him to wear. Bring them here. Too bad Sophia is away—that's her speciality—hiding people."

"She's coming tomorrow," said the mother as she threw her shawl about her shoulders.

Whenever she was given some task she was so filled with the desire to perform it quickly and well that she could think of nothing else.

"How do you think he should be dressed?" she now asked in a businesslike tone, lowering her brows.

"It doesn't matter. He'll leave at night."

"Night's worse—fewer people on the streets, and the police more watchful. He isn't a very sly one, you know."

Yegor laughed huskily.

"Can I come to the hospital to see you?" asked the mother.

He nodded as he coughed.

"Would you like to take turns with me at his bedside?" asked Ludmilla, glancing at the mother with her dark eyes. "You would? Fine. But now be off as fast as you can."

She took the mother affectionately but imperiously by the arm and led her to the door, stopping when they were out to say softly:

"Don't be offended by my putting you out this way, but it's harmful for him to speak. And I still have hope...."

She gripped her hands until the bones cracked, and dropped her lids wearily over her eyes. This confession embarrassed the mother.

"Goodness! Why of course!" she mumbled.

"Watch to see there are no spies around!" said the woman softly. She raised her hands to her face and rubbed her temples. Her lips quivered and her face softened.

"I know!" said the mother, not without pride.

As she went through the gate she stopped for a minute, adjusting her shawl as she glanced about sharply, but inconspicuously. She could almost unerringly distinguish spies in a crowd. She well knew the exaggerated indifference of their walk, the unnatural ease of

their gestures, the expression of weariness and boredom which ill disguised the wary, guilty flash of their unpleasantly sharp eyes.

But this time she failed to see any such faces and hurried down the street. She called an izvoshchik and ordered him to drive her to the market. In selecting an outfit for Nikolai she wrangled stubbornly over prices and railed at the drunken husband whose debauchery forced her to buy him a complete new outfit almost every month. Her invention had little effect on the salespeople, but she herself was highly pleased by it. On the way she had figured that the police would realize the necessity of buying Nikolai new clothes, and would therefore send spies to the market. With the same naive caution she returned to Yegor's apartment, after which she escorted Nikolai to the edge of town. They walked on different sides of the street, and the mother was pleased and amused to see how Nikolai plodded heavily ahead, getting his legs mixed up in the long skirts of his brown coat and constantly pushing back the hat which kept slipping down over his nose. In an abandoned by-street they met Sasha, and with a nod of her head to Vesovshchikov, the mother turned back home.

"But Pavel's still in jail ... and Andrei ..." she thought sadly.

X

Nikolai met her in a state of great agitation.

"Yegor is in a bad way!" he exclaimed. "In a very bad way! They have taken him to the hospital. Ludmilla was here and wants you to come...."

"To the hospital?"

With a nervous gesture Nikolai adjusted his glasses and then helped the mother put on her jacket.

"Here—take this package with you," he said in a quivering voice as he pressed her fingers in his warm, dry hand. "Did you fix up Vesovshchikov all right?"

"Yes."

"I shall also come to see Yegor."

The mother was faint with weariness, and Nikolai's agitation roused in her a premonition of approaching disaster.

"He's dying," was the dark thought which kept throbbing in her mind.

But on entering the clean, bright little room where Yegor sat laughing hoarsely from the mound of white pillows in which he was ensconsed, she felt relieved. She remained standing in the doorway and listening to what Yegor was saying to the doctor:

"Doctoring the sick is like reforms...."

"Stop your nonsense, Yegor!" exclaimed the doctor in a worried tone.

"But I'm a revolutionary and loathe reforms...."

The doctor gently placed Yegor's hand back on his knee and stood up, thoughtfully stroking his beard while he felt the puffiness of his patient's face.

The mother knew the doctor—he was one of Nikolai's closest friends and his name was Ivan Danilovich. She went over to Yegor, who greeted her by sticking out his tongue. The doctor turned around.

"Ah, Nilovna! Hello! What's that you have in your hand?"

"Books I suppose," put in Yegor.

"He mustn't read," said the little doctor.

"He wants to turn me into an idiot!" complained the patient.

Short gasps and a moist wheezing came from his chest. His face was covered with tiny drops of perspiration, and it cost him great effort to lift his hand to wipe his brow. The strange immobility of his puffy cheeks distorted his broad, kind face, neutralizing his features into a lifeless mask. Only his eyes, deep-sunk in swelling, looked out with a clear, condescending smile.

"Hey you, Esculapius, I'm tired. May I lie down?"

"No, you may not," answered the doctor curtly.

"Well I shall, the minute you go out!"

"Don't let him, Nilovna! Adjust his pillows. And please don't let him speak—it's very harmful."

The mother nodded and the doctor went out with short, quick steps. Yegor threw back his head, closed his eyes, and became motionless except for the twitching of his fingers. The white walls of the little room exuded a dry cold and a dull oppressiveness. Through the large window could be seen the curly tops of the limes,

with patches of bright yellow glowing among their dark, dusty leaves —the ravages of imminent autumn.

"Death is claiming me slowly and unwillingly," said Yegor without moving or opening his eyes. "Apparently she has some pity for me—I was always so easy to get on with!"

"Do stop talking, Yegor Ivanovich," begged the mother as she gently stroked his hand.

"Wait a bit—I'll stop...."

With a great effort he continued, gasping for breath and interrupting himself with long pauses when he lacked the strength to go on.

"It's splendid that you're with us—so pleasant to see your face. I sometimes ask myself—what will be her end? It's a pity to realize that you—like all the rest—must land in jail—and so on. Are you afraid of going to jail?"

"No," she answered simply.

"Naturally not. But there's no getting away from it—jail's rotten. It's jail that did this to me. To tell the truth—I don't want to die...."

The mother was about to say, "Maybe you won't die yet," but a glance at his face made her keep silent.

"I could still work.... But if I was unable to work—there would be no point in living—it would be stupid...."

The mother sighed and involuntarily remembered Andrei's favourite expression: "Fair enough, but not much comfort!" She had had an exhausting day and was hungry. The moist, monotonous whispering of the sick man filled the room and crawled helplessly over the smooth walls; the tops of the limes outside the window were like low-hanging clouds, startlingly dark and threatening. Everything had become strangely quiet, with the immobility of twilight dismally awaiting the coming of night.

"How bad I feel!" said Yegor, closing his eyes and becoming silent.

"Go to sleep," advised the mother. "Maybe you'll feel better."

After verifying his breathing, she glanced around and sat for a while without moving, in the cold grip of grief; then she dozed off.

She was awakened by a cautious sound at the door. She started up and saw that Yegor's eyes were open.

"I must have dozed off," she said softly. "Forgive me."

"I'm the one to be forgiven," he said just as softly.

The darkness of evening glanced in through the window. The room was chilly, and everything had become strangely shadowed. The sick man's face was dark.

There came a rustle and the voice of Ludmilla:

"Sitting and whispering together here in the dark.... Where's the switch?"

Suddenly the room was flooded with harsh white light. In the middle stood the tall, straight black figure of Ludmilla.

A tremor passed over Yegor's whole body. He raised his hand to his chest.

"What is it?" cried Ludmilla as she ran over to him.

He looked at the mother with motionless eyes which now seemed large and strangely bright.

He opened his mouth wide and raised his head, reaching out with his hand. The mother took it and looked into his face, not daring to breathe. With a strong, convulsive twist of his neck he threw back his head and said in a loud voice:

"I can't! It's all over!"

His body gave a slight shudder, his head fell helpless on his shoulder, and the cold light of the lamp hanging above his bed was lifelessly reflected in his wide-open eyes.

"Oh, my dear!" whispered the mother.

Ludmilla slowly moved away from the bed until she reached the window, where she stood staring out.

"He's dead!" she cried suddenly in an unusually loud voice.

She leaned over with her elbows on the window sill, and then as though someone had unexpectedly struck her over the head, she sank moaning to her knees, her hands covering her face.

The mother crossed Yegor's heavy hands on his chest and adjusted his head on the pillow. Then she wiped away her tears and went over to Ludmilla, bending over to stroke the other woman's heavy hair. Ludmilla slowly turned dull, dilated eyes to her and struggled to her feet.

"We lived together in exile," she whispered with trembling lips. "We went out there together and served jail sentences.... Sometimes it was repulsive—unbearable—many people lost heart...."

She was seized by a fit of loud, dry sobbing which she suppressed by an effort of will. She brought her face closer to that of the mother, and it was softened by a sad tenderness that made her look younger.

"But his cheerfulness was inexhaustible," she continued in a quick whisper, sobbing without tears. "He would always laugh and joke, disguising his own suffering in order to encourage the weak ones. He was always good and kind and tactful. Out there in Siberia idleness often corrupts people, leading them to give way to their lower instincts. How well he knew how to combat this! If you only knew what a wonderful comrade he was! His personal life was desperately unhappy, but nobody ever heard a word of complaint from his lips! Never! I was a close friend of his. I owe much to his kindness. He gave me all that he could of his rich intellect—yet, tired and lonely as he was, he never asked for the slightest sign of affection or personal attention in exchange...."

She went over to Yegor and bent down to kiss his hand.

"Comrade. My dear, good comrade—thank you—thank you from the bottom of my heart." she said softly. "Farewell. I shall go on working as you always worked—tirelessly, with unwavering faith, all my life. Farewell."

Her body was shaken by sobs, and she sank with her head at Yegor's feet. The mother wept silently and profusely. For some reason she tried to suppress her tears; she wanted to comfort Ludmilla with particularly strong comfort. She wanted to speak fine words of love and grief about Yegor. Through her tears she looked at his sunken face, at his eyes, over which the lids were half-closed as though he were only dozing, at his dark lips about which a light smile was playing. Everything was quiet and painfully bright....

Ivan Danilovich came in with his customary short, quick steps, and suddenly stopped in the middle of the room. Brusquely he thrust his hands into his pockets and asked in a loud, nervous voice:

"When did it happen?"

Nobody answered. He wiped his brow and walked with a slight stagger over to Yegor. After pressing his hand, he moved off to one side.

"Nothing unexpected about it. With a heart like his it should have happened six months ago ... at least...."

Suddenly his high, inappropriately loud and calm voice broke. He leaned against the wall and began feverishly twisting his beard as he watched the group at the bedside.

"Another one gone," he said quietly.

Ludmilla rose and went to open the window. Presently they were all standing close together at the window, staring into the dark face of the autumn night. Above the black treetops glittered the stars, deepening the infinite spaces of the sky.

Ludmilla took the mother's arm and silently leaned against her shoulder. The doctor stood, with lowered head, polishing his glasses. From the darkness outside the window came the weary night sounds of the city. The cold caressed their faces and stirred their hair. Ludmilla shuddered as a tear stole down her cheek. Out in the corridor they could hear smothered, frightened sounds, a hasty shuffle of feet, groans, and whispers. But the three remained silent and motionless at the window, staring into the night.

Feeling that she might be in the way here, the mother carefully freed her arm and went to the door, from where she bowed to Yegor.

"Are you going?" asked the doctor quietly without looking around.

"Yes...."

Once out in the street, she thought of Ludmilla and her suppressed weeping.

"She doesn't even know how to cry...."

The remembrance of the words Yegor had spoken before he died brought a sigh from her lips. As she slowly walked down the street she kept recalling his lively eyes, his gaiety, the tales he told about life....

"It's hard for a good man to live, but easy to die. How am I going to die?" she thought.

In her mind's eye she saw Ludmilla and the doctor standing at the window of that white, too-bright room, with Yegor's dead eyes at their back. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by a great pity for mankind, and with a painful sigh she hurried her steps, spurred on by some vague impulse.

"I must hurry!" she thought, succumbing to the sad, but courageous force goading her from within.

XI

The mother spent the entire next day making arrangements for the funeral. In the evening, when she and Sophia and Nikolai were having tea, Sasha appeared in a strangely lively and noisy mood. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were shining merrily, and it seemed to the mother that she was filled with some joyful hope. Her mood formed a harsh contrast to the sad tone in which they had been recalling the life of Yegor. It did not adapt itself, disturbing them and blinding them like a fire suddenly flaring up in darkness.

Nikolai thoughtfully tapped the table with his fingers as he said:

"You aren't yourself today, Sasha."

"Really? Perhaps," she replied, with a happy laugh.

The mother glanced at her in silent reproof, while Sophia said to remind her:

"We were just speaking of Yegor Ivanovich."

"What a wonderful person he was!" exclaimed Sasha. "I never saw him without a smile on his face and a joke on his tongue. And how he worked! He was an artist of revolution, a master of revolutionary thinking. With what strength and simplicity he always drew his pictures of violence and falsehood and injustice!"

She spoke quietly, with a meditative smile in her eyes, but this smile could not quench the fire of exaltation which all could detect, though none could comprehend.

They did not wish to substitute the happy mood brought by Sasha for the sadness caused by the death of their comrade, and they unconsciously defended their right to indulge in grief by trying to convert the girl to their own frame of mind.

"And now he is dead," said Sophia insistently, with a studied look at Sasha.

Sasha cast a quick, inquiring glance at all of them and frowned. She lowered her head and became silent, slowly adjusting her hair. After a strained pause she suddenly looked up and said in a challenging tone:

"He's dead! What does that mean—dead? What is dead? Is my respect for Yegor dead, or my love for him as a comrade, or my memory of his ideas and his work? Has the feeling he roused in my heart disappeared, or my knowledge of him as of an honest, coura-

geous individual? Is all that dead? I know that for me it can never die. And it seems to me that we are too quick in saying of a person —he is dead. 'His lips are dead, but his words shall live on in the hearts of the living!' "

In her agitation she once more sat down at the table, leaning her elbows on it and continuing more quietly and thoughtfully as she smiled at her comrades with hazy eyes:

"Maybe what I say sounds foolish, comrades, but I believe in the immortality of honest people, the immortality of those who have made it possible for me to live the wonderful life I live, a life which thrills me with its amazing intricacy, its wealth of phenomena, and the growth of ideas which are as dear to me as my own heart. Perhaps we are too sparing of emotions. We live too much with our thoughts, and that is inclined to distort us. We evaluate without feeling...."

"Has something nice happened to you?" asked Sophia with a smile.

"Yes," said Sasha. "Something very nice, it seems to me. I spent the entire night talking with Vesovshchikov. I never used to like him —he seemed to me coarse and ignorant, and undoubtedly he used to be. He was filled with a dark, morbid irritation with everyone. Somehow he always placed himself in the centre of everything like a weight and kept saying rudely and maliciously: I, I, I! There was something horribly narrow-minded about him."

She smiled and once more looked at them with shining eyes.

"But now he says 'Comrades!' And you should hear *how* he says it! With a kind of shy, gentle love that isn't to be expressed in words. He has become amazingly simple and sincere and filled with the desire to work. He has found himself. He is fully aware of his strong points and his shortcomings. The most important thing is that a genuine feeling of comradeship has been born in him."

As the mother listened to Sasha, she was happy to discover that so stern a person could become gentle and joyful. But at the same time, somewhere deep down in her heart she kept thinking jealously:

"And what about Pavel?"

"He thinks only of his comrades," continued Sasha, "and do you know what he tried to convince me of? The necessity of arranging their escape. He claims that is very simple and easy."

Sophia raised her head and said eagerly:

"That's an idea, Sasha! What do you think?"

The cup of tea trembled in the mother's hands. Sasha drew her brows together and tried to suppress her excitement. After a moment's pause she said in a serious tone, but with a happy smile:

"If what he says is true, then we ought to make the attempt. It's our duty to try!"

Suddenly she blushed and sank into a chair without speaking.

"You darling!" thought the mother with a smile. Sophia also smiled, while Nikolai glanced at Sasha and laughed softly. The girl raised her head. She was pale, her eyes flashed and her tone was dry and offended.

"I understand why you're laughing," she said. "You think I have some personal reason for wanting to do this."

"Why, Sasha?" asked Sophia archly, getting up and going over to her. It seemed to the mother that this hurt Sasha, and Sophia should not have said it. She sighed and looked at her reproachfully.

"Then I refuse to have anything to do with it!" exclaimed Sasha. "I can't participate in making the decision if you're going to look upon it as...."

"Enough, Sasha," said Nikolai calmly.

The mother also went over to her and began to smooth her hair. The girl grasped her hand and raised her flushed face to the mother's. The latter smiled and sighed, at a loss for words. Sophia sat down on the chair next to Sasha and put her arm around her shoulder.

"You're a funny duck," she said, looking into her eyes with an inquiring smile.

"Maybe it was stupid of me...."

"How could you ever have thought such a thing?" continued Sophia, but Nikolai interrupted in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Undoubtedly we must arrange their escape if such a thing is possible," he said. "But first of all we must find out if our comrades in jail would want us to do this."

Sasha dropped her head.

Sophia lighted a cigarette, and with a glance at her brother threw the match into the corner.

"How could they not want it?" sighed the mother. "Only I can't believe it is possible."

The mother was anxious to hear them confirm the possibility, but they were silent.

"I must see Vesovshchikov," said Sophia.

"Tomorrow I shall tell you when and where this can be arranged," answered Sasha.

"What are his plans?" asked Sophia as she walked up and down the room.

"They intend making him typesetter in the new print shop. Until then he will live with the forester."

Sasha was frowning and her face had resumed its usual stern expression. She spoke curtly.

"You must give Pavel a note when you go to see him the day after tomorrow," said Nikolai, going over to where the mother was washing up the cups. "You understand, we have to know—"

"I understand, I understand." the mother hastened to assure him. "I'll manage to give it to him."

"I'm going now," said Sasha, and after quickly and silently shaking hands with each of them, she went out, severely erect, with a particularly resolute step.

When she had gone, Sophia put her hands on the mother's shoulders and rocked her back and forth on the chair.

"Could you love such a daughter, Nilovna?" she asked.

"Ah me! If only I could see them together for just one day!" cried the mother, ready to weep.

"Yes, a little happiness doesn't harm anyone," said Nikolai softly. "But no one is satisfied with a little happiness. And when there's a lot—it becomes cheap."

Sophia went to the piano and began to play a sad tune.

XII

The next morning some thirty or forty people stood at the gates of the hospital waiting for the coffin of their comrade to be carried out. Among them ranged the spies, listening to their exclamations and taking mental note of faces, manners, and words, while across

the street was stationed a group of policemen with revolvers on their hips. The crowd was aggravated by the boldness of the spies and the sarcastic smiles of the policemen, ready at any moment to demonstrate their force. Some of the people disguised their annoyance by joking, others kept their eyes sullenly fixed on the ground in order to avoid noticing the insults, while still others, unable to hide their feelings, made biting remarks about authorities who were afraid of people armed with nothing but the spoken word. The pale blue autumn sky shone brightly down on the grey cobblestones strewn with yellow leaves which the wind blew about the feet of the people.

The mother stood in the crowd and thought sadly, as she looked at the familiar faces about her:

"There aren't many of you—not many! And almost no workers...."

The gates opened and men bore out the coffin lid covered with wreathes tied with red ribbons. The waiting people immediately lifted their hats, giving the impression that a flock of black birds had suddenly taken wing. A tall police officer with a heavy black moustache on his red face walked quickly into the crowd, while behind him came the soldiers, unceremoniously pushing the people aside and tramping loudly in their heavy boots.

"Take off the ribbons!" ordered the officer in a hoarse voice.

Men and women pressed about him, talking excitedly, waving their arms and jostling each other. Before the mother's eyes flashed pale, agitated faces with trembling lips; down the cheeks of one woman rolled tears of exasperation.

"Down with violence!" shouted a young voice, which was immediately drowned in the noise of argument.

The mother's heart was also stung, and she turned to a poorly-dressed young man standing next to her.

"They don't even let you hold a funeral the way you'd like," she said indignantly. "It's a disgrace!"

The feeling of hostility grew. Above the heads of the people swayed the coffin lid with its ribbons flying in the wind, catching at the heads and faces beneath with a nervous rustle of silk.

The mother was seized with fear that there would be a clash, and she kept muttering hurriedly to right and left:

"The devil with them if that's the way they feel about it! Let them have the ribbons. We may as well give in."

Someone's loud, sharp voice sounded above the noise:

"We demand the right to see our comrade off to his final resting place—a comrade whom you tortured to death—"

A high voice began to sing:

You fell, a noble sacrifice....

"Take off the ribbons! Cut them away, Yakovlev!"

Came the swish of a sword. The mother shut her eyes in expectation of an outcry. But the people only grumbled and snarled like angry wolves. Then silently, with lowered heads, they moved forward, filling the street with the shuffle of their feet.

The desecrated lid of the coffin with its crushed wreathes floated in the air above the heads of the people, while beside them swayed the mounted police. The mother walked along the sidewalk and could not see the coffin itself, which was now surrounded by a crowd which had grown unnoticeably until it now filled the street. The grey figures of mounted policemen brought up the rear as well, while on either side walked policemen with hands on their sword hilts. Everywhere the mother detected the familiar sharp eyes of detectives, carefully scanning the faces of the people.

Farewell, comrade, farewell,

sang two sad voices.

"We can do without that," cried someone. "We shall march in silence, gentlemen."

There was something stern and imposing in this cry. The melancholy song broke off and conversation became hushed, so that only the dull, even tramp of feet over cobblestones could be heard. This sound rose above the heads of the people and floated up to the transparent heaven, shaking the air like the first thunder of a still distant storm. A cold wind which kept growing stronger, hurled the dust and waste of the city streets hostilely at the people; it tore at their hair and clothes, blinded their eyes, struck them in the chest and whirled about their feet....

This silent funeral, without priests and soul-rending singing, these thoughtful faces and frowning brows, filled the mother with dread.

Slow thoughts circled in her mind, and she clothed them in sad words:

"There aren't many of you standing for the truth...."

She walked on with bowed head, and it seemed to her that it was not Yegor they were burying, but something else—something near and dear and essential to her. She felt miserable and out of place. A shaggy, alarming sense of disagreement with these people who were burying Yegor possessed her heart.

"Of course," she thought, "Yegor did not believe in God—and none of these other people do...."

She did not wish to follow through the thought, and she sighed, trying to free her soul of a great burden.

"Oh God! Oh dear Jesus! Can it be that I too—like this...."

They reached the cemetery and for a long time kept twisting along the narrow lanes among the graves until they came to an open space strewn with low white crosses. They crowded silently about the open grave. The tense silence of the living among the graves presaged something dreadful which caused the mother's heart to shudder and die. The wind howled and whistled among the crosses, ruffling the crushed flowers on the lid of the coffin.

The policemen drew themselves up to attention with their eyes on their chief. A tall, pale young man with dark brows and long hair took his place at the head of the grave. At that very moment the hoarse voice of the police officer shouted:

"Gentlemen...."

"Comrades!" began the dark-browed young man in a loud, clear voice.

"Just a minute!" shouted the officer. "I must warn you that I cannot allow any speeches!"

"I shall say only a few words," replied the young man calmly. "Comrades! Let us swear at the grave of our friend and teacher that we shall never forget his precepts, and that each of us, all his life, will ceaselessly dig the grave of that power which is the source of all the ills of our native land—of that evil, oppressive power—the monarchy!"

"Arrest him!" cried the officer, but his voice was drowned in a cacophony of cries:

"Down with the monarchy!"

The policemen pushed their way through the crowd toward the orator, but he waved his hands from where his friends pressed about him protectively and shouted:

"Long live freedom!"

The mother was pushed to one side. In her fear she leaned against one of the crosses and shut her eyes, expecting a blow. She was deafened by the roar of discordant sounds; the earth gave way beneath her feet, and she could hardly catch her breath for the wind and her fear. Police whistles sounded the alarm, rough voices shouted commands, women's voices cried hysterically, fence rails splintered, heavy boots stamped over the dry earth. This lasted for such a long time that she could no longer endure the terror of standing there with closed eyes.

She glanced up and rushed forward with a cry, her hands outstretched. Not far away, on the narrow path among the graves, the policemen had surrounded the long-haired young man and were beating back the people who threw themselves to his defence from all sides. Bared swords flashed cold and white in the air, now glinting above the heads, now falling in their midst. Canes and broken fence rails were flourished as weapons. The shouting people milled about in a crazy dance dominated by the pale face of the young man. Through this storm of mad passions came his strong voice:

"Comrades! Why waste your strength?"

His words were convincing. The people threw down their sticks and began to run away one by one, but the mother kept pressing forward, impelled by some irresistible force. She saw Nikolai with his hat on the back of his head pushing away the maddened people.

"Are you crazy?" he remonstrated. "Calm yourselves!"

It seemed to her that one of his hands was red.

"Nikolai Ivanovich! Get away from here!" she cried, rushing over to him.

"Where are you going? They'll strike you!"

She felt a hand on her shoulder and saw Sophia standing next to her, hatless, her hair dishevelled, holding a young boy by the hand. The boy, who was scarcely more than a child, was wiping blood from his face and muttering with trembling lips:

"Let me go.... It's nothing...."

"Take care of him—take him to our house. Here's a handkerchief

to bind up his face," said Sophia quickly, and when she had put the boy's hand into that of the mother she ran away, saying as she went:

"Go quickly or they will arrest you!"

People were scattering through the cemetery in all directions, with the policemen striding heavily among the graves, catching their feet clumsily in the hem of their flowing greatcoats, swearing and swinging their swords. The boy watched them wolfishly.

"Hurry up!" cried the mother as she wiped his face with the handkerchief.

"Don't bother about me—it don't hurt," he muttered, spitting out the blood. "He gave it to me with the hilt of his sword. But he got his all right! I gave him a wallop with a stick that made him howl! But you just wait!" he shouted with a shake of his bloody fist. "That's nothing to what's coming! We'll wipe you out without a fight, once we rise up—all us workers!"

"Hurry!" urged the mother as she made her way to the little gate in the cemetery fence. It seemed to her that the police were hiding and waiting for them in the open field beyond the fence, and that as soon as they were outside the cemetery they would rush at them and strike them. But when she finally reached the gate and cautiously glanced out into the field spread with the grey fabric of autumn twilight, she was reassured by the silence and emptiness.

"Here, let me bandage your face," she said.

"Don't bother—I'm not ashamed of it," he said. "It was an honest fight—he gave me mine and I gave him his."

But the mother quickly bound up the wound. The sight of his blood filled her with pity, and a cold chill swept over her when her fingers came into contact with its warm stickiness. Quickly, and without speaking, she dragged the boy across the field.

"Where you taking me, comrade?" he managed to say ironically when he had freed his mouth of the bandage. "I can go without your help."

But she felt that his hands were trembling and he swayed on his feet. In a weak voice he kept talking and asking questions, hurrying on without waiting for the answers.

"Who are you? I'm a tinsmith and my name's Ivan. There were three of us in Yegor Ivanovich's study circle—three of us tinsmiths,

but eleven in all. We were awful fond of him—may his soul rest in peace. Even if I don't believe in God—"

At one of the streets the mother called an izvoshchik. When she had seated Ivan she whispered: "Don't say anything now," and carefully bound his mouth with the handkerchief.

He raised his hand to his face, but let it drop back helplessly into his lap, too weak to struggle with the bandage. Still he kept on muttering through the handkerchief:

"Don't think I'll ever forget this, you sweet things.... Before he came there was a student named Titovich who used to teach us ... political economy.... Then they arrested him...."

The mother put her arm around Ivan and drew his head to her breast. Suddenly the boy slumped and became silent. Paralyzed with fear, she glanced furtively on every hand. It seemed to her that the police would come running at her from behind some corner, and on seeing Ivan's bandaged head would grab him and kill him.

"Drunk?" asked the izvoshchik, twisting in his seat and smiling good-naturedly.

"Took a swig that was enough to burn his tongue out!" said the mother with a sigh.

"Your son?"

"Yes. A shoemaker. I myself am a cook."

"A hard life, yours. Hm-m."

With a flick of his whip, the izvoshchik turned around again and continued quietly:

"Hear about the fight just took place in the cemetery? Seems they buried one of these political chaps—one of them that's against the higher-ups—got some kind of a bone to pick with them. Seems the ones as buried him was all the same kind—pals so to speak. And if they don't start hollerin'—down with the higher-ups as makes the people poor! Along comes the police and starts beating them up. They say as how some got slashed to death. But the police got theirs too!"

He was silent a moment, and then added in a strange voice, with an incredulous shake of his head:

"Waking up the dead like that! Giving the dead no peace!"

Ivan's head struck softly against the mother's breast as the cab bounced over the cobblestones. The izvoshchik sat half-turned on his box, muttering meditatively:

"There's unrest got into the people—disorder is rising up off the earth. Last night the gendarmes come to one of our neighbours and kept rummaging around 'til morning, and then they hauls away one of the blacksmiths with them. People say they'll take him to the river dead of night and drown him. The blacksmith was a good enough fellow. . . ."

"What was his name?" asked the mother.

"The blacksmith? Savel. Savel Yevchenko. Still young, but he knew a lot. Looks like it's not allowed to know things. Used to be he'd come up and say to us—what kind of life you living, izvoshchiks? Worse'n a dog's life, truth to tell, we'd say."

"Stop!" said the mother.

The jerk woke Ivan, and he gave a low moan.

"The kid's all in!" said the izvoshchik. "That's your vodka for you! Vodka, vodka. . . ."

With great difficulty Ivan staggered into the yard, protesting all the while:

"I'm all right—I can manage. . . ."

XIII

Sophia was home already. She was fidgety and excited and held a cigarette between her teeth.

When they had put the wounded boy on the divan, she skilfully unbound his head and began giving orders, screwing up her eyes from the smoke of her cigarette.

"They've brought him, Ivan Danilovich! Tired, Nilovna? Had a fright, eh? Well, take a rest now. Give Nilovna a glass of port, Nikolai."

The mother was suffering the shock of what she had just been through; she found difficulty in breathing and felt a sharp pain in her chest.

"Don't go worrying about me," she muttered. But her whole being craved attention—the comfort of sympathetic affection.

From the next room came Nikolai, with his hand bandaged; with him was the doctor, Ivan Danilovich, dishevelled and bristling like a porcupine. The latter quickly crossed to Ivan and bent over him.

"Water," he said. "A lot of water. And some cotton and clean linen."

The mother started toward the kitchen, but Nikolai took her by the arm and led her into the dining room.

"That was said to Sophia, not to you," he said gently. "I'm afraid you've been upset, haven't you, my dear?"

When the mother met his searching, sympathetic eyes, she could not restrain her sobs.

"Oh, what has happened!" she cried "They slashed at people, cut them up. . . ."

"I saw it," said Nikolai with a nod as he handed her a glass of wine. "Both sides lost their heads a bit. But don't let it worry you. They struck with the flat of their swords. It seems that only one person was seriously wounded. They did that before my very eyes; I managed to pull him out of the crowd."

The mother was comforted by Nikolai's voice and by the light and warmth of the room. She looked at him gratefully as she asked:

"Did they strike you too?"

"Apparently I did that myself—carelessly knocked my hand against something or other and took the skin off. Here, have some tea. It's cold out and you are lightly dressed."

She reached for the cup and noticed that her fingers were covered with dry blood. Involuntarily she dropped her hand into her lap—her skirt was damp. She raised her brows and opened wide her eyes, glancing down at her fingers. Her heart throbbed and she felt dizzy.

"Pavel too—they might do the same thing to him!"

Ivan Danilovich entered the room in his vest with his sleeves rolled up. He answered Nikolai's silent inquiry in his high voice:

"The wound on his face is not serious, but his skull is cracked, though not very badly—he's a husky chap. Nevertheless he's lost a lot of blood. Shall we send him to the hospital?"

"Why? Let him stay here," said Nikolai.

"For today, and perhaps tomorrow, but then it will be more convenient for me if he is in the hospital. I have no time to be making calls. Will you write a leaflet about the incident in the cemetery?"

"Of course," said Nikolai.

The mother rose quietly and started towards the kitchen.

"Where are you going, Nilovna?" asked Nikolai, stopping her solicitously. "Sophia will manage everything alone."

She glanced at him and gave a little shudder.

"I'm all covered with blood," she said with a strange laugh.

As she was changing her clothes in her own room, she kept wondering at the calmness of these people and their ability to get over such dreadful things so easily. These thoughts sobered her and drove the fear from her heart. When she entered the room where the wounded boy was lying she found Sophia bending over him and saying:

"Nonsense, comrade!"

"I'll be in the way," he protested weakly.

"Stop talking—that will do you more good...."

The mother stood behind Sophia with her hand on her shoulder and smiled into the boy's pale face as she told him how he had frightened her in the carriage by the dangerous things he had muttered. Ivan's eyes burned feverishly. He clucked his tongue and said shamefacedly:

"What a fool I am!"

"We shall leave you now," said Sophia, adjusting his blanket. "Go to sleep."

They went into the dining room and for a long time sat discussing the events of the day. Looking upon this drama as upon something already far in the past, they now strained confidently toward the future, planning the work of the morrow. Their faces were weary, but their thoughts were courageous, and as they spoke of their work they did not hide their dissatisfaction with themselves. The doctor sat shifting nervously on his chair.

"Propaganda is not enough these days!" he said, making an effort to soften his high, sharp voice. "The young workers are right—we have to broaden out our activities. The workers are right, I tell you!"

Nikolai frowned and adopted the doctor's tone:

"On every hand we hear complaints of not enough literature, and we haven't yet been able to set up a decent print shop. Ludmilla is wearing herself out. She'll collapse if we don't give her some help."

"What about Vesovshchikov?" asked Sophia.

"He can't live in town. He'll begin work only when we get the new shop going, but we still need one more person before we can do that."

"Won't I do?" asked the mother quietly.

The three of them glanced at her for a few seconds without speaking.

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Sophia.

"It would be too difficult for you, Nilovna," said Nikolai dryly. "You would have to live out of town, and this would mean you could not see Pavel. And in general...."

"That wouldn't mean much to Pavel," she said with a sigh. "And for me too, to tell the truth, these visits just rip your heart. Aren't allowed to say anything. Stand there facing your son like a fool while they stare into your mouth to see you don't say anything you shouldn't."

She was worn out by the events of the last few days, and now when there seemed to be an opportunity to live far away from the drama of the city, she greedily jumped at the chance.

But Nikolai changed the subject of conversation.

"What are you thinking about, Ivan?" he said, turning to the doctor.

The doctor raised his drooping head as he replied gloomily:

"I'm thinking how few there are of us! We have to work more energetically. And we have to convince Pavel and Andrei that they must escape. They're too valuable to be sitting there doing nothing."

Nikolai frowned and shook his head as he glanced at the mother. She realized that they found it difficult to talk about her son in her presence, so she rose and left the room, carrying with her a sense of injury that these people should have disregarded her wish. As she lay in bed with wide open eyes listening to the soft murmur of voices, she surrendered herself to a feeling of alarm.

The day had been darkly incomprehensible and full of evil portent. But she did not want to think of this. Pushing her disturbing impressions out of her mind, she centred her attention on Pavel. She was eager to see him free, but at the same time she was afraid. She felt that events about her were leading toward a climax which threatened some severe clash. People's silent endurance was giving way to tense waiting. Their aggravation had noticeably increased. On every hand she heard sharp words, and everything breathed of unrest. Every proclamation roused animated discussions at the market, in the shops, among servants and craftsmen. Every arrest

was followed by frightened, perplexed, and sometimes indignant comments as to its cause. Ever more often she heard simple people pronouncing words which had once so frightened her: uprising, socialists, politics. If they were pronounced sarcastically, behind the sarcasm could be discerned curiosity; if they were pronounced maliciously, behind the malice could be detected fear; if they were pronounced thoughtfully, the thought encompassed hope and a threat. Slowly the wide circles of unrest expanded upon the dark waters of this stagnant life. Drowsy thoughts began to awake, and the usual calm acceptance of the day's events began to totter. She could see this more clearly than other people, for she had a better knowledge of life's grave physiognomy than they. And now as she saw wrinkles of thought and aggravation appear, she was both glad and alarmed. She was glad because she saw in this the work of her son; she was alarmed because she knew that if he escaped from prison he would take his place at the head of everyone else, in the most dangerous position. And he would perish.

Sometimes the image of her son assumed the proportions of a storied hero, encompassing all the brave, honest words she had ever heard, all the people she had ever admired, everything bright and heroic she had ever known. At such times she would be filled with pride and tenderness and would contemplate him with quiet ecstacy, thinking hopefully:

"Everything will be all right—everything!"

Her love—her mother love—would flare up and cause her heart to contract painfully. Then what was maternal stunted the growth of what was purely human, consuming it with a fine flame, so that her exaltation was substituted by the ashes of her fear, in which one thought struggled dismally:

"He will die ... he will perish! ..."

XIV

One noon she sat opposite Pavel in the prison office watching his bearded face with hazy eyes and seeking an opportunity to hand him the note crushed between her fingers.

"I'm well and so is everybody else," he said quietly. "How are you?"

"All right. Yegor Ivanovich died," she replied mechanically.

"Really?" exclaimed Pavel. Slowly he dropped his head.

"The police started a fight at the funeral and arrested one fellow," continued the mother artlessly. The assistant head of the prison clicked his tongue indignantly and jumped up.

"Don't you know it's forbidden to say such things!" he muttered. "It's not allowed to talk about politics."

The mother also got up and said naively, with a shade of guilt in her voice:

"I wasn't talking about politics—about a fight. There's no question about their fighting. They even smashed the head of one chap. . . ."

"It's all the same. I must ask you to be silent. That is, to be silent about everything that doesn't concern you personally—that is, your family and your home in general."

Realizing that he was getting tangled, he again sat down at the desk and began rummaging through some papers.

"I'm the one who has to answer for such things," he added wearily.

Without taking her eyes off him, the mother quickly thrust the note into Pavel's hands. Then she sighed with relief.

"You don't understand what you're allowed to talk about..." said the officer.

"Neither do I," laughed Pavel.

"Then there's no sense in coming here," he remarked irritably. "Don't know what to talk about but keep coming here—upsetting people. . . ."

"Trial coming off soon?" asked the mother.

"The prosecutor was here a few days ago and said it would be soon. . . ."

They continued exchanging trifling remarks, and the mother noticed that Pavel was looking at her with soft, loving eyes. He was just as calm and even-tempered as ever. He had not changed, except for the whiteness of his hands, and except for the beard, which made him look much older. She wanted to tell him something pleasant—to let him know about Nikolai, and so without changing the tone in which she had been passing such innocent remarks, she continued:

"Saw your godson the other day...."

Pavel searched her eyes in silent inquiry. She began to tap her cheek with her fingers to remind him of the pock marks on Vesovshchikov's face.

"The boy's right enough—going to be given a job soon."

Her son understood and nodded to her with laughing eyes.

"That's fine," he said.

"Well, guess that's about all," she concluded, pleased with herself and touched by his happiness.

He squeezed her hand tightly in parting.

"Thanks, mother."

The joyous recognition of their hearts' closeness went to her head like strong wine. Unable to find words to answer him, she gripped his hand in silence.

She found Sasha waiting for her when she returned home. The girl usually visited her on the days when she saw Pavel. She never asked about Pavel, and if the mother herself did not mention him, she satisfied her curiosity by looking long into the mother's eyes. But this time she met her with an anxious inquiry.

"Well, how is he?"

"All right."

"Did you give him the note?"

"Of course. It was slick the way I gave it to him...."

"Did he read it?"

"There? How could he?"

"Of course—I forgot," said the girl slowly. "We'll have to wait another week—a whole week! Do you think he'll consent?"

Sasha frowned and looked intently at the mother.

"I can't tell," mused the mother. "Why shouldn't he, if it's not dangerous."

Sasha tossed her head.

"Do you know what the patient is allowed to eat? He's hungry," she asked.

"He can eat anything. Just a second and I'll...."

She went into the kitchen and Sasha followed her slowly.

"May I help you?"

"Goodness no!"

The mother leaned over the stove and took out a bowl.

"Wait..." said the girl quietly.

Her face paled and her eyes painfully dilated as her trembling lips whispered hurriedly:

"I wanted to ask you—I'm sure he won't consent—I beg you to talk him into it! He's so badly needed. Tell him it's for the sake of the cause. Tell him I'm afraid for his health. You can see for yourself—the date of the trial hasn't even been set...."

She spoke with obvious difficulty. She kept looking into one corner, drawn up to her full height, and her voice wavered. Wearily she lowered the lids of her eyes and bit her lips. The mother could hear the cracking of her clenched fists.

Pelagea was upset by this outburst, but she understood Sasha and embraced her sadly.

"Oh my dear," she answered softly, "he won't listen to anybody except himself—nobody at all!"

Both of them remained silent, pressed close to each other. Then Sasha gently removed the mother's arms from her shoulders and said with a shudder:

"Yes, you are right. That's all nonsense—nerves...."

Suddenly she said simply and calmly:

"All right. Let's feed our patient."

When she was sitting beside Ivan's bed she asked him solicitously if his head ached.

"Not much, only everything's still sort of hazy. And I feel weak," answered Ivan, pulling the blanket up under his chin in his embarrassment and screwing up his eyes as though the light were too bright. Sasha saw that he was ashamed to eat in her presence, so she got up and went out. Ivan sat up and followed her with his eyes.

"Bea-ut-ti-ful!" he murmured.

He had merry blue eyes, close-set little teeth, and a voice which was still changing.

"How old are you?" asked the mother thoughtfully.

"Seventeen."

"Where are your parents?"

"In the village. I've been here since I was ten years old. Soon as I finished school I ran away to the city. What's your name, comrade?"

The mother was always amused and touched when people addressed her with this word.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked with a smile.

After an embarrassed pause the boy explained:

"You see, one of the students from our study circle—that is, one of those who read to us, told us about the mother of Pavel Vlassov, the worker. Remember the First of May demonstration?"

The mother nodded and pricked up her ears.

"He was the first to openly raise the banner of our party," announced the boy proudly, and his pride was echoed in the heart of the mother.

"I wasn't there then. We wanted to hold our own demonstration, but it fell through. Too few of us. But we'll do it next year—you'll see!"

He could hardly breathe with excitement as he envisaged future events.

"So it's that Vlassov's mother I was talking about," he continued, waving his spoon. "She also joined the party after that. They say she's simply a marvel!"

The mother gave a broad smile. It was pleasant for her to listen to the boy's praise. Pleasant and embarrassing. She wanted to say: I'm that Vlassov's mother! . . . but she held back the words and said to herself with gentle sarcasm:

"What an old fool you are!"

Suddenly she bent toward him and spoke excitedly:

"Eat some more! You must hurry and get well for the sake of the cause!"

The street door was opened, letting in the damp, cold breath of autumn, and the mother looked up to see Sophia standing there, all smiling and rosy.

"Honest to goodness, you'd think I was an eligible heiress, the way the spies are wooing me! Time for me to be getting away from here. . . . Well, how are you, Ivan? Feeling better? What news from Pavel, Nilovna? Is Sasha here?"

She caressed the mother and the boy with her grey eyes while lighting a cigarette and asking questions to which she expected no answers. As the mother watched her she smiled to herself and thought:

"I'm getting to be considered one of these good people myself!"

Once more she leaned toward Ivan and said:

"Hurry and get well, son!"

Then she went into the dining room, where she found Sophia talking to Sasha:

"She has already prepared three hundred copies. She'll kill herself at the rate she's going. Sheer heroism! What a privilege it is to live among such people, Sasha, to be their comrade and work with them."

"Yes," answered the girl softly.

When they were having tea that evening Sophia said to the mother:

"You'll be having to pay another visit to the country, Nilovna."

"All right. When?"

"Do you think you could manage it in about three days?"

"Of course."

"This time you must hire post horses and take another route—through the Nikolsky volost," advised Nikolai. He was frowning and sullen, an expression which did not become him, spoiling as it did his usual benign equanimity.

"It will be very far through Nikolsky," observed the mother. "And to take horses all the way...."

"To tell you the truth," said Nikolai, "I'm against this trip. Things are not quiet there—arrests have been made—took some teacher it seems. We must be more careful. It would be better to bide our time...."

"We have to keep them supplied with literature without interruption," observed Sophia, tapping the table with her fingers. "Are you afraid to go, Nilovna?" she asked suddenly.

The mother was hurt.

"Have I ever been afraid? The first time I went I felt no fear ... and now ... all of a sudden ..." she dropped her head without finishing the sentence. Whenever she was asked if she was afraid, if she found it convenient, if it was possible for her to do such and such a thing, she felt they were asking a favour of her, and it seemed to her that she was being set apart and treated differently than they treated each other.

"Why should you ask me whether I am afraid or not?" she said in a choked voice. "You don't ask each other such things."

Nikolai nervously took off his glasses and put them on again, looking intently at his sister. The mother was upset by the strained silence, and she rose from the table guiltily, wanting to say something. But Sophia gently took her hand and said softly:

"Forgive me. I shall never do it again."

This brought a smile to the mother's face, and in a few minutes all three of them were animatedly discussing the proposed trip.

XV

At dawn the mother was jogging along in a post chaise over a road washed by autumn rains. A raw wind was blowing, and mud was splashing on every hand. The coachman twisted about on his seat to complain to her in a nasal voice:

"So I says to him—to my brother, that is—let's share up, I says! So we begins to share up...."

Suddenly he struck out with his whip at the left-hand horse and shouted angrily:

"Giddyap there, you witches' spawn!"

The fat crows of autumn stepped anxiously over the bare furrows while a cold wind whistled all around. The crows braced themselves to meet the attacks of the wind, which ruffled their feathers and blew them off their feet, forcing them to lazily flap their way to another spot.

"So he goes and skins me out of my share. I sees there's nothing I can put my hands on..." went on the coachman.

The mother listened to him as in a dream. Through her memory streamed the events of the last few years and she saw herself actively participating in all of them. Formerly life had been created somewhere far away, nobody knew by whom or for what purpose; but now much of it was being created before her very eyes and with her own participation. This roused in her mixed feelings of satisfaction and distrust in herself, perplexity and a quiet grief....

The surroundings circled in slow movement: grey clouds scudded heavily across the sky in pursuit of each other; the wet trees on

either side of the road waved their bare branches in passing; the fields gave place to low hills, which dissolved in their turn.

The nasal voice of the coachman, the jingle of bells, the whistle and rustle of the moist wind, all merged to form a vibrant stream flowing unceasingly over the fields.

"Paradise itself's too little for a rich man," went on the coachman, swaying on his seat. "So he begins squeezing me out—the authorities was all friends of his...."

When they reached the station he unharnessed the horses and said to the mother in a plaintive tone:

"You might give me five kopeks for a drink...."

When she gave him the coin he tossed it in his palm and said in the same tone:

"Three of them goes for vodka, the other two for bread."

In the afternoon the mother arrived, cold and weary, at the little town of Nikolskoye. She went to the station for a cup of tea, where she took a seat by the window, placing her heavy suitcase under a bench. From the window she could see a small square covered with trampled yellow grass, and a dark grey building with overhanging roof—the administration building of the volost. A bald and bearded *muzhik* with no coat over his shirt was sitting and smoking a pipe on the porch. A pig was browsing on the grass of the square. With an irritable flip of the ears, it would thrust its snout into the earth and shake its head.

The clouds climbed on top of each other in great, dark masses. Everything was quiet and dark and dreary, as though life were lying in wait.

Suddenly a police sergeant came galloping onto the square and drew up his horse at the porch of the volost building. He flourished his whip in the air and shouted at the *muzhik*. His cries throbbed against the window, though his words could not be heard. The *muzhik* got up and pointed into the distance. The sergeant rolled off his horse, tossed the reins to the *muzhik*, and staggered to the steps, where he grabbed the railing and pulled himself up heavily, disappearing through the door.

Once more everything was silent. Twice the horse dug a hoof into the soft earth. Into the room came a girl in her early teens, with yellow hair worn in a short braid and gentle eyes in a round

face. She kept biting her lip and nodding her head as she carried in a battered tray loaded with dishes.

"Good afternoon, my dear," said the mother.

"Good afternoon."

When she had placed the dishes and tea things on the table, the girl suddenly announced excitedly:

"They just caught a robber—they're bringing him here!"

"Who's the robber?"

"I don't know...."

"Whom did he rob?"

"I don't know," repeated the girl. "I only heard they caught him. The volost guard's gone to call the chief of police."

The mother glanced through the window and saw that the square was filling up with *muzhiks*. Some of them came solemnly and slowly, others rushed to the scene, buttoning up their sheepskins as they came. They gathered at the porch of the building and looked off somewhere to the left.

The girl glanced through the window and then ran out of the room, banging the door behind her. The mother started and pushed her suitcase further under the bench. Then she threw a shawl over her head and hurried over to the door, suppressing an unaccountable desire to run.

When she went out onto the porch, her eyes and chest were smitten by cold, she had difficulty in breathing, and her legs turned to stone: across the square came Rybin, his hands tied behind him and a policeman on either side striking the ground with their sticks as they approached. The crowd stood silently waiting at the porch of the volost building.

Stunned as she was, the mother could not tear her eyes from the scene. Rybin was saying something. She could hear his voice, but his words left no echo in the dark emptiness of her heart.

She took a deep breath and pulled herself together. Near the porch stood a *muzhik* with blue eyes and a wide, fair beard who was gazing intently at her. She coughed and rubbed her throat with hands enervated by fear.

"What has happened?" she asked him with an effort.

"See for yourself," he answered, and turned away. Another *muzhik* came over and stood by her.

The policemen leading Rybin stopped in front of the crowd, which kept growing, though the people remained silent. Suddenly the voice of Rybin rose above their heads:

"True believers! Have you heard about the writings laying forth all the truth about the lives of us peasants? Well, it's for those writings I'm paying now. I'm the one that handed them out to the people!"

The crowd drew closer about Rybin. His voice was calm and unhurried, and that strengthened the mother.

"Hear that?" said the second *muzhik* quietly, nudging the blue-eyed one. The latter raised his head and once more glanced at the mother without answering. The other also looked at her. He was younger than the first, and had a stringy dark beard and thin face spotted with freckles. Then both of them moved away from the porch.

"They're afraid," thought the mother.

She became more attentive. From the porch where she was standing she could plainly see the dark, bruised face of Mikhail Ivanovich and the impassioned shine of his eyes. She wanted him to see her too, so she stood on her toes and craned her neck.

The people looked at him with sullen distrust and were silent. Only at the rear of the crowd could be heard hushed conversation.

"Peasants!" said Rybin in a strained, loud voice. "Believe what's written in those papers. Maybe I'll have to pay for them with my life—they beat me and tortured me, trying to find out where I got them, and they'll beat me again. But I'm ready to stand anything, because it's the truth that's told in those papers and the truth ought to be dearer to us than our daily bread—that's what!"

"Why should he say that?" exclaimed one of the *muzhiks* standing near the porch.

"It's all the same now," answered the blue-eyed one. "A fellow can only die once."

The people continued to stand there without a word, gazing sullenly from under their brows, and it seemed that some invisible weight was pressing down on them.

The police sergeant came staggering out onto the porch of the volost building.

"Who's talking here?" he yelled drunkenly.

Suddenly he slid down the steps and grabbed Rybin by the hair, shaking his head back and forth.

"Was it you, you son-of-a-bitch?" he shouted.

The crowd stirred and a wave of muttering broke out. The mother dropped her head in helpless suffering. Once more the voice of Rybin rang out:

"Look, good people! . . ."

"Silence!" The sergeant struck him over the ear. Rybin swayed and hunched his shoulders.

"They tie up a fellow's hands and do whatever they want with him. . . ."

"Take him away, policemen! And all you people clear out!" The sergeant kept leaping in front of Rybin like a dog with a piece of meat, striking his face and chest and stomach with his fist.

"Stop hitting him!" cried someone in the crowd.

"Why should you hit him?" came a supporting voice.

"Let's go," said the blue-eyed *muzhik* with a nod to his companion. They both sauntered over to the volost building while the mother followed them with a kindly glance. She gave a sigh of relief as she saw the police sergeant run up onto the porch again, from where he shouted in a frenzied voice:

"Bring him here! I tell you. . . ."

"Don't do it!" came a strong voice from the crowd—the mother realized it was the *muzhik* with the blue eyes who was speaking. "Don't let them, fellows! If they take him in there they'll beat him to death. Then they'll say we did it. Don't let them!"

"Peasants!" cried Mikhailo. "Can't you see what your lives are like? Can't you understand how they rob you and deceive you and suck your blood? Everything comes from you—you're the greatest force on this earth—and what rights have you? Only the right to die of starvation!"

Suddenly the *muzhiks* started shouting, interrupting each other:

"He's telling the truth!"

"Call the chief of police! Where's the chief of police?"

"The police sergeant's gone for him."

"Who, that drunk?"

"It's not our business to call the authorities."

The noise kept increasing.

"Go ahead and speak! We won't let them beat you!"

"Untie his hands!"

"Look out you don't get caught!"

"The ropes are hurting my hands!" said Rybin calmly, but in a voice so sonorous as to be heard above all the others. "I won't run away, *muzhiks*! I can't hide from the truth—it lives inside me! That's what!"

A few of the men separated themselves from the crowd and stood off to one side, passing remarks and shaking their heads. But more and more ragged people came running up in a state of great excitement. They seethed about Rybin, who rose from their midst like a forest shrine, waving his hands above his head and shouting:

"Thank you, good people, thank you! If we don't untie each other's hands, who'll do it for us?"

He wiped his beard and once more raised a hand red with blood.

"Here's my blood—shed for the sake of truth!"

The mother went down off the porch, but since she could not see Mikhailo in the midst of the crowd, she again climbed the steps. Some vague happiness fluttered in her breast.

"Peasants! Keep your eyes open for these papers and read them! Don't believe the priests and the authorities when they tell you the preachers of truth are heathens and rebels. Truth is wandering secretly over the earth, seeking a nest for herself among the people. She's like fire and sword for the authorities. They can't take her in—she'll slay them and burn them! For you, Truth is a good friend; for them she's a bitter enemy. That's why she wanders in secret over the earth!"

Once more exclamations broke out among the crowd.

"Listen, true believers!"

"Ah, brother, they'll give it to you for this!"

"Who gave you away?"

"The priest!" answered one of the policemen.

Two of the *muzhiks* uttered a mighty oath.

"Watch out, fellows!" came somebody's warning voice.

XVI

The chief of police was approaching. He was a tall, heavy-set man with a round face. He wore his cap cocked over one ear, one side of his moustache was twisted upwards, the other downwards, so that his face gave the impression of being crooked and disfigured by a dull, lifeless smile. He held a sword in his left hand, while he gestured vigorously with his right. Everyone heard his firm, heavy steps approaching. The crowd parted to let him through. A sullen oppressiveness settled on the faces, and the noise fell away as though sinking into the earth. The mother felt her eyes burning and the muscles of her forehead quivering. Once more she felt the urge to join the crowd. She strained forward and became tensely motionless.

"What's this?" asked the chief of police, halting in front of Rybin and measuring him with his eyes. "Why aren't his hands tied? Policemen, bind him!"

His voice was high and ringing, but colourless.

"They were tied. The people untied them," answered one of the policemen.

"What's that? The people? What people?"

The chief of police glanced around at the crowd standing in a semicircle in front of him.

"Who are they, the people?" he remarked without raising or lowering his monotonous white voice. He touched the blue-eyed *muzhik* with the flat of his sword hilt.

"I suppose you're the people, Chumakov? Well, and who else? You, Mishin?"

He grabbed one of them by the beard with his right hand.

"You better be clearing out of here, you bastards, or I'll give it to you—I'll show you!"

His face was not angry or threatening. He spoke calmly and struck the people with a customary movement of his long arms. The people retreated before him with lowered heads and averted faces.

"Well, what are you here for?" he said to the policemen. "Bind him, I tell you!"

He let out a string of oaths and once more looked at Rybin.

"Hands behind your back, you!" he said in a loud voice.

"I don't want them to tie my hands," said Rybin. "I'm not planning to run away and I won't fight, so why tie my hands?"

"What's that?" asked the chief of police, stepping toward him.

"Enough of your torturing the people, you brutes!" continued Rybin, raising his voice. "It won't be long before your hour will strike!"

The chief of police stood looking into his face with trembling moustaches. Then he took a step backwards and shouted in a frenzied voice:

"You son-of-a-bitch! What's that you said?"

Suddenly he gave Rybin a stunning blow in the face.

"You can't kill the truth with your fists!" shouted Rybin, advancing toward him. "And you have no right to strike me, you filthy dog!"

"*I* have no right? *I*?" howled the chief of police.

Once more he raised his hand, aiming at Rybin's head. Rybin stooped and the blow missed him, nearly upsetting the chief of police. Someone in the crowd snorted, and once more Rybin's wrathful voice could be heard:

"Don't dare hit me I tell you, you devil!"

The police officer glanced about and saw that the people had drawn together to form a dark, lowering ring.

"Nikita!" shouted the chief. "Eh, Nikita!"

A short, thick-set *muzhik* in a sheepskin jacket emerged from the crowd. His large, tousled head was bent.

"Nikita!" said the chief of police as he calmly twisted his whiskers. "Give him a box on the ear—a good one!"

The *muzhik* stepped forward, halted in front of Rybin, and raised his head. Rybin struck him in the face with sure, heavy words:

"Just look, people, how the brutes choke you with your own hands! Look, and think it over!"

Slowly the *muzhik* raised his arm and delivered Rybin a mild blow on the head.

"Is that the way to do it, you son-of-a-bitch?" wailed the chief.

"Hey, Nikita!" came a voice from the crowd. "Don't be forgetting God!"

"Beat him, I tell you!" shouted the chief, taking him by the nape

of the neck. But the *muzhik* lowered his head and moved off to one side.

"I've done enough," he muttered.

"What?"

A spasm passed over the face of the chief of police; he stamped the ground and rushed at Rybin with an oath. There came the sound of a blow which sent Rybin reeling. He raised his arm, but a second blow knocked him down, and the chief of police began kicking him in the chest and side and head.

An angry murmur rose from among the crowd. The people began to move against the chief, but he noticed this and jumped back, whipping his sword from its hilt.

"What's this? An uprising? Aha-a-a! So that's it!"

His voice trembled and broke and he gave off futile little squeaks. Suddenly the strength went out of him along with his voice. He slumped and drew his head between his shoulders, glancing about with empty eyes as he backed up, feeling his way with his feet.

"Very well," he shouted hoarsely. "Take him away—I'm leaving. Come on now. Don't you know that he's a political criminal, you bastards? Don't you know he's stirring up the people against the tsar? And you go defending him! So you're rebels too, eh? So that's it!"

The mother stood without stirring, without so much as blinking an eye, bereft of strength and the ability to think, gripped by fear and pity as though in a dream. The sullen, resentful, and angry cries of the people mingled in her ears with the crackling voice of the chief of police and somebody's whispers, forming a buzzing like that of angry hornets.

"If he's guilty, take him to court. . . ."

"Take pity on him, Your Honour. . . ."

"It's the truth, there's no law allows such treatment. . . ."

"Of course. If such a thing is possible, then everybody will resort to beating. A fine thing that would be!. . ."

The people broke up into two groups: one surrounded the chief of police, shouting and pleading with him; the other, smaller group, stood about the prostrate man and muttered menacingly. Several from the latter group raised Rybin from the ground, and when the policemen attempted to tie his hands again, they cried:

"Don't be in such a hurry, you devils!"

Mikhailo wiped the dirt and blood from his face and beard and looked about silently. His glance fell on the mother. She started and leaned towards him, involuntarily waving her hand. But he turned away from her. A few minutes later his eyes once more sought her face. It seemed to her that he straightened up and raised his head, and his blood-stained cheeks trembled.

"He recognized me—can it really be that he recognized me?"

She nodded to him, all aquiver with an awful yearning. The next moment she noticed that the blue-eyed *muzhik* was standing beside him and also looking at her. For a second his glance roused in the mother a sense of danger.

"What am I doing? They'll take me too!"

The muzhik said something to Rybin, who replied with a shake of his head.

"It's all right," he said in a voice which was clear and courageous, in spite of its trembling. "I'm not alone on the earth! They'll never round up all of the truth. The memory of me will remain wherever I've been. Even if they have torn out the nest—taken all the comrades. . . ."

"He's saying that to me," guessed the mother.

"But the day will come when the eagles will fly free—the people will break their fetters!"

A woman brought a pail of water and began washing Rybin's face, oh-ing and ah-ing the while. Her high, plaintive voice became tangled in the words Mikhailo was saying, so that the mother could not distinguish them. A group of *muzhiks* came over with the chief of police at their head, and somebody shouted:

"Let's have a cart to take the prisoner away! Whose turn is it this time?"

Then came the voice of the chief of police, speaking in a new tone—one that was almost plaintive:

"I can strike you, but you can't strike me. You don't dare, you cur!"

"Is that so? Who do you think you are—God?" shouted Rybin.

A burst of restrained exclamations drowned out his voice.

"Don't argue with him, brother! He's one of the authorities!"

"You mustn't be angry with him, Your Honour. He's not himself!"

"Keep quiet, simpleton!"

"They're going to take you to town now."

"There's more law in the town!"

The cries of the people were suppliant and conciliatory. They merged in a vague hum which expressed little hope. The policemen took Rybin by the arm and led him to the porch of the volost building, where they disappeared through the door. Slowly the *muzhiks* dispersed, but the mother saw the blue-eyed muzhik coming toward her, looking up at her from under his brows. Her knees gave way beneath her and despair sucked at her heart, engulfing her in a wave of nausea.

"I mustn't go away," she thought. "I mustn't."

She grabbed tight hold of the railing and waited.

The chief of police was standing on the porch of the volost building waving his arms and speaking reproachfully in a voice which was once more white and spiritless.

"It's fools that you are, you sons of bitches. Sticking your noses into things you don't know anything about. This is a state affair, you cattle! You've got me to thank. You ought to get down on your knees in gratitude to me for being so good to you! If I wanted I could ship the whole bunch of you off to hard labour."

A couple of dozen *muzhiks* stood with bared heads listening to him. It grew darker as the clouds lowered. The blue-eyed muzhik came up to the porch where the mother was standing.

"See what's going on?"

"Yes," answered the mother softly.

"What's your business here?" he asked, looking her straight in the eye.

"I buy laces from the peasant women—linen too."

The *muzhik* slowly stroked his beard.

"Our women don't make those things," he said dully, with a glance toward the volost building.

The mother swept him with her eye and stood waiting for a convenient moment to go inside. The *muzhik's* face was handsome and thoughtful and he had sad eyes. He was tall and broad-shouldered, dressed in a patched kaftan, a clean cotton shirt, and brown homespun pants, with worn-out shoes on his bare feet.

For some reason the mother gave a sigh of relief. Suddenly she said, in response to an instinct swifter than her groping thoughts:

"Could you take me in for the night?"

The question was unexpected even for herself, and as soon as she had asked it, everything became tense inside of her. She straightened up and looked at the man unwaveringly. But barbed thoughts kept pricking at her mind:

"I'll be the ruin of Nikolai Ivanovich. And I won't see Pavel again for a long, long time! They'll beat me!"

The *muzhik* answered unhurriedly, keeping his eyes on the ground as he fastened his kaftan over his chest.

"Take you in for the night? Why not? Only mine's a poor sort of hut."

"I'm not used to better," said the mother.

"All right," agreed the muzhik, raising his head and once more measuring her with his eyes. It had grown darker, and his eyes shone cold, his face pale in the twilight.

"Then I'll be right with you. And maybe you'll carry my suitcase for me?" she said softly, with the feeling that she was slipping downhill.

"All right."

He lifted his shoulders as he once more adjusted his kaftan.

"Here comes the cart," he said.

Rybin appeared on the porch of the volost building. His head and face were wrapped in something grey and once more his hands were bound.

"Farewell, good people!" came his voice through the cold twilight. "Seek the truth, and treasure it! Trust a man who brings you the pure word, and do not spare yourselves in defence of the truth!"

"Shut your mouth!" shouted the chief of police. "Lash those horses, you fool of a policeman!"

"What have you to lose? Just look at your lives!"

The cart set off. Rybin called from where he was sitting between the two policemen:

"Why should you go on starving to death? Once you get your freedom, you'll have bread and justice! That's what! Farewell, good people!"

His voice was swallowed up by the rattle of the wheels, the galloping of the horses, and the voice of the chief of police.

"All over," said the *muzhik* with a shake of his head, then turning to the mother he continued in a low voice: "Wait for me here in the station. I'll be back presently."

The mother went into the room and sat down at the table in front of the samovar. She picked up a piece of bread, looked at it, and slowly returned it to the plate. Once more the wave of nausea overwhelmed her, and she could not eat. She felt unpleasantly warm; sickness drew the blood from her heart and made her dizzy. Before her she could see the face of the blue-eyed *muzhik*—strangely incomplete and inspiring distrust. For some reason she did not wish to think that he would give her up, but this idea had already entered her mind and lay dull and motionless on her heart.

"He noticed me," she considered weakly. "He noticed me and—guessed."

The thought did not develop, drowned as it was in despair and a murky feeling of nausea.

A brooding silence, which had taken the place of the noise beyond the window, exposed the sense of fear and oppression hovering over the village. The feeling of loneliness was sharpened, filling the soul with a twilight as soft and grey as ashes.

Once more the girl appeared in the doorway.

"Shall I bring you some fried eggs?" she asked.

"Don't bother. I don't feel like eating. They frightened me with their shouts and cries."

The girl came up to the table, saying in a hushed, excited voice:

"You should have seen how the chief of police beat him! I was standing close by—he knocked out his teeth and I saw him spit—the blood was thick and dark and red . . . his eyes swelled up that tight! He's a tarman. The police sergeant's lying upstairs—dead drunk and still asking for drink. He says there's a whole band of them, and him with the beard's their head—the ataman, so to say. Caught three of them, but one got away. They also caught a schoolteacher as belonged to their band. They don't believe in God and keep talking other people out of believing in Him so's they can rob the churches—that's the kind they are! Some of our *muzhiks* felt sorry for him, but

others say as how they ought to put an end to him. Oh we've got plenty of mean *muzhiks* like that!"

The mother listened attentively to the girl's quick, disconnected speech, trying to overcome her fear and dismal expectations. The girl seemed glad to have someone listen to her, and she kept on talking excitedly, all in a lowered voice:

"My pa says it all comes from a bad harvest. For two years now the land has given nothing—all shrunk and withered it is. That's why our *muzhiks* get so mean. They yell and fight at the village meetings. One day when they were selling out Vasukov to pay his debts, he gave the village elder such a smack in the face! 'There's my debts for you,' he says."

Heavy steps were heard outside the door. The mother took hold of the table and pulled herself to her feet.

The blue-eyed *muzhik* came in without taking off his cap and said:

"Where's your suitcase?"

He lifted it easily and shook it.

"Empty. Marka, show this woman to my hut."

He went out without looking back.

"You spending the night here?" asked the girl.

"Yes. Came for laces—I buy laces...."

"They don't make any here. Make them in Tinkova and Daryina, but not here," explained the girl.

"I'll go there tomorrow...."

When the mother had paid for the tea, she delighted the girl by giving her a three-kopek tip. They went outside and the girl stepped quickly over the damp earth in her bare feet.

"If you want, I'll go over to Daryina and tell the women to bring their laces here," she said. "They'll come here and you won't have to ride over. After all, it's twelve versts...."

"Don't bother, dear," said the mother as she hurried to keep up. The cold air refreshed her, and a vague resolution was slowly taking form within her. It grew slowly and uncertainly, and in her desire to hasten its growth she kept asking herself:

"What shall I do? If I make a clean breast of everything...."

It was cold and dark and damp. The windows of the huts glowed with reddish light. Little cries and the drowsy mowing of cattle could

be heard in the silence. The village was wrapped in dark, oppressive meditation.

"Here," said the girl. "It's a miserable place you've picked for a night's lodging—he's such a poor *muzhik*."

She felt for the door. When she had opened it, she stuck her head in and shouted:

"Aunt Tatyana!"

Then she ran away.

"Good-bye!" came her voice through the darkness.

XVII

The mother stepped over the sill and raised her hand to her eyes, the better to see into the hut. There was little room in it, but she was immediately struck by its cleanliness. A young woman glanced at her from around a corner of the stove, nodded without speaking, and once more withdrew. A lamp was burning on the table.

The owner of the hut was sitting at the table tapping nervously with his fingers as he searched the mother's eyes.

"Come in," he said after some time. "Tatyana, go call Pyotr, and be quick about it."

The woman went out without looking at the mother, who took a seat on a bench opposite the man and glanced about. Her suitcase was nowhere to be seen. The hut was filled with a dreary silence, broken only by the occasional sputtering of the lamp. The anxious, frowning face of the *muzhik* wavered mistily before the mother's eyes, giving rise to a feeling of dull vexation.

"Where is my suitcase?" she suddenly asked in a loud voice, to her own consternation.

The *muzhik* shrugged his shoulders.

"It won't get lost," he answered, adding in a lowered voice:

"Back there at the station I said on purpose it was empty so's the girl would hear. But it's not empty. It's very heavy."

"Well, what of it?" asked the mother.

He got up and came over to her, bending close as he whispered:

"You know that man?"

"Yes," answered the mother in a firm voice, in spite of the fact that the question took her by surprise, This brief word seemed sud-

denly to light up everything from within, making things clear. She sighed with relief and settled herself more firmly on the bench.

The muzhik gave a broad grin.

"I guessed it when you gave him a sign out there and he returned it. I whispered to him—was he acquainted with the one standing there on the porch?"

"And what did he answer?" asked the mother quickly.

"Him? He answered—there's lots of us. There's lots, he said."

The *muzhik* looked inquiringly into the eyes of his guest and once more smiled as he continued:

"There's a strong fellow for you! And brave! He says right out—I'm the one! And he keeps on saying what he has to say no matter how much they beat him."

The mother was put more and more at her ease by his voice, which was weak and uncertain, and by the sight of his frank eyes in a face which seemed incomplete. Gradually her alarm and dismay were substituted by acute compassion for Rybin.

"The villains! The brutes!" she suddenly cried out in bitter wrath, and began to weep.

The *muzhik* moved away, mournfully shaking his head.

"The authorities sure have made people love them!"

Again he turned to the mother and said quietly:

"It seems to me—I guess there must be newspapers in the suitcase, am I right?"

"Yes," answered the mother simply, wiping away her tears. "I was bringing them to him."

The *muzhik* frowned and grabbed his beard in his fist as he stood staring into the corner. At last he said:

"They got here to us, and so did the books. And we know that man—we saw him!"

He stopped and thought for a second.

"What do you plan to do with it now—the suitcase?" he asked.

"Leave it with you," said the mother, looking at him challengingly.

He did not protest, nor did he show any surprise.

"With us," he repeated.

With a nod of approbation, he sat down at the table, combing his beard with his fingers.

The mother was haunted by the vision of the brutal treatment of Rybin which kept rising in her memory with merciless insistence. His image drove all other thoughts from her mind, and the pain and insult she felt for mankind drove out all other feelings, so that she was incapable of thinking of the suitcase or anything else. Her tears flowed unrestrained, but her expression was severe and her voice unwavering as she said:

"May they be accursed forever for the way they rob and beat and drag human beings in the dust!"

"They're strong," replied the *muzhik* quietly. "They are very strong."

"And where do they get their strength?" exclaimed the mother in despair. "They get it from us, the common people—everything's taken from us!"

She was irritated by the muzhik's bright, but enigmatic face.

"Yes," he drawled thoughtfully, "the wheel. . . ."

Suddenly he became alert, straining his ears toward the door. "They're coming," he said.

"Who?"

"Friends, it seems. . . ."

His wife entered, followed by another *muzhik*. The latter tossed his cap into the corner and quickly came over to the owner of the hut.

"Well?" he asked.

The owner nodded.

"Stepan," said his wife from where she was standing at the stove. "Maybe the guest wants something to eat?"

"No thank you, my dear," said the mother.

The second *muzhik* came over to the mother and said in a quick, broken voice:

"Let me introduce myself. My name's Pyotr Yegorov Ryabinin, nicknamed the Awl. I understand a thing or two about your business. I know how to read and write and am not exactly feeble-minded. . . ."

He grasped the hand the mother held out to him and turned to the host:

"Look for yourself, Stepan!" he said. "Varvara Nikolayevna is a kind enough lady I suppose, but she claims this business is foolish and harmful. Like as if young chaps and students were filling the people's heads with nonsense. But you and me can see that it was a

good, hundred per cent *muzhik* they arrested today, and now look here—a middle-aged woman and not one of your gentlefolks, to all appearances. What might be your origin, if you'll excuse the asking?"

He spoke quickly and distinctly, without stopping for breath. His beard jerked nervously and his eyes kept searching the mother's face and figure. His clothes were torn and ragged, and his hair was matted, as though he had just been in a fight and was filled with the joy of having licked his opponent. The mother immediately liked him for his spirit, and for the fact that he spoke his mind simply and frankly. She looked smilingly into his face as she answered his question, after which he once more shook her hand and laughed a dry, crackling laugh.

"It's a clean business, Stepan," he said. "It's a fine business. Didn't I tell you it comes from the people themselves? But that fine lady—she doesn't go telling you the truth. She'd do herself harm if she told you the truth. Oh, I respect her all right—goes without saying. She's good enough and wants to help us—a wee bit—without doing herself any harm. But the common people—they want to go straight ahead, and they're not scared of harm or injury. Get the difference? They get harmed all their lives—they get injured whatever they do. No place for them to turn to. The only word they hear is 'Stop!' no matter which way they turn."

"I see," said Stepan with a nod, immediately adding, "she's worried about her suitcase."

Pyotr winked knowingly at the mother.

"Don't you worry," he said with a comforting gesture. "Everything'll be all right, mother. Your suitcase is at my place. Today when he told me about you—like as if you were also mixed up in this business and knew that man—I says to him—look sharp, Stepan! Can't slip up on anything in a case like this. Looks like you also had your suspicions about us when we were standing there next to you. No missing an honest face when you see one—not many of them around, if truth be told. Don't worry about your suitcase. . . ."

He sat down next to her and looked at her inquiringly:

"If you'd like to get rid of what's in it, we'll be only too glad to help you out. We could use those books and papers."

"She wants to leave them all with us," said Stepan.

"That's fine, mother! We'll find a place for everything!"

He jumped to his feet with a laugh and began walking quickly up and down the floor.

"A piece of rare luck! Though not so strange—the rope snapped in one place, held in another. That's all right. The paper's a good one, mother, and doing a good job—taking the blinders off. The gentlefolk don't think much of it. I work for a lady seven versts from here—carpentering. She's decent enough—got to give her credit for handing out her books. Sometimes you read something that's a real eye-opener! In general, we're grateful to her. But once I showed her this paper and she took it right to heart. 'Don't you go reading that stuff, Pyotr,' she says. 'It's just a bunch of silly schoolboys that write stuff like that. And you'll only get yourself in trouble reading it—jail and Siberia,' she says. . . ."

Once more he became silent for a moment before asking:

"That man today, mother—is he a relation of yours?"

"No," answered the mother.

Pyotr laughed noiselessly and shook his head as though very much pleased at something. The next minute it seemed to the mother that she had offended Rybin by her denial of relationship, and she added:

"He's not a relation, but I've known him for a long time and respect him like a brother—an elder one!"

She could not find the right words to express her feeling, and this was so painful that once more she began to weep softly. An oppressive, expectant silence reigned in the hut. Pyotr stood with bent head as though listening to something. Stepan was sitting with his elbows on the table, keeping up a nervous tapping. His wife was leaning against the stove, and the mother was conscious of the woman's gaze fastened on her face. The mother herself sometimes glanced at the young woman, who had a swarthy oval face with a straight nose and a sharply chiselled chin. Her greenish eyes were keen and attentive.

"So he's a friend of yours," said Pyotr softly. "He's got a mind of his own all right! Put a high price on himself. There's a fellow for you, eh, Tatyana? And you say—"

"Is he married?" interrupted Tatyana, compressing the lips of her small mouth.

"A widower," said the mother sadly.

"That's why he's so brave," said Tatyana in a deep, rich voice. "A married man wouldn't choose such a path—he'd be afraid."

"What about me?" cried Pyotr. "Aren't I married?"

"Tut, tut, neighbour," said the woman with a wry smile, avoiding his eyes. "What do you do? You just talk, and sometimes read a book or so. Little good it does the people for you and Stepan to sit whispering in some dark corner the way you do."

"Lots of people listen to my words," protested the *muzhik* quietly, hurt by her contempt. "I'm, you might say, like yeast working here. You shouldn't say that. . . ."

Stepan looked at his wife silently and again dropped his head.

"Why should a *muzhik* get married?" asked Tatyana. "Needs a woman to work for him, he claims. Fine work, I'd say!"

"Not enough for you?" put in Stepan dully.

"What sense is there in this work? Only to go on living half starved from day to day. If you have children, no time to look after them on account of the work that doesn't even keep you in bread."

She went over to the mother and sat down next to her, speaking insistently, but without complaint or sadness.

"I had two babies. One of them pulled boiling water over himself when he was only two years old. The other was born dead—before his time—all because of that accursed work. Has it brought me any happiness? I'm telling you there's no sense in the *muzhiks* getting married. They only tie their own hands when they might go on living without being hampered, fighting for a better way of life. Then they could go straight after the truth like that man. Am I right, mother?"

"You're right," said the mother. "You're right, my dear. Otherwise there's no changing this life. . . ."

"You got a man of your own?"

"He died. I've got a son. . . ."

"Does he live with you?"

"He's in jail," said the mother.

As she said these words the mother was conscious of a feeling of pride supplementing the usual sorrow they roused in her breast.

"This is the second time they've put him in—all because he sowed God's truth among the people. He's young and handsome and clever. It's him who thought up your paper. And it's him as set Mikhailo Ivanovich along the right path, though Mikhailo's twice as old as he is. Soon they'll pass a sentence on my son and send him

off to Siberia. But he'll run away and come back here to go on with his work. . . ."

As she spoke the feeling of pride kept growing in her breast, creating the image of a hero which demanded portrayal in words. It was essential that she find something bright and reasonable to counterbalance the darkness she had witnessed that day, a darkness whose senseless horror and shameless cruelty kept throbbing within her head. Unconsciously obeying the demands of her wholesome spirit, she gathered all that she knew as being pure and bright into one great flame which blinded her with the intensity of its burning.

"Already there are many people like him, and more and more keep getting born, and to the end of their days they'll go on fighting for freedom and truth. . . ."

She threw caution to the winds, and while she did not mention any names, she told all that she knew about the secret work being carried on to release the masses from the chains of greed. As she described people dear to her heart, she poured into her words all the strength and abundance of a love which life's vicissitudes had brought to so late a flowering. And she herself joyously beheld these people who rose in her mind's eye, illuminated and glorified by her feeling.

"And this work is being carried on the same all over the earth, in all the cities, by good people everywhere—there is no limit, no measure to it, and it keeps growing and will continue to grow until our hour of victory. . . ."

Her voice flowed on evenly, and she had no difficulty in finding words, which she slipped like coloured beads onto the strong thread of her desire to purge her heart of the blood and dirt of that day. She could see that these *muzhiks* seemed rooted to the spot by what she said; they sat unstirring with their eyes glued to her face, and she could hear the spasmodic breathing of the woman sitting alongside of her. And all of this strengthened her faith in what she was saying, and what she was promising these people. . . .

"All those who have a hard life, all those who are worn out by violence and need, all those who have been ground down by the rich and the servants of the rich—all those should go forth to join the ones who perish in jail and give themselves up to deadly torture for the sake of the people. With no thought of themselves, they point the way to happiness for all people; with no attempt to deceive, they

say,—'hard is the path'—and they force no one to take it. But once a person has taken his stand alongside of them, never will he leave them, for he can see: this is right—this is the road, and no other!"

She was happy to be doing something she had long wanted to do—she herself was telling the people the truth!

"The simple folk needn't worry about going along with such people. Such people won't be satisfied with some little gain. They won't stop until they do away with all deception, all greed and evil. They won't fold their hands until the whole people join together and cry with one voice—I am the master! I myself will make laws which will be the same for all!"

Feeling tired, she stopped talking and glanced about, filled with the calm confidence that her words had not been spoken in vain. The *muzhiks* kept looking at her in anticipation of something else. Pyotr crossed his arms on his breast and narrowed his eyes, while a smile hovered about his lips. Stepan had one elbow on the table and his entire figure remained straining forward as though he were still listening. His face was in shadow, and for that reason it now seemed more complete. His wife, who was sitting next to the mother, was leaning with her elbows on her knees, studying the floor.

"That's how it is," said Pyotr under his breath as he slowly sat down on the bench.

Stepan straightened up, looked at his wife, and stretched out his arms as though wanting to embrace the entire company.

"If you once start that sort of thing," he began thoughtfully, "then of course you got to throw your whole soul into it. . . ."

"Yes indeed, no looking backwards," put in Pyotr shyly.

"Looks like it's started on a big scale," continued Stepan.

"On a world scale!" added Pyotr.

XVIII

The mother leaned against the wall and threw back her head as she listened to their quiet, weighty words. Tatyana got up, glanced about, and sat down again. There was a cold glint in her green eyes as she looked with contempt and displeasure at the *muzhiks*. Suddenly she turned to the mother.

"You must have seen lots of sorrow in your life," she said.

"That I have," replied the mother.

"I like to hear you talk—your words pull at the heart strings. When I hear you, I think—Oh God, what wouldn't I give to get even a peep at the kind of people you talk about! And at life itself! What do we see of life here? A bunch of sheep, that's what we are! Take me for instance. I know how to read and write; I read books and do a lot of thinking—sometimes I can't even sleep nights for thinking. But what good is it? If I stop thinking I'll only wither away for nothing, and if I go on, it'll also be for nothing."

She spoke with mockery in her eyes, and sometimes it seemed as though she bit off her words like a thread. The *muzhiks* said nothing. The wind stroked at the windowpanes, murmured softly in the chimney and rustled the straw on the roof. A dog howled. Occasionally a drop of rain rapped unwillingly at the window. The light in the lamp shuddered and almost went out, only to revive and continue burning bright and steady.

"When I heard you speak I kept thinking—that's something worth living for! And it's so strange—as I listened I realized that I knew all that! But I'd never heard anything like it before and I never had such ideas myself. . . ."

"We better have something to eat and put out the light, Tatyana," said Stepan slowly, with a frown. "People may notice that the Chumakovs' light's burning extra long tonight. Makes no difference to us, but it might not be so good for our guest. . . ."

Tatyana got up and went to the stove.

"Ye-s-s," smiled Pyotr. "Have to watch our step these days, neighbour! Soon as these papers put in their appearance among the people. . . ."

"I'm not thinking about myself. Won't be any great loss if they arrest me."

His wife came over to the table and said:

"Get away."

He got up and moved off to one side, watching her set the table.

"You and me, brothers, are worth just about five kopeks a bunch —and then only when there's a hundred to the bunch," he remarked with an ironic smile.

The mother felt sorry for him; the more she saw of him, the

better she liked him. After her talk, she felt unburdened of the day's filth; she was pleased with herself and filled with good will toward everyone.

"You are wrong, my man," she said. "You mustn't accept the price put on you by those who only suck your blood. You must set your own price—the price of what's inside you—the price of your friends, not your enemies."

"What friends have we?" exclaimed the *muzhik* softly. "Friends—until we fight over the first crust of bread."

"But I'm telling you the common people do have their friends."

"Maybe, but not here—that's the thing," answered Stepan musingly.

"Why not find friends here?"

Stepan thought for a moment before replying:

"H-m. Yes, that's what we ought to do."

"Sit down, supper's ready," invited Tatyana.

During supper Pyotr, who seemed to have been overwhelmed by what the mother told them, once more became lively.

"You must leave early in the morning, mother, so's not to attract any notice," he said. "And ride on to the next station without entering the town. Take the post chaise."

"Why should she? I'll drive her over," said Stepan.

"No, you mustn't. What if they say to you—'Did she spend the night?' 'Yes she did.' 'Where is she now?' 'I drove her to the station.' 'Aha! So you're the one helped her get away!' And off you go to jail. There's no point in hurrying yourself off to jail. Everything in due time. Even the tsar will die when his hour is nigh, as the saying goes. But this way she simply spent the night, hired some horses, and went away. Plenty of people spend the night here, beings as our village is on the main road."

"Where'd you learn to be so scary, Pyotr?" asked Tatyana sarcastically.

"Have to know how to do things, neighbour!" exclaimed Pyotr, striking himself on the knee. "Have to know when to be scary and when to be brave. Remember what a shaking-up they gave Vaganov on account of that newspaper? You won't get him to take a book in his hands again for love or money! But you can trust me, mother. I'm a sharp rogue all right, and I'll distribute those papers and

leaflets of yours—as many as you like and in just the right places. It's true our folks are mostly illiterate and afraid, but there comes a time when you just can't keep your eyes from popping out. And these leaflets tell the answer simple enough—the thing is: you got to think; you got to put two and two together. Sometimes it happens the illiterate ones understand more than the literate ones—especially if the literate ones have full stomachs. I do a lot of travelling around these parts and I've seen plenty. We'll be able to manage all right, but we've got to use our brains and be plenty sly to keep from getting caught at the very outset. The authorities seem to have got wind that the *muzhik's* not just what he should be—stopped smiling and not the least bit affectionate—in general, seems he'd like to break off with the authorities. The other day in Smolyakovo—that's a village near here—they come to collect the taxes, and the *muzhiks* rise up on their hind legs with clubs in their hands! The chief of police makes no bones about it—'So it's against the tsar you are, you sons of bitches!' he yells. There was one *muzhik*—Spivakin by name—who up and answers—'You can take yourself to hell along with your tsar. What kind of a tsar is he anyhow, once he steals the last shirt off our backs?' So that's how far things have gone, mother! Of course they grabbed Spivakin and threw him in jail, but his words were left—even the youngsters remember what he said. His words go on living and shouting away!"

He ate nothing, but kept on talking in a swift whisper, glancing boldly around with his mischievous dark eyes and lavishly offering the mother his observations of peasant life, like brass coins poured from a purse.

Twice Stepan interrupted him to say:

"You better eat something."

On both occasions Pyotr took up a piece of bread and his spoon, then went on telling out his stories with the ease of a lark singing a song. When supper was over he suddenly sprang to his feet and said:

"Well, time for me to get going! Good-bye, mother," he said as he shook her hand. "Maybe we'll never see each other again, but I want you to know I think all this is just fine—fine to have met you and listened to you. Anything in that suitcase of yours besides the papers? A woolen shawl? Very good—a woolen shawl. Remember

that, Stepan! He'll bring you your suitcase in just a minute. Come on, Stepan! Good-bye and good luck!"

The scurrying of the roaches became audible when they had gone. The wind hustled over the roof and rattled in the chimney, and a fine rain drizzled against the window. Tatyana made up a bed for the mother by pulling covers from the bunk on top of the stove and spreading them on a bench.

"He's a lively person," observed the mother.

"Makes a lot of noise but it doesn't go far."

"What about your husband?" asked the mother.

"He's all right—a good enough fellow. Doesn't drink. We're happy together. Only he has a weak character. . . ."

She drew herself up.

"What should we do now?" she said after a short pause. "Shouldn't the people revolt? Of course they should! That's what everyone is thinking, only each one thinks it to himself. And they ought to think it out loud—but someone has to take the first step. . . ."

She sat down on the bench and asked suddenly:

"You say that young girls from the gentlefolk go in for that business—mingling with the workers and reading to them—aren't they too good for that? Aren't they afraid?"

She gave a deep sigh on hearing the mother's answer. Then she dropped her eyes and lowered her head as she continued:

"In some book I came across the expression—'a meaningless life.' Oh, I understood what that meant all right—at first sight! I know what that kind of a life is! The meanings are there, but all disconnected—like sheep without a shepherd—and no one to herd them together. That's what a meaningless life is. I'd run away from it without once looking back if I could—it's unbearable when you realize the truth."

The mother could perceive the pain in the dry shine of the woman's green eyes, in her thin face, and in the tone of her voice. She wanted to caress and console her.

"You understand what is to be done, my dear. . . ."

"But you have to know how," interrupted Tatyana softly. "Your bed's ready now."

She went over to the stove and stood there solemn, straight, and lost in thought. The mother lay down without undressing. Her bones

ached with weariness and she moaned softly. Tatyana turned down the lamp, and when the hut was filled with darkness she began to speak in low, even tones. Her voice sounded as though it were wiping away something from the flat face of the darkness.

"I see you don't pray. I also don't believe there's a God. Or miracles."

The mother turned restlessly on her bench. The bottomless pit of the night yawned at her through the window, while faint sounds crawled in the darkness. She spoke fearfully, almost in a whisper:

"As for God—I'm not sure. But I believe in Christ. I believe in His words: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.' I believe in that."

Tatyana remained silent. The mother could make out the vague contours of her straight figure, grey against the black background of the stove. She stood motionless. The mother sorrowfully closed her eyes. Suddenly she heard the woman say in a cold voice:

"I can never forgive God or man for the death of my children—never!"

Pelagea raised herself anxiously, her soul keen to the hurt that could wring out such words.

"You're young yet. There will be other children," she said gently.

The woman did not answer immediately, and then it was in a whisper:

"Never. Something's wrong with me. The doctor says I can't have any more children."

A mouse ran across the floor. Something snapped loudly, breaking the silence with the invisible lightening of sound. Once more could be heard the rustle of rain on the roof, stirring among the straw like someone's thin, frightened fingers. Water dripped drearily onto the earth, marking the slow passage of this autumn night.

Through her drowsing, the mother was conscious of dull steps outside, then in the entranceway. The door was opened cautiously and someone said:

"Are you in bed, Tatyana?"

"No."

"Is she asleep?"

"Looks like it."

A light flared up, wavered a second, and was suffocated by the darkness. The *muzhik* approached the mother's bed and adjusted the

coat thrown over her feet. The mother was touched by the simplicity of his attention, and she closed her eyes again with a smile. Stepan undressed without speaking and crawled up on the bunk. Everything became quiet.

The mother lay motionless, listening acutely to the fluctuations of the dreamy darkness, while before her eyes rose the bloody face of Rybin.

There was a stirring up on the bunk.

"See what kind of people go in for this? Elderly people who have worked all their lives and drunk their fill of grief. Time for them to be taking it easy, but this is what they do instead. You're young and smart.... Oh, Stepan!..."

The voice of the *muzhik* answered, deep and rich:

"Have to think it over first...."

"I've heard that before."

The voices broke off for a minute, then Stepan's voice continued:

"This is the way to begin—first talk to the *muzhiks* separately—Alexei Makov, for instance—he's literate and spirited and got it in for the authorities. Sergei Shorin's also a clever *muzhik*. Knyazev's honest and not afraid. That's enough for a beginning. We need to have a look at the kind of people she told us about. I'll take an axe and go off to town, like I was setting out to earn some extra money chopping wood. We got to be careful. She was right when she said a man must place his own price on himself. Like that *muzhik* today. He wouldn't give in if you brought him up before God Himself. But what do you think of that Nikitka? Had qualms of conscience, all right!"

"They beat a fellow in front of your nose and all you did was watch with your mouth hanging open!"

"Take it easy! You ought to be glad we didn't beat him up ourselves—that fellow!"

He kept on whispering for a long time, sometimes lowering his voice so that the mother could scarcely catch his words, at other times speaking in deep, full tones. Then his wife would stop him.

"Hush! You'll wake her up!"

The mother fell into a heavy sleep which descended on her like a cloud.

Tatyana woke her up when the grey dawn was looking blindly through the windows of the hut, and the church bell was tolling the end of the night watch.

"I've put up the samovar. First have a glass of tea; you'll find it cold riding off straight from your bed."

While Stepan combed his matted beard he asked the mother her town address. It seemed to her that the *muzhik*'s face had improved during the night—had somehow become more complete.

"How strange it should have happened like this!" he said with a laugh as they were having tea.

"What?" asked Tatyana.

"Our getting acquainted. So simply. . . ."

"There is an amazing simplicity in everything connected with our work," said the mother thoughtfully.

Her hosts' manner was restrained as they parted with the mother. They spoke little, but showed the greatest concern for her comfort in innumerable small ways.

When she was once seated in the post chaise, the mother reflected that Stepan would begin his work as cautiously and modestly as a mole, but would be indefatigable. And always his wife's complaints would ring in his ears; her green eyes would retain their searing fire, and never as long as she lived would she be free of the vengeful, wolfish grieving of a mother for her dead children.

She remembered Rybin—his blood, his face, his burning eyes and words. And her heart contracted with a bitter feeling of helplessness in the face of rampant brutality. All along the road back to the city the image of Mikhailo stood out against the dull background of the grey day. She saw his sturdy, black-bearded figure in the torn shirt, with his injured head and his hands tied behind him—a man filled with wrath and with faith in the truth he was defending. The mother thought of the innumerable villages cringing so humbly against the earth, and of the people who were secretly awaiting the advent of justice, and of the thousands of people who spent all of their lives at senseless work, unprotestingly, without hoping for anything better.

And she envisaged life as a hilly, unploughed field, silently but eagerly waiting for the ploughman. . . .

"Sow me with the seeds of truth and reason," it seemed to say to free, honest men, "and I shall return your labours a hundredfold!"

As she recalled the success with which her own efforts had been crowned, she was filled with a quiet flutter of joy, which she shamefacedly suppressed.

XIX

Nikolai opened the door for her. He was tousled and held a book in his hand.

"Already?" he called out joyfully. "You're a quick one!"

His gentle eyes kept blinking behind his glasses. He helped her out of her things and glanced into her face with a fond smile.

"They searched our house last night," he said, "and I was afraid something might have happened to you. But they didn't arrest me. If you had been arrested, they would surely have taken me."

He led her into the dining room, continuing his animated conversation.

"Of course I shall lose my position. But that doesn't upset me any. I'm sick of sitting at a desk and counting the number of peasants who own no horses."

The room looked as though some Goliath, inspired by sudden caprice, had shaken the walls of the house until everything was topsy-turvy. The pictures were strewn on the floor, strips of wallpaper had been ripped off and hung in ribbons, in one spot a floor board had been taken up, a window sill had been wrenched off, and ashes from the stove had been scattered on the floor. The mother shook her head at the sight of this familiar picture, and looked at Nikolai intently, aware of some new quality in his face.

The cold samovar stood on the table along with unwashed dishes; cheese and sausage lay on the paper in which they had been bought instead of on plates, the cloth was covered with books and bits of bread and charcoal from the samovar. The mother gave a short laugh, and Nikolai also smiled ruefully.

"Of course I've added my share to the general chaos, but that's all right, Nilovna. I thought they would be coming back again, and that's why I didn't clear anything away. Well, tell me about your trip."

The question fell heavily on her heart. Once more the image of Rybin rose before her, and she felt guilty for not having immediately spoken of him. She leaned toward Nikolai and began to give him her account, trying to preserve her composure and not to omit anything.

"They arrested him. . . ."

A spasm passed over Nikolai's face.

"Really?"

The mother stopped him with a gesture and continued as though she were in the presence of Justice itself, to whom she was protesting the torture she had seen inflicted on a human being. Nikolai leaned back in his chair and listened with a pale face, biting his lip the while. Slowly he took off his glasses, placed them on the table, and passed his hand over his face as though wiping off an invisible cobweb.

His features became suddenly sharpened, his cheekbones stood out strangely and his nostrils quivered. The mother had never seen him like this before, and it frightened her.

When she had finished he got up and walked up and down with his fists thrust deep into his pockets.

"He must be a great person," he muttered through clenched teeth: "It will be difficult for him in jail. People of his type take it hard."

He kept bearing down on his fists to subdue his agitation, but the mother was aware of his state, and it was conveyed to herself. He narrowed his eyes until they became like the edges of knife blades. Once more he spoke with cold anger as he walked up and down:

"Think of the horror of it! In their frenzy to maintain their hold on the people, a handful of stupid individuals go choking and beating and crushing everybody else! Savagery increases and cruelty becomes the law of life. Just think of it! Some of them beat people and behave like wild beasts because they know they are beyond the law; they are sick with a sensual craving for torture—the revolting malady of slaves who are free to give vent to the full force of their slavish feelings and bestial habits. Others are poisoned by the desire for revenge. Still others have been made deaf and dumb by the flogging they themselves have received. The people are being corrupted, the entire people!"

He stopped and became silent, clenching his teeth.

"You become a brute in spite of yourself in this brutal life."

But he conquered his agitation and turned to the weeping mother almost calmly, with a steady light in his eyes.

"But we must not lose any time, Nilovna! Let us try to take ourselves in hand, dear comrade. . . ."

With a sad smile he went over to her and asked, pressing her hand:

"Where is your suitcase?"

"In the kitchen."

"There are spies stationed at our gate. We cannot carry out so much material without being noticed, and there is nowhere to hide it. I am of the opinion that they will come tonight to make another search, and therefore, however regrettable it may be, we must burn it all."

"All what?" asked the mother.

"All that is in the suitcase."

The mother understood, and however sad she felt, she could not restrain a smile of pride in her achievement.

"There is nothing there—not a single sheet of paper!" she said, gradually reviving as she told him about her meeting with Chumakov.

At first Nikolai frowned anxiously as he listened, but soon the frown was replaced by an expression of amazement, until at last he interrupted her by crying excitedly:

"This is simply splendid! You are an exceedingly lucky person."

He gripped her hands as he exclaimed softly:

"You have a most touching faith in people . . . and I love you like my own mother!"

She smiled as she watched him curiously, wondering why he had become so lively and excited.

"In general, this is excellent," he said, rubbing his hands together and laughing softly. "I have been having a fine time these last few days—among the workers all the time—reading and talking to them and observing them. And my heart has become filled with something amazingly pure and wholesome. They are such splendid people, Nilovna! I am speaking about the young workers—strong and sensitive and thirsting for knowledge. When you look at them it makes you think that some day Russia will be the most democratic country in the world!"

He raised his hand in confirmation, as though he were taking an oath, then continued after a pause:

"I have gone sour sitting here with these mouldy old books and figures. Almost a year of such life—that's monstrous! I'm used to living among workers, and I feel out of place when away from them—tense and under a strain. But now I'll live like a free man again. I shall see them all the time and work with them. Do you understand? I shall be at the cradle of new ideas, in the presence of youthful, creative energy. That is amazingly simple and beautiful and is a tremendous stimulus. It makes a person young and strong. It is a rich way of life."

He laughed happily and a bit self-consciously, and the mother understood his joy and shared it.

"And besides—you yourself are a wonderful person!" exclaimed Nikolai. "How vividly you describe people, and how well you understand them!"

He sat down next to the mother, at first turning his beaming face aside and stroking back his hair to hide his embarrassment, but soon turning to look at her as she gave him a simple and vivid account of her experiences.

"A great piece of luck!" he exclaimed. "There was every possibility of your being thrown into jail too, and instead.... Yes, apparently the peasants are beginning to stir—and that is only natural. That woman—I can see her with amazing clarity.... We need to assign special people to work in the village. People! We don't have enough of them! We need hundreds!"

"If only Pavel was free. And Andrei," said the mother softly.

He glanced at her and dropped his eyes.

"It may be hard for you to hear me say it, Nilovna, but I know Pavel very well, and I am sure he will never escape from jail. He wants to be put on trial. He wants a chance to attain to his full stature, and he will never refuse such a chance. And why should he? He will run away from Siberia."

The mother sighed and answered softly:

"Well, I suppose he knows best...."

"Hm," said Nikolai the next moment, glancing at her through his glasses. "I wish that *muzhik* of yours would hurry up and pay us

a visit. It is necessary to write a leaflet about Rybin for the peasants. It can scarcely do him any harm, once he himself is so outspoken. I shall write it today and Ludmilla will print it in a jiffy ... but how will the leaflets reach them?"

"I shall take them."

"No thank you," exclaimed Nikolai quickly. "I'm wondering if Vesovshchikov could do it?"

"Shall I speak to him?"

"You can try. And teach him how to do it."

"But what am I going to do?"

"Don't worry, we shall find work for you."

He sat down to write. She glanced at him as she cleared the table, noticing how the pen quivered in his fingers as he covered the paper with rows of black words. Sometimes the muscles of his neck jerked, and when he threw back his head and closed his eyes she could see the trembling of his chin. This made her anxious.

"It is ready," he said at last, getting up. "Here, hide this paper somewhere on your person—but if the gendarmes come they will search you too."

"The devil with them," she answered calmly.

That evening Doctor Ivan Danilovich dropped in.

"Why are the authorities so upset all of a sudden?" he asked, pacing quickly up and down the room. "They searched seven houses last night. Where's my patient, eh?"

"He left yesterday," answered Nikolai. "Today is Saturday, and he couldn't miss attending his study circle."

"That's foolishness—to sit in a study circle with a broken skull. . . ."

"I did my best to convince him, but nothing came of it. . . ."

"Probably wanted to show off to his comrades," observed the mother. "'Just look at me—I've shed my blood already!. . .'"

The doctor glanced at her and screwed up his face in mock severity as he said:

"Br-r-r! What a hardhearted creature you are!"

"Well, Ivan, there's nothing to keep you hanging around here, and we're expecting guests. Get out! Nilovna, give him the paper."

"Another paper!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Here. Take it and hand it over to the print shop."

"I've taken it and I'll hand it over. Anything else?"

"Nothing else. There is a spy standing at the gate."

"I saw him. There's one at my door too. Well, good-bye. Good-bye, you vicious woman! Incidentally, my friends, the fight at the cemetery turned out to be a good thing after all. The whole town's talking about it. The pamphlet you wrote about it was a good one and came out just at the right time. I always say a good fight's better than a bad peace."

"All right. Get going."

"I shouldn't say that was very hospitable of you. Your hand, Nilovna! That boy certainly did a foolish thing! Know where he lives?"

Nikolai gave him his address.

"I'll pay him a call tomorrow. A nice chap, isn't he?"

"Very."

"Have to take care of him. He's got a good head on his shoulders," continued the doctor on his way out. "It's fellows like him who must form the true proletarian intelligentsia to take our places when we leave for those shores where I suppose there are no class contradictions."

"You have become very talkative of late, Ivan."

"That's because I'm in good spirits. So you're expecting to go to jail? Have a good rest!"

"Thanks. I'm not feeling tired."

As the mother listened to their conversation she was pleased by their solicitude for the boy from the working class.

When the doctor had gone the mother and Nikolai sat down to supper, talking quietly in the expectation of their nocturnal visitors. Nikolai told her about his comrades in exile, and about those who had escaped and were continuing their work under assumed names. The bare walls threw back his words as though his tales of modest heroes sacrificing themselves in order to build a new world were too incredible to be accepted. A soft shadow fondly embraced the mother, warming her heart toward these unknown people. In her imagination they merged into one great, fearless individual who was moving slowly but surely over the earth, clearing away the century-old mildew of lies in order to show people the clear and simple truth of life. And this great truth, renascent, would summon all without discrimination,

would promise everyone emancipation from greed and spite and falsehood—three monsters terrorizing and enslaving the whole world with their cynical force.... This image roused in her a feeling resembling that with which she used to kneel gratefully in front of the icon to end a day which had seemed easier than others. Now she had forgotten those days, but the feeling which they inspired had expanded, become brighter and happier, settling deeper in her soul and burning with a stronger flame.

"Looks like the gendarmes weren't coming!" exclaimed Nikolai suddenly.

"The devil with them, I tell you," replied the mother with a quick glance at him.

"True enough. But it's time you were getting some sleep, Nilovna. You must be desperately tired. There's no denying you have an amazingly strong constitution! All this danger and excitement—and you take it so easily. But your hair is turning grey very fast. Well, go have some rest now."

XX

The mother was awakened by a loud knock at the kitchen door. Whoever it was kept knocking uninterruptedly, with patient insistence. It was still dark and quiet, and the stubborn knocking filled the darkness with alarm. The mother quickly threw something about her and went out into the kitchen, pausing at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Me," answered an unfamiliar voice.

"Who?"

"Open the door," implored the person in lowered voice.

The mother lifted the latch and pushed the door open with her foot. Ignat entered.

"So I didn't make a mistake!" he cried joyfully.

He was splashed with mud to the waist. His face was grey, his eyes sunken, and his curly hair stuck out in all directions from under his cap.

"We're in trouble." he whispered as he locked the door.

"I know."

The boy was surprised to hear this.

"How do you know?" he asked, blinking his eyes.

She gave him a brief explanation.

"Did they take those other two—your comrades?"

"They were away. They're recruits—went to report. Five were taken, including Uncle Mikhailo."

He drew a deep breath and added with a short laugh:

"I was left. They must be hunting for me."

"How did you manage to escape?" asked the mother. The door into the other room was slightly opened.

"Me?" exclaimed Ignat, sitting down on a bench and glancing around. "A minute or two before they came, the forester ran up and knocked at the window. 'Watch out, fellows,' he cried. 'They're after you.'"

He laughed quietly and wiped his face on his coat.

"Well, you couldn't knock Uncle Mikhailo out with a sledge hammer! 'Ignat,' he says. 'Be off with you to the town—fast. Remember that elderly woman?' he says, scratching a note while he talks. 'Here, take this to her.' So I creeps into the bushes, and sure enough, I hear them coming. There were lots of them crawling up on all sides, the devils. Surrounded our tar works. I kept low in the bushes and they passed me by. Then up I gets and starts legging it for all I'm worth. I been on the way two nights and one day without a halt."

It was clear that he was pleased with himself. There was a smile lurking in his hazel eyes and his full red lips kept twitching.

"I'll have tea for you in a minute," said the mother as she reached for the samovar.

"Here, take the note."

With difficulty he raised his foot, grunting and grimacing with pain as he put it on the bench.

Nikolai appeared in the doorway.

"Good evening, comrade," he said, narrowing his eyes. "Let me help you."

He leaned over the foot and began to unwind the dirty cloths substituting for socks.

"No," exclaimed the boy, pulling his foot away and glancing in surprise at the mother.

"We'll have to give his feet a rubdown with vodka," she said without noticing his glance.

"Of course," answered Nikolai.

Ignat snorted with embarrassment.

Nikolai picked up the note, straightened out the grey, wrinkled paper, and held it close to his eyes while he read it:

"Don't abandon our business mother and tell that tall gentlewoman not to forget to write more than ever about our business I beg you. Good-bye. Rybin."

Nikolai slowly dropped the hand holding the note.

"How splendid!" he murmured.

Ignat sat watching them as he carefully worked the dirty toes of his bare foot. The mother tried to hide the tears in her eyes as she brought a basin of water and kneeled down before him, reaching out for his foot.

"Oh, you mustn't," he cried in fright, drawing his foot under the bench.

"Give me your foot and be quick about it!"

"I'll bring some vodka," said Nikolai.

The boy drew his foot still further under the bench.

"What do you think, I'm in the hospital?" he muttered.

The mother began to unwind the strips of cloth from his other foot.

Ignat sniffed loudly and kept twisting his neck uneasily as he looked down at the mother.

"They beat Mikhailo Ivanovich," she said in a trembling voice.

"Really?" exclaimed the boy quietly.

"Yes. He was already in a bad state when they brought him to Nikolskoye, and there the police sergeant and the chief of police beat him—in the face—and kicked him—until he was all bloody!"

"They know how to do it, all right!" said the boy with a frown. His shoulders jerked. "I'm afraid of them—like a thousand devils. Did the *muzhiks* beat him too?"

"One of them struck him when the chief of police ordered him to. But the others were all right. Even took his side. Cried out they had no right to beat him."

"Hm-m. The *muzhiks* are beginning to understand who's on what side and why."

"There are sensible people among them too."

"There's sensible people everywhere. It's want makes them what they are. They're there all right, only it's hard to find them."

Nikolai brought a bottle of vodka, added some charcoal to the samovar, and went out without speaking. Ignat watched him in silence.

"Who's the mister—a doctor?" he asked the mother when Nikolai had gone out.

"There are no misters among us. We're all comrades."

"Seems funny to me," said Ignat, and his smile revealed doubt and embarrassment.

"What seems funny?"

"Things in general. At one end they bloody your nose for you, at the other they wash your feet for you. What's in between?"

The door opened and Nikolai said:

"In between are people who lick the hands of those who bloody your noses, and suck the blood of those whose noses get bloodied. That's what's in between!"

Ignat looked at him respectfully.

"Pretty near the truth, I guess," he said after a pause.

The boy got up and took a few firm steps.

"Like new feet," he said. "Thanks."

Then they went into the dining room for tea, and Ignat told them about his life, speaking in a deep, impressive voice.

"I used to distribute our newspaper—I'm a great one for walking."

"Do many of the people in the country read it?" asked Nikolai.

"All the literate ones, even if they're rich—of course the rich ones don't take it from us.... They're smart enough to know the peasants will spill the blood of the landlords so's to wash the land out from under their feet. And once they do that they'll divide it up so there won't be any more landlords and hired men. That's clear enough—why else start a fight?"

He even seemed offended, and looked at Nikolai inquiringly and distrustfully. Nikolai smiled and said nothing.

"If we fought against the whole world today and put everybody down—just so's there'd be rich ones and poor ones all over again tomorrow—what would be the sense? No thank you! Can't fool us—riches are like dry sand—they don't lay quiet; they go scattering out in all directions! Oh no, we won't have that!"

"Well you needn't get so mad about it," laughed the mother.

"The thing that worries me is how we can hurry and get that leaflet about Rybin's arrest to your people," said Nikolai thoughtfully.

Ignat became alert.

"Is there such a leaflet?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Give it to me. I'll take it," offered the boy, rubbing his hands together.

The mother laughed quietly without looking at him.

"But you're tired and you said you were afraid," she said.

Ignat smoothed back his curly hair with a broad palm as he said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Fear's one thing, business another. What you laughing at? You're a fine one too!"

"Ah, you silly child!" exclaimed the mother involuntarily, with an attempt to suppress the happiness he roused in her.

"Humph—child!" he grunted shamefacedly.

"You aren't to go back there," said Nikolai, glancing fondly at him through narrowed eyes.

"Why not? Where do I go?" asked Ignat uneasily.

"Someone else will take the leaflets: you just give him detailed instructions as to what he must do and how—do you agree?"

"All right," said Ignat at last in a tone of disappointment.

"We'll fix you up with a new passport and get you a job as a forest warden."

"What'll I do if the *muzhiks* come to steal firewood, or something—catch them and tie them up? That job wouldn't suit me."

The mother laughed, and so did Nikolai, and this made the boy feel hurt and uncomfortable again.

"Don't worry, you won't have to tie up any *muzhiks*," consoled Nikolai. "You can take my word for it."

"All right, if that's how it is," said Ignat with a happy smile. "But I'd like to get a job in a factory. They say factory fellows are smarter than others."

The mother rose from the table and walked to the window.

"What a funny thing life is," she mused. "Five laughs and five cries a day. Well, have you finished, Ignat? Time to get some sleep."

"I'm not sleepy."

"Get along, get along."

"You're very strict, aren't you? Well, I'm going. Thanks for the tea . . . and your kindness. . . ."

As he climbed into the mother's bed he scratched his head and muttered:

"Now all these things'll stink of tar. . . . No sense in all this fuss. . . . I'm not sleepy. . . . How quick he was about those in between . . . the devils. . . ."

Suddenly he was asleep and snoring loudly, his mouth half open and his brows lifted.

XXI

That evening he was sitting opposite Vesovshchikov in a little basement room and saying in lowered tones:

"Four times at the middle window. . . ."

"Four?" asked Nikolai anxiously.

"First three—like this," and he tapped them out on the table: "One, two, three. Wait a second, and then one more."

"I understand."

"A redheaded *muzhik* will open the door and ask: 'You come for the midwife?' And you say: 'Yes, for the factory owner's wife.' That's all. He'll understand."

They sat with their heads together, both of them strong, husky chaps, talking along in lowered voices while the mother stood watching them with her hands folded on her breast. She was amused by all the mysterious knocks and passwords.

"Hardly more than children," she thought to herself.

A wall lamp lighted up the stains of dampness on the ceiling, pinned up magazine pictures, a battered pail and a tinsmith's scraps lying on the floor. The room was filled with the smell of rust and paint and dampness.

Ignat was wearing a heavy fall coat made of some kind of shaggy material which he seemed to like. The mother caught him fondly patting the sleeve and twisting his strong neck around to get a better look at himself.

"Children," she thought. "Blessed children. . . ."

"All right," said Ignat, getting up. "Don't forget to go to Muratov first and ask for granddad."

"I won't," answered Vesovshchikov.

But Ignat was not satisfied, and repeated all the knocks and signs and passwords before he finally held out his hand:

"Give them my regards," he said. "You'll see they're a good sort, those people."

He gave himself a pleased glance and patted the sleeve of his coat.

"Time for me to go?" he asked the mother.

"Will you find your way?"

"I'll find it all right. Good-bye, comrades."

And out he went, shoulders squared, chest high, his new hat tipped over one ear, and his hands thrust bravely into his pockets. Wisps of wavy blond hair waved at his temples.

"So now I've been given a job," said Vesovshchikov, coming softly over to the mother. "I was beginning to get bored, wondering what I ever ran away from the jail for. Here I don't do anything but hide day and night, while there I'd be learning something. It was just fine the way Pavel made us use our heads. What's been decided about their escape, Nilovna?"

"I don't know," she said with an involuntary sigh.

Nikolai placed a heavy hand on her shoulder and drew his face closer.

"You talk them into it," he said. "They'll listen to you. It's simple as pie—look for yourself: here's the prison wall, and next to it a street lamp. Just opposite is a vacant lot, on the left the cemetery, on the right, streets and buildings. Every day a lamplighter comes to clean the lamp. So he puts a ladder against the wall, climbs up and fixes a rope ladder to one of the bricks in the top of the wall, lets it down into the prison yard and— there you are! Inside the prison they know when this'll happen and talk the common criminals into stirring up trouble, or else do it themselves so's to give the guards something to think about while the runaways climb the ladder and make their getaway. One-, two-, three, and it's all over. Simple as that!"

He kept gesturing as he expounded his plan, which seemed so clear and simple and clever. She had always considered Nikolai dull and clumsy. Formerly he had looked on everything with a surly hatred and distrust, while now it was as though he were reborn; he irradiated an even, warm light which won the mother's heart and excited her.

"Just think! They'll do it in the daytime! Only in the daytime!

Who'd ever suspect a prisoner of trying to break away in the daytime, when the whole prison's on its feet?"

"Mightn't they shoot?" asked the mother with a shudder.

"Who? There are no soldiers, and the guards only use their revolvers to drive nails with."

"It seems almost too simple."

"But you'll see! Talk them into it. I have everything ready—the rope ladder, the hook for the top—and my landlord here will be the lamplighter."

Someone on the other side of the door coughed, shuffled, and rattled some tin.

"That's him," said Nikolai.

A tin bathtub made its appearance in the doorway, and a hoarse voice muttered:

"Get through there, you old devil. . . ."

Above the tub they caught a glimpse of a good-natured face with bulging eyes and grey hair and moustaches.

Nikolai helped him with the tub. Into the room stepped a tall, stooped man who blew out his beardless cheeks in a raucous cough, spat, and then greeted the guests hoarsely:

"Good health to you."

"Here, ask him!" exclaimed Nikolai.

"Ask me what?"

"About the escape."

"Ah," said the tinsmith, wiping his moustaches with stained fingers.

"She don't believe how easy it'll be, Yakov Vasilyevich."

"Don't believe it, eh? Then I guess she don't want to. But you and me want to, so we believe it!" said the smith calmly. Suddenly he bent double with coughing. When the spell was over he stood for a long time in the centre of the room rubbing his chest and studying the mother with his bulging eyes.

"Pavel and his comrades will decide that question," said the mother.

Nikolai thoughtfully dropped his head.

"Who's that—Pavel?" asked the smith as he took a seat.

"My son."

"Last name?"

"Vlassov."

He nodded, took out his tobacco pouch, and began filling his pipe.

"Heard of him," he said. "My nephew knows him. My nephew's also in jail—Yevchenko—heard of him? My name's Gobun. Soon they'll have all the young folks behind bars—all the more room for us old ones! One of the gendarmes told me they'd send my nephew to Siberia. They're equal to it, the dogs!"

He turned to Nikolai and began drawing on his pipe, frequently spitting on the floor.

"So she don't want to? That's her business," he said jerkily. "When a fellow's free, he can start walking if he's tired of sitting, or start sitting if he's tired of walking. If they rob you, shut your eye, if they beat you, don't cry, if they kill you, there you lie. Everybody knows that. But I'll get that Savka of mine out yet. I'll get him out all right."

The mother was puzzled by the way he barked out his crisp sentences, but she envied the way he had said those last words.

She was thinking of Nikolai as she went down the street with the cold wind and rain in her face.

"How he has changed! Just to think!"

She recalled Gobun and thought almost prayerfully:

"It's clear I'm not the only one who has taken a new hold on life."

And immediately her heart was filled with thoughts of her son:

"If only he was willing!"

XXII

As she was saying good-bye to Pavel in the prison office on the following Sunday, she felt him press a small ball of paper into her palm. She started as though singed and glanced inquiringly into her son's face, but she found no answer there. Pavel's blue eyes were smiling their usual calm, resolute smile.

"Good-bye," she said with a sigh.

Once more her son held out his hand, and a shade of tenderness passed over his face.

"Good-bye, mother."

She waited without letting go.

"Don't worry, and don't be angry," he said.

These words and the stubborn line on his brow were her answer.

"Dear me," she muttered, lowering her head. "What are you saying. . . ."

She hurried out without another glance at him, so that he should not see the tears in her eyes and the trembling of her lips. All the way home it seemed to her that the hand holding the paper was aching and her whole arm hung heavily, as though she had received a blow on the shoulder. As soon as she reached home she handed Nikolai the note and stood waiting for him to smooth out the paper with flutters of hope in her heart. But Nikolai did not justify them.

"Of course!" he said. "This is what he writes: 'We shall not attempt an escape, comrades. We cannot. None of us can. We would lose our self-respect if we did. But try to help that peasant who was recently arrested. He needs your attention and deserves everything you can do for him. He is having too hard a time of it here. Every day he gets into a fight with the authorities. Already he has had twenty-four hours in the dungeon. They'll torture him to death. All of us appeal on his behalf. Comfort my mother. Tell her everything, and she will understand."

The mother raised her head and said in a quiet, trembling voice:

"What's there to tell? I understand."

Nikolai quickly turned aside and blew his nose lustily.

"Looks as though I had caught a cold . . ." he muttered.

He raised his hands to adjust his glasses and said, as he walked back and forth:

"The fact is, we would not have had time anyhow."

"That's all right. Let them have a trial," said the mother with a frown, while sadness settled like fog on her heart.

"Here, I just received a letter from a comrade in St. Petersburg. . . ."

"After all, he can escape from Siberia, can't he?"

"Of course. This comrade writes that the trial is soon to be held and the sentence has been decided on—exile for all of them. These brigands turn their own law courts into a vulgar joke. Just imagine, the sentence is decided in St. Petersburg before the trial is even held!"

"Don't bother, Nikolai Ivanovich!" said the mother firmly. "You don't have to explain or to comfort me. Pavel will do the right thing. He wouldn't make himself and his comrades suffer to no good purpose. And he loves me—you can see for yourself how thoughtful he is of me. Explain to her, he says; comfort her. . . ."

Her heart beat furiously and she felt dizzy with emotion.

"Your son is a fine person," exclaimed Nikolai in an unnaturally loud voice. "I have tremendous respect for him!"

"Let's think of some way to help Rybin," suggested the mother.

She wanted to do something right away—to go somewhere—to walk until she dropped with exhaustion.

"Good," said Nikolai, pacing the floor. "We need Sasha. . . ."

"She'll come. She always comes on the days I see Pavel."

Nikolai sat down on the divan next to the mother. He bowed his head in thought, bit his lip and twisted his beard.

"Too bad my sister is away. . . ."

"It would be fine if we could do it while Pavel is still there—it would make him happy," said the mother.

They were silent for some time.

"I don't understand why he doesn't want to . . ." said the mother.

Nikolai jumped to his feet, but at that moment the bell rang. They glanced at each other.

"That's probably Sasha," said Nikolai softly.

"How shall we tell her?" asked the mother just as softly.

"Hm—yes. . . ."

"I feel so sorry for her. . . ."

The ring was repeated, this time less resolutely, as though the person standing there had not quite made up his mind. Nikolai and the mother both started toward the door, but when they reached the kitchen Nikolai stood to one side and said:

"Better for you to go alone. . . ."

"Has he refused?" asked the girl bravely as soon as the mother opened the door.

"Yes."

"I knew he would," said Sasha simply, but her face went white. She unbuttoned her coat, then rebuttoned it part way and tried unsuccessfully to slip it off her shoulders.

"Wind and rain—horrid weather," she said. "Is he well?"

"Yes."

"Well and happy," said Sasha softly as she stood studying her own hand.

"He writes we should try to free Rybin," said the mother without glancing at the girl.

"Yes? It seems to me we ought to make use of our plan," said the girl slowly.

"I think so too," said Nikolai, suddenly appearing in the doorway. "Hello, Sasha."

The girl held out her hand and asked:

"Why not? Everyone agrees it's a good plan."

"But who'll carry it out? We're all so busy."

"Let me!" said Sasha quickly, getting up. "I have the time."

"All right. But you'll have to ask the others. . . ."

"I'll ask them. I'll go right away."

Once more she began to button up her coat with sure movements of her thin fingers.

"You might have a rest first," said the mother.

"I'm not tired," replied the girl with a quiet smile.

Silently she shook hands and went out, once more cold and severe.

The mother and Nikolai went to the window and watched her cross the yard and disappear through the gate. Nikolai whistled softly, sat down at the table and began to write.

"She'll feel better, once she has something to keep her busy," said the mother thoughtfully.

"Of course," replied Nikolai. Then he turned to the mother with a smile on his kind face and said: "That cup seems to have passed you by, Nilovna. It seems you never knew what it meant to long for the man you loved?"

"Phooh!" said the mother with a wave of her hand. "The only thing I ever felt was fear they'd marry me off!"

"Were you never fond of any one?"

"I don't remember. I suppose I was. Must have been fond of somebody, only I don't remember."

She looked at him and continued with sad composure:

"My husband beat me so much he knocked everything that happened before my marriage out of my head."

Nikolai turned back to the table and the mother went out of the

room for a moment. When she returned Nikolai looked at her affectionately as he basked in fond memories.

"As for me, I had an experience something like Sasha's. I was in love with a girl—a wonderful person. I was about twenty when I met her, and I've loved her ever since—I love her now just like I did then—with all my heart, gratefully and forever."

From where she was standing next to him, the mother could see the warm, clear light shining in his eyes. He had placed his hands on the back of a chair, and rested his head on his hands, and he sat looking somewhere far away, his entire body, lean and strong, yearning toward a vision, like a flower yearns toward the sun.

"Why don't you marry her?" suggested the mother.

"She has been married four years already...."

"Why didn't you marry her first?"

He thought for a moment.

"Somehow it didn't work out. Whenever I was free, she was in jail or in exile, and whenever she was free, I was in jail. That greatly resembles Sasha's situation, doesn't it? Finally they sent her to Siberia for ten years—to one of the most distant regions. I wanted to go with her, but I was ashamed, and she was ashamed. Out there she met another man—a fine chap—one of my comrades. They ran away together and now they are living abroad. Hm-m."

Nikolai took off his glasses, wiped them, held them up to the light and wiped them once again.

"Ah, my poor friend!" exclaimed the mother lovingly as she shook her head. She felt sorry for him, yet at the same time something about him made her smile with a warm, maternal feeling. He shifted his position and picked up the pen again, waving it in rhythm to his words as he continued:

"Family life lowers the energy of a revolutionary—it always does! Children, deprivation, the necessity of working to feed the family.... A revolutionary should constantly increase his energy, so that his activities can expand. The times demand it—we must always march ahead of everybody else, because we are the workers chosen by history to destroy the old world and build a new one. If we lag behind, giving in to our weariness or to the distraction of some little triumph, we are guilty of a wrong almost as great as betrayal of the cause. There is no one with whom we could march side by side with-

out damaging our faith, and we must never forget that our task is not some little triumph, but complete victory."

His voice became firm, his face pale, and his eyes shone with the usual calm, restrained power. Once more the bell rang. It was Ludmilla, her cheeks red with cold, her body shivering in a coat too light for the season.

"The trial is to take place next week," she said angrily as she took off her worn rubbers.

"Are you sure?" cried Nikolai from the other room.

The mother ran to him, uncertain whether it was fear or joy that caused such tumult in her breast. Ludmilla went with her.

"I am sure! At the courthouse they do not attempt to disguise the fact that the sentence has already been passed," she said, with a shade of irony in her deep voice. "How can you explain such a thing? Is the government afraid that its officials will be too lenient towards its enemies? Is it afraid that, in spite of all the time and energy it has spent distorting the minds of its servants, they may turn out to be not such rascals after all?"

Ludmilla sat down on the divan and rubbed her thin cheeks with her hands. Her eyes expressed utter contempt, and her voice became more and more wrathful.

"Don't waste your energy, Ludmilla," said Nikolai in an effort to soothe her. "They can't hear you, you know. . . ."

The mother listened intently to her words, but understood nothing, for one thought kept repeating itself in her mind:

"The trial—next week!"

Suddenly she was conscious of the proximity of some inexorable, inhuman force.

XXIII

Thus the mother lived under a cloud of perplexity and anxious waiting for two more days. On the third Sasha appeared and said to Nikolai:

"Everything's ready. Today at one o'clock. . . ."

"So soon?" he asked in surprise.

"Why not? I had only to find clothes and a place for Rybin to go. Gobun undertook to do everything else. Rybin will have to run

only one block. Vesovshchikov (obviously in disguise), will meet him, throw a coat around him, a hat on his head, and show him the way. I shall be waiting with a complete outfit and take him further."

"Not bad. But who is this Gobun?" asked Nikolai.

"You know him. It was in his room you held your study circle with the mechanics."

"Ah, I remember. A queer bird."

"He's a retired soldier—a tinsmith—a person of very little development, but he has a deep-rooted hatred for all violence.... He's a bit of a philosopher," said Sasha thoughtfully, glancing out the window. The mother listened in silence, and some vague idea was growing in her mind.

"Gobun wants to set his nephew free—remember that Yevchenko? You liked him—so spick and span he always was."

Nikolai nodded.

"He has made all the arrangements," continued Sasha, "but I am beginning to doubt that the attempt will be successful. It will take place when all the prisoners are having their airing, and I'm afraid that when they see the ladder, many of them will want to use it...."

She closed her eyes and became silent. The mother went over to her.

"And they'll spoil it for each other...."

All three of them were standing at the window, the mother behind Nikolai and Sasha. Their quick speech roused mixed feelings in her breast.

"I am going too," she said suddenly.

"Why?" asked Sasha.

"Don't go, my dear. Something may happen to you. Don't go," advised Nikolai.

The mother looked at him.

"No, I am going," she said softly but firmly.

They exchanged quick glances.

"I understand," said Sasha with a shrug of her shoulders. Then she turned to the mother, took her by the arm, and said in a simple tone which was dear to the mother's heart:

"But you must realize there's no point in hoping...."

"Dear heart!" cried the mother, drawing her close with a trembling hand. "Take me with you—I won't be in the way! I must go! I can't believe it's really possible—to escape."

"She is going with us," said the girl to Nikolai.

"That's up to you," he answered, dropping his head.

"But we mustn't be together. You go to the truck garden in the vacant lot; you can see the wall of the prison from there. But in case you are questioned, how will you explain your presence?"

"I'll find something to say!" said the mother eagerly.

"Don't forget that the prison guards know you!" warned Sasha. "And if they see you there...."

"They won't see me!"

The mother was enlivened by a hope which had ever been smouldering in her breast, and now flared up with fevered brilliance:

"Maybe—he too!"

An hour later the mother was in the lot behind the prison. A sharp wind was blowing. It tore at her skirts, struck the frozen ground, rocked the rickety fence about the garden she was passing, and hurled itself with full force at the prison wall. It picked up human cries from the prison yard and whirled them into the sky, where the racing clouds momentarily formed small openings into the blue zenith.

Behind the mother was the truck garden, before her the cemetery, while some seventy feet to her right was the prison. Near the cemetery a soldier was lunging a horse, while another soldier stood next to him stamping the ground, shouting and laughing and whistling. There was no one else near the prison.

Slowly she walked past them to the fence enclosing the cemetery, glancing surreptitiously behind her and to her right. Suddenly she felt her knees give way and her feet become as heavy as though they were frozen to the earth. Around the corner came a stooped lamplighter with a ladder over one shoulder, hurrying as lamplighters are wont. Winking with fright, the mother looked at the soldiers: they were standing in one spot, while the horse raced around them; she looked at the man with the ladder—he had already placed it against the wall and was climbing unhurriedly. With a gesture into the prison yard, he quickly descended and disappeared around the corner. The mother's heart pounded; the seconds dragged past. The

ladder was scarcely noticeable against the dark background of the prison wall, stained and discoloured as it was, with spots where broken plaster revealed the bricks beneath. Suddenly a dark head appeared above the wall, then a body which straddled the wall and crawled down the other side. A second head in a shaggy cap appeared; a dark ball rolled across the ground and vanished around the corner. Mikhailo straightened up, glanced about, shook his head....

"Run, run!" whispered the mother, stamping her foot.

There was a ringing in her ears and she heard loud cries. Above the wall appeared a third head. The mother clutched at her breast and watched with bated breath. The blond head of a beardless youth had shot up as though tearing loose, but it suddenly disappeared behind the wall again. The cries became louder and more excited and the wind carried the thin shrilling of whistles through the air. Mikhailo walked along the wall. Now he had passed her and crossed the open space between the prison and the houses of the city. It seemed to her that he was walking too slowly and holding his head too high. Anyone who had once seen his face would remember it forever.

"Hurry, hurry!" she whispered.

Something banged on the other side of the prison wall and she could hear a shattering of glass. One of the soldiers stood with his feet dug into the ground, pulling on the horse's rope; the other had raised his fist to his mouth and was shouting toward the prison. When he had finished, he turned his ear to the wind to catch an answer.

The mother stood at strained attention, twisting her head in all directions, and while her eyes saw everything, they believed nothing. What she had imagined as being so complicated and fraught with danger turned out to be quick and simple, and this quickness overwhelmed her and numbed her consciousness. Rybin had already disappeared; a tall man in a long coat was walking down the street and a young girl ran ahead of him. Three prison guards dashed around the corner of the prison, keeping close to each other, their right arms extended. One of the soldiers ran to meet them, the other kept running around the horse, trying to jump on its back, but the animal was stubborn and kept jumping into the air, and

everything else seemed to jump along with the horse. The sound of the whistles came cutting through the air with frantic insistence. Their desperate shrieks roused in the woman a sense of danger; she shuddered and walked along the fence of the cemetery, keeping her eye on the guards, but they and the soldiers disappeared around another corner of the prison. Soon they were followed by a figure in an unfastened coat whom she recognized as being the assistant head of the prison. From somewhere appeared policemen and excited spectators.

The wind swept down in a whirling dance, as though rejoicing, bringing to the mother's ears tattered shreds of cries and whistles.... She was made happy by this turmoil, and she quickened her steps, thinking the while:

"He could have done it just as easy...."

Suddenly two policemen rushed around the corner.

"Stop!" cried one of them, all out of breath. "Have you seen—a man—with a beard?"

She pointed in the direction of the gardens.

"He ran over there," she said calmly. "Why?"

"Yegorov! Blow your whistle!"

The mother went home. She felt sorry about something. In her heart was a feeling of bitterness and regret. A carriage passed her as she came out on the street after crossing the lot. She glanced within and saw a young man with a blond moustache and a pale, tired face. He saw her too. He was sitting sidewise, and for that reason his right shoulder was higher than his left.

Nikolai greeted her joyfully.

"Well, what happened?"

"Seems as though it came off all right."

She began to give him an account of the escape, trying to remember all the details. But she spoke as though retelling another's tale, the truth of which she doubted.

"Luck is with us," said Nikolai, rubbing his hands together. "The devil only knows how worried I was that something might happen to you. Listen, Nilovna, take the advice of a friend and stop dreading that trial. The sooner it comes off, the sooner Pavel will be free. Maybe he will make his escape while on his way to exile. As for the trial, it will be approximately like this...."

He began to describe the procedure, and as he spoke she realized that there was something he himself was afraid of, in spite of his efforts to comfort her.

"Are you afraid I'll say something I shouldn't in court?" she asked suddenly. "Or that I'll ask them for something?"

He jumped up, waving his hands deprecatingly.

"Of course not!" he said in an offended tone.

"I'm afraid, and that's the truth. But I don't know what I'm afraid of." She stopped speaking, and her eyes roved over the room.

"Sometimes it seems to me they'll begin talking rough to Pasha: 'You *muzhik*, you!' they'll say—'You son of a *muzhik*! What are you up to?' Pavel's a proud one, and he'll answer them back. Or Andrei'll get sarcastic with them. The others are hot-headed too. It makes you think, what if they don't stand for it—and get a sentence—a sentence so's we'll never see them again!"

Nikolai frowned without answering, pulling at his beard.

"There's no getting such thoughts out of your head," said the mother quietly. "That's why the trial's so—fearsome! Once they begin hauling everything over and weighing things! So very fearsome! It's not the punishment that's fearsome, but the trial. I don't know how to put it...."

She felt that Nikolai did not understand her, and that made it all the more difficult to tell about her premonitions.

XXIV

Her fear was like mildew lining her throat and choking her. When the day of the trial arrived, she went to the courthouse bent under the burden lying so heavily on her heart.

She was greeted in the street by acquaintances from the factory settlement to whom she bowed without speaking as she passed through the sullen crowd. In the corridors and the courtroom she met relatives of those on trial who also passed remarks in lowered voices. It seemed to her that words were superfluous; she could not understand them. Everyone was afflicted by the same grief. The mother was aware of this, and it only oppressed her the more.

"Sit here beside me," said Sizov, moving over on the bench.

She sat down obediently, straightened out her skirt and glanced about. Before her eyes danced green and red dots and stripes and fine yellow threads.

"It's your son who brought our Grisha to this," muttered a woman sitting next to her.

"Shut up, Natalya," said Sizov angrily.

The mother looked at the woman. She was Samoilov's mother, and further along sat her husband, a bald, good-looking man with a lean face and flowing red beard. He narrowed his eyes as he kept staring ahead, and his beard trembled with the strain he was under.

A dull light poured into the courtroom through high windows which were coated with snow on the outside. Between the windows hung a portrait of the tsar in an ornate gilt frame, the sides of which were hidden by the folds of heavy maroon window hangings. In front of the portrait stood a table covered with green baize extending almost the entire width of the room. Two wooden benches were placed behind bars, against the right wall, while against the left stood two rows of armchairs upholstered in maroon. Back and forth bustled silent attendants in uniforms with green collars and gold buttons down the front. The murky air was filled with timid whispering and mixed odours of medicines. All this—the colours and shine, the sounds and odours—hurt the eye and the ear, and was breathed into the chest, filling it with an empty, aching fear.

Suddenly someone spoke in a loud voice. The mother started, and when everyone else stood up, she also rose, catching hold of Sizov's hand.

A high door to the left opened and a bespectacled old man came hobbling in. Thin white side whiskers shook on his grey jowls. His clean-shaven upper lip sank against toothless gums, while his chin and jaws rested on the high collar of his uniform, giving the impression that there was no neck inside. He was supported by a tall young man with a ruddy, round, porcelain face. Behind them came three men in gold-embroidered uniforms, and three in civilian clothes.

They took a long time to seat themselves at the long table, but once this was accomplished, a man with a languid, beardless face leaned over and began to whisper to the old man, clumsily moving his swollen lips. The old man sat strangely erect and motionless as

he listened; behind the glasses of his spectacles the mother could detect two colourless little dots.

Near the writing desk at one end of the table stood a tall, bald gentleman who cleared his throat as he leafed through documents.

The old man swayed forward and began to speak. His first words were enunciated clearly, but those which followed crawled in a jumble over his thin grey lips:

"I proclaim.... Lead them...."

"Look!" whispered Sizov, nudging the mother as he stood up.

The door behind the bars was opened, a soldier with a bared sword over his shoulder came in, followed by Pavel, Andrei, Feodor Mazin, both the Gusev brothers, Samoilov, Bukin, Somov, and five more young people whose names the mother did not know. Pavel smiled to her, and Andrei grinned and nodded; somehow their smiles, their lively faces and movements seemed to lighten the strained, snobbish atmosphere of the courtroom; the dazzle of gold on the uniforms faded; the mother's courage was revived and strengthened by the breath of calm confidence and vital strength which the prisoners brought with them. On the benches behind her, where until this moment the people had been waiting dejectedly, there now arose a quiet murmur.

"They're not afraid!" Sizov whispered, while Samoilov's mother began to snuffle.

"Quiet!" came the stern injunction.

"I must warn you..." said the old man.

Pavel and Andrei were sitting alongside of each other on the first bench, along with Mazin, Samoilov and the Gusevs. Andrei had shaved his beard but let his moustaches grow, so that they hung down and made his round head resemble a cat's. There was something new in his face—something sharp and caustic about his mouth, something lowering in his eyes. Two dark lines had appeared on Mazin's upper lip, and his face had rounded out. Samoilov was as curlyheaded as ever, and Ivan Gusev grinned just as broadly.

"Ah, Feodor, Feodor," whispered Sizov, lowering his head.

The mother listened to the inarticulate questions which the old man put to the prisoners without looking at them, his head resting motionless on his collar. She listened to the calm, brief answers of her son, and it seemed to her that the senior judge and his assistants

could not be cruel and wicked to him. As she studied the faces at the long table in the effort to guess the result of the trial, she became conscious of a growing hope in her heart.

The porcelain fellow read a document in a monotonous voice which made the audience sit motionless, as though entranced. Four lawyers carried on a quiet, but animated conversation with those on trial. Their movements were quick and strong, and they resembled large black birds.

The armchair on one side of the old man overflowed with the obesity of a judge whose tiny little eyes were buried in fat. On the old man's other hand sat a stoop-shouldered judge with reddish whiskers and a pale face. He wearily rested his head on the back of the chair, half closed his eyes, his thoughts wandering. The prosecutor also wore an expression of weariness and boredom. Behind the judges sat three important personages: the mayor, a stout, imposing individual who sat thoughtfully stroking his cheek; the Marshal of the Nobility, a grey-haired, red-cheeked man with a long beard and large, amiable eyes; and the Head of the Volost, a man with a huge belly, which seemed to cause him some embarrassment, for he kept covering it with the tails of his coat, which kept slipping off.

"There are no criminals and judges here," came Pavel's firm voice. "There are only captives and victors."

Everyone became quiet. For a few seconds the mother could hear nothing but the hurried scratching of a pen and the beating of her own heart.

The senior judge also seemed to be listening and waiting for what would follow. His assistants stirred. Finally he said:

"Hm-m. Andrei Nakhodka! Do you confess to—"

Andrei rose slowly, squared his shoulders, tugged at his moustaches and looked at the old man from under lowered brows.

"How can I confess to my guilt?" replied the *khokhol* in his melodious, unhurried voice, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I have not killed anyone nor stolen anything. I simply am opposed to a form of life which leads people to steal and kill each other. . . ."

"Be more brief in your answers," said the old man with an effort.

The mother was aware of a stirring on the benches behind her. People began to whisper and move, as though throwing off the cobwebs of the porcelain fellow's words.

"Hear what they're saying?" whispered Sizov.

"Answer, Feodor Mazin...."

"No, I won't," said Feodor, jumping to his feet. His face was flushed and his eyes were bright, but for some reason he hid his hands behind his back.

Sizov gasped and the mother's eyes widened in amazement.

"I declined to have a lawyer for the defence and I refuse to say anything. I count this trial illegal! Who are you? Have the people given you the right to judge us? No they have not! And I refuse to recognize your authority!"

He sat down and hid his flushed face behind Andrei's shoulder.

The fat judge nodded to the senior judge and whispered something in his ear. The pale-faced judge opened his eyes, cast a sidewise glance at the prisoners, and jotted something in pencil on the paper lying before him. The Head of the Volost shook his head and shifted his feet, the more easily to rest his belly on his knees and cover it with his hands. Without turning his head, the old man twisted his whole body toward the pale-faced judge and whispered something to him. The latter listened with bowed head. The Marshal of the Nobility whispered to the prosecutor and the mayor listened to them, still stroking his cheek. Once more the senior judge began to speak in his dull voice.

"Just hear how he cut them off!" whispered Sizov to the mother in surprise. "Why he was the best of them all!"

The mother smiled uncomprehending. Everything that was happening seemed to her a tiresome and unnecessary introduction to the dreadful thing that would presently take place, crushing them all with its cold horror. But the words of Pavel and Andrei had sounded as fearless and strong as though they had been spoken in their little house in the workers' settlement rather than in this courtroom. She had been roused by Feodor's impassioned outburst. Something courageous was taking place at this trial, and judging by the animation of the people sitting behind her, she was not the only one aware of it.

"What is your opinion?" asked the old man.

The bald-headed prosecutor rose and placed one hand on the desk as he made a quick speech, citing figures. There was nothing terrifying about his voice.

At the same time a dry, prickly alarm irritated the mother's

heart. She was vaguely aware of something hostile in the air which did not shake its fist and cry out, but kept growing subtly and imperceptibly. It hovered in the vicinity of the judges, seeming to engulf them in an impenetrable cloud which insulated them from everything going on outside. She looked at the judges and found them incomprehensible. They did not become angry with Pavel and Feodor as she had expected, they did not insult them, but it seemed to her that they attached no importance to the questions they asked. Their tone was indifferent and they had to force themselves to listen to the answers, as if they knew everything beforehand and were utterly unconcerned.

Now a gendarme was standing before them and saying in a bass voice:

"Pavel Vlassov is said to be the chief instigator...."

"What about Nakhodka?" asked the fat judge.

"He is also...."

One of the lawyers got up.

"May I have a word?" he said.

"Are there any objections?" asked the old man.

It seemed to the mother that all of the judges were suffering from ill health. An unwholesome weariness was found in their manners and voices, and their faces expressed this same weariness and boredom. It was clear that they found all of this a strain—their uniforms, the courtroom, the gendarmes, the lawyers, the necessity of sitting in their armchairs asking questions and listening to proceedings.

The yellow-faced officer of her acquaintance was now standing in front of them and telling what he knew about Pavel and Andrei in a loud, drawling voice.

"It's not much that you know," thought the mother as she listened.

She looked at the people behind the bars without fear for them, without pitying them. She could not pity them. They roused in her only surprise, and the warm wave of love which now flooded her heart; the surprise was tranquil, the love joyfully vivid. There against the wall they sat, young and strong, paying little attention to the monotonous talk of witnesses and judges and the arguments of the lawyers with the prosecutor. Occasionally one of them would

laugh sarcastically and pass a remark to his comrades, over whose faces would flit the same mocking smile. Pavel and Andrei whispered almost uninterruptedly to one of the lawyers for the defence whom the mother had seen at Nikolai's the night before. Mazin, who was more restless and excited than the others, kept listening to their conversation. Sometimes Samoilov would say something to Ivan Gusev, and in response the latter would nudge his comrade and make such an effort to restrain his laughter that his face grew red, his cheeks filled out, and he had to hang his head. Twice he actually exploded, and then he sat for some time all drawn together, trying to take himself in hand. In each of the prisoners youth held sway, easily defying every effort to suppress its lively fermentation.

Sizov touched her lightly on the elbow. She turned and saw that he was pleased, but a bit anxious.

"Just look how strong those youngsters have become!" he whispered. "Very lords!"

In the courtroom the witnesses kept on talking in their hurried, colourless voices, while the judges spoke reluctantly and disinterestedly. The fat judge yawned, covering his mouth with his puffy hand; the red-whiskered one had become paler than ever, and occasionally he pressed his temple with his fingers, painfully staring at the ceiling with unseeing eyes. Once in a while the prosecutor would make pencil notes, after which he would continue his soundless conversation with the Marshal of the Nobility, who would stroke his grey beard, roll his large, fine eyes, and smile with an imperious arching of his neck. The mayor sat with his legs crossed, staring at his fingers as he drummed with them on his knee. It seemed that the Head of the Volost, who had anchored his belly on his knees and was solicitously embracing it with his arms, was the only one listening to the monotonous hum of voices, unless the old man sitting as motionless in his armchair as a weathercock on a windless day, could be accorded the same honour. This lasted so long that once more the audience became numb with boredom.

"I declare. . ." said the old man as he stood up. The rest of the words were garbled behind his thin lips.

The courtroom became filled with sighs, quiet exclamations, coughing, and a scraping of feet. The prisoners were led out. They

smiled and nodded to relatives and friends, and Ivan Gusev even managed to call to someone:

"Don't lose heart, Yegor!"

The mother and Sizov went out into the corridor.

"Shall we go to the inn for a cup of tea?" asked the old man solicitously. "We have an hour and a half."

"I don't think I care to."

"Neither do I. What do you think of those lads, eh? They sit there like they was the only people on earth, and all the rest just didn't mean a thing. That Feodor!"

Samoilov's father came over to them, holding his hat in his hands.

"See my Grigori?" he said with a rueful smile. "Refused any defence and don't even want to talk to them. He was the first to think up that. Your son was for having lawyers, Pelagea, but mine says nothing doing. Four of them refused after that. . . ."

His wife stood next to him. She kept blinking back the tears and wiping her nose with a corner of her handkerchief.

"That's something for you!" continued Samoilov, clutching his beard and fastening his gaze on the floor. "When you look at them, the rascals, you can't help thinking it's a pity they got themselves into this mess. And then all of a sudden you think—maybe the truth is theirs after all! Especially when you see how their numbers keep growing at the factory. The police keep hauling them in, but they keep multiplying like fish in the river. Again it makes you think—and maybe the power is theirs."

"It's hard for us to understand this business, Stepan Petrovich," said Sizov.

"Yes, it's hard," agreed Samoilov.

"They're a healthy bunch, the scoundrels," said his wife with a loud sniff.

Then she turned to the mother with a smile on her broad, flabby face.

"Don't be angry with me, Nilovna," she said. "Earlier in the day I blamed your son for it. But the devil only knows who's most to blame. Hear what the gendarmes and the spies had to say about our Grigori? He did his share too, the redheaded imp!"

Obviously she was proud of her son without perhaps appreciat-

ing her own feeling, but the mother appreciated it and replied with a kind smile and heartfelt words:

"Young hearts are always quicker to catch the truth...."

People wandered through the corridor and formed groups talking in excited, suppressed voices. Almost no one stood alone, and all the faces expressed the desire to talk, ask questions, listen to replies. They walked back and forth in the narrow white lane between the walls as though blown about by a strong wind, and they seemed to be searching for something strong and firm to which they could anchor themselves.

Bukin's elder brother, a tall fellow as fair-skinned as himself, was waving his arms and turning to all sides in his effort to prove something:

"That Klepanov, Head of the Volost, has no business being here...."

"Keep your mouth shut, Konstantin," said a little old man who was his father as he glanced cautiously about.

"No I won't! There are rumours that he killed one of his clerks last year on account of the clerk's wife; he lives with her. What do you call that? Besides which, everybody knows he's a thief...."

"For god's sake, Konstantin!..."

"That's right," said Samoilov. "That's right. You can't say the trial's been a fair one...."

Bukin heard his voice and quickly came over, drawing all the others along with him. His face was red and he kept waving his arms as he shouted:

"When it's a matter of murder or theft, people are tried by a jury—by the common people: peasants, townspeople, workmen. But when people go against the authorities, it's the authorities themselves who try them! What do you call that? If you insult me and I give you a sock in the jaw and then you are the one to pass judgment, of course you'll find me guilty. But who was the first one to be in the wrong? You!"

A grey-haired, hook-nosed guard with a chest full of medals dispersed the crowd and shook his finger at Bukin.

"Stop shouting. You're not in a saloon!" he said.

"That's all right, mister. I understand. But if I was to strike you and then I was the judge, who do you think...."

"I think I better turn you out of here, that's what!" said the guard severely.

"Turn me out? What for?"

"For making so much noise. Put you out in the street."

Bukin looked at those about him and said in lowered tones:

"The only thing they want is to make people shut up!"

"Sure. What did you think?" cried the old man roughly.

Bukin shrugged his shoulders and began to speak more softly.

"And why shouldn't the people be allowed to attend the trial? Why only relatives? If your trial is fair, let everybody hear it! What you afraid of?"

"The trial's not fair, there's no doubt about that." asserted Samoilov loudly.

The mother wanted to tell him what she had heard Nikolai say about the illegality of the trial. but she had not understood everything and had forgotten some of the words. In trying to recall them, she moved to one side, and noticed that a young man with a light moustache was watching her. He kept his right hand in the pocket of his trousers, and this made his left shoulder lower than the right, a peculiarity which seemed somehow familiar to the mother. But he immediately turned his back on her and she forgot him, engrossed as she was in her recollecting.

But a minute later she became conscious of a quiet question:

"Her?"

"Yes." was the eager answer.

She glanced around. The man with the lifted shoulder was standing sidewise and saying something to his neighbour, a dark-bearded young man in a short coat and boots to the knees.

Once more she searched her memory, was disturbed, but found nothing definite. She was filled with an irresistible desire to tell people about her son's cause. She wanted to hear what they would say against it. and thereby judge what the court verdict would be.

"Is that the way to conduct a trial?" she began cautiously and quietly. addressing Sizov. "They spend all their time trying to find out who did what. without paying any attention to why they did it. And they're all old men. Young people should be tried by young people."

"Yes," agreed Sizov. "It's hard for us to understand this business, very hard." He shook his head thoughtfully.

The guard opened the door of the courtroom and called out:

"Relatives! Show your tickets!"

"Tickets!" commented someone caustically "Like at the circus!"

A vague irritation could be detected among the people. They had become more noisy and relaxed and they kept getting into arguments with the guards.

XXV

Sizov mumbled something as he resumed his place on the bench.

"What's that?" asked the mother.

"Nothing special. The people are fools. . . ."

A bell was rung.

"Order in the Court. . . ."

Once more everyone stood up as the judges filed in and took their places in the same order as before. The prisoners were led to their seats.

"Hang on!" whispered Sizov. "The prosecutor is going to make his speech."

The mother strained forward with her whole body in fresh anticipation of something dreadful.

The prosecutor stood to one side of the judges, his face turned to them, one elbow on the desk. With a sigh and a flourish of his right hand, he began to speak. The mother could not grasp his first words. His voice flowed on thick and smooth, but uneven—sometimes fast, sometimes slow. For a while the words would come slow and monotonous, like painstaking stitches, then suddenly they would swarm up and circle about like flies near a lump of sugar. But she found nothing sinister in them. They drifted in the room as cold as snow and as grey as ashes, filling it little by little with something as irritating as fine, dry dust. This speech, so lavish in words, so devoid of feeling, seemed not to reach Pavel and his comrades; it certainly did not affect them in the least. They kept sitting there as calmly as ever, talking quietly, sometimes smiling, sometimes frowning to hide their laughter.

"He's lying," whispered Sizov.

She could not have said that. She heard the prosecutor's words and realized that he was accusing all of the prisoners without exception. In speaking of Pavel, he began to speak of Feodor, and when he finished with Feodor, he moved on to Bukin. It was as though he were neatly packing them all away in one bag. But she was not satisfied with the formal meaning of his words, which neither touched nor intimidated her. She still expected something frightening, and searched for it beyond his words—in his face, his eyes, his voice, in his white hand which kept flourishing gracefully in the air. Yet there was something fearsome here. She was aware of it, but unable to capture it and reduce it to definition, in spite of the warnings of her heart.

She glanced at the judges. Unquestionably they were bored by the speech. Nothing at all was expressed on these lifeless, grey and yellow faces. The prosecutor's words spread a fog invisible to the eye, which thickened about the judges, enveloping them ever closer in a cloud of indifference and weary waiting. The senior judge sat frozen stiffly erect, while from time to time the grey dots behind his spectacles melted into the colourless expanse of his face.

And as she looked on that lifeless indifference, that feelingless detachment, she could not help asking herself:

"Can it be that they are passing judgment?"

This question caused her heart to contract, gradually squeezing out her expectation of the fearsome and leaving only a sharp sense of injury.

The prosecutor's speech ended unexpectedly. He took a few swift last stitches, bowed to the judges, and sat down, rubbing his hands. The Marshal of the Nobility nodded to him and rolled up his eyes; the mayor stretched out his hand, while the Head of the Volost simply gazed at his belly and smiled.

But the judges had apparently not been gladdened by his speech. They remained motionless.

"Now," said the old man, holding a paper to his face, "the court will hear the councillor for the defence on behalf of Fedoseyev, Markov and Zagarov."

The lawyer whom the mother had seen at Nikolai's stood up. He had a broad, amiable face with little eyes which sparkled as though two sharp blades protruded from under his reddish eyebrows, cut-

ting the air like scissors. He spoke loudly and clearly and unhurriedly, but the mother could not follow his speech.

"Understand what he said?" whispered Sizov in her ear. "Understand? He said the prisoners were so upset—half crazy. That sound like my Feodor?"

She was too overwhelmed by disappointment to answer. Her sense of injury increased until it became a mighty weight on her heart. Now it was clear to Pelagea why she had expected justice. She had expected to witness a strict, honest measuring of the truth of her son against the truth of his judges. She had expected that the judges would question him long and attentively and in great detail as to what was going on within him, that they would turn keen eyes upon all his thoughts and actions. And when they saw the truth, they would justly proclaim in a loud voice:

"This man is right!"

But nothing of the sort happened. It seemed that those on trial were so far away as to be beyond the vision of their judges, and that the latter were of no significance to the former. In her weariness the mother lost all interest in the trial, and without listening to the words, thought to herself:

"Do you call this a trial?"

"Give it to them!" whispered Sizov approvingly.

Now a different lawyer was speaking, a small man with a sharp, pale, mocking face. The judges kept interrupting him.

The prosecutor jumped up angrily and said something about the order of proceedings, after which the old man made a feeble remonstrance. The lawyer for the defence listened with his head lowered respectfully, then continued his speech.

"Poke along," said Sizov, "poke along until you hit something."

A rustle of animation passed through the room. Aggressive energy seemed released as the lawyer began to irritate the tough old skin of the judges with prickly words. The judges seemed to draw together, sullen and pouting, to withstand the sharp thrusts of his eloquence.

Now Pavel had risen, and suddenly the room became utterly quiet. The mother strained forward. Pavel spoke very calmly.

"As a party member, I recognize judgment passed only by my party, and so I shall not speak in my defence; but at the request of

my comrades, who have also refused to defend themselves, I shall attempt to explain to you those things which you have not understood. The prosecutor has called our demonstration under the banner of Social-Democracy a revolt against the ruling power, and he has at all times looked upon us as people trying to overthrow the tsar. I wish to make it clear that we do not consider the monarchy the only chain binding our country; it is only the first and most accessible chain from which it is our duty to free the people."

The silence became more profound under the sound of his strong voice, moving back the walls of the courtroom, as it were, so that Pavel seemed to be lifted far away and placed in high relief.

The judges shifted ponderously and anxiously in their chairs. The Marshal of the Nobility whispered something to the languid judge, who nodded and whispered into the old man's right ear, while the ailing judge whispered into his left. The old man turned waveringly and said something to Pavel, but his voice was drowned out by the broad and even flow of Vlassov's speech:

"We are Socialists. That means we are against private property, an institution which disintegrates society, setting people against each other, creating an irreconcilable hostility of interests, resorting to falsehood in the effort to conceal or justify this hostility, and corrupting all people with lies, hypocrisy and evil-doing. We hold that a society which looks upon the individual only as a means of aggrandizement is inhuman and hostile to our interests, and we cannot accept its false, dual system of morality. We denounce the cynicism and cruelty of its attitude towards the individual. We wish to fight and shall fight against all the forms of physical and moral slavery enforced on the individual by such a society, against all means of crushing human beings in the interests of selfish greed. We are workers, people by whose labour all things are made, from children's toys to massive machines; yet we are people deprived of the right to defend our human worth. Anyone at all is able to use us for his own personal ends. At present we wish to achieve a degree of freedom which will eventually enable us to take all power into our own hands. Our slogans are simple enough: 'Down with private property!' 'All means of production in the hands of the people!' 'All power in the hands of the people!' 'Work is the obligation of all!' From this you can see that we are not mere rebels!"

Pavel gave a short laugh and slowly ran his fingers through his hair. The light in his blue eyes flared up brighter than ever.

"I must ask you to stick to the point," said the old man loudly and distinctly. He turned to look at Pavel, and it seemed to the mother that a greedy, malicious light flashed in his dull left eye. All the judges looked at her son, their eyes clutching at his face, sucking at his strength, thirsting for his blood, that it might resuscitate their own exhausted bodies. But he stood there tall and straight, strong and brave, holding out his hand and saying:

"We are revolutionaries and will continue to be so as long as some only boss and others only work. We are against the society whose interests you have been ordered to defend; we are its irreconcilable enemies, as well as yours, and no reconciliation between us is possible until we have won our fight. And we workers are sure to win! Your masters are not as strong as they think! That private property for whose accumulation and protection they sacrifice the millions of lives at their command, that very force which gives them power over us, gives rise to friction among them, destroying them physically and morally. The cost of defending private property is too high. In actual fact, all of you who are our masters are more slaves than we. You are enslaved spiritually—we only physically. You are incapable of freeing yourselves from the yoke of habit and prejudice, a yoke which has killed you spiritually. But nothing keeps us from being free in spirit. The poisons you feed us are weaker than the antidotes which, against your own will, you pour into our consciousness. Our awareness of the truth is growing uninterruptedly and with increasing speed, attracting the best people—all who are spiritually wholesome from even your own circles. Just see—you already have no one capable of making a moral defence of your class; you have already exhausted all the arguments which could save you from the crushing pressure of historical justice; you are unable to create any new ideas; you are spiritually barren. Our ideas are growing, burning ever brighter, inspiring the masses and organizing their struggle for freedom. A knowledge of the great role to be played by the working class is welding all the workers of the world into one great force, and there is nothing with which you can oppose the rejuvenation they are bringing to the world except cruelty and cynicism. But cynicism is too obvious and cruelty is an irritant.

The hands which today are laid on our throats, tomorrow will be extended to us in comradely clasp. Your energy is the mechanical energy of multiplying gold; it splits you into groups destined to devour each other. Our energy lies in the vital and ever-increasing consciousness of the solidarity of all working people. All that you do is criminal, for it is directed toward the enslaving of the people. Your lies and greed and wickedness have created a world of ghosts and monsters to intimidate the people. It is our task to free them from these monsters. You have torn man away from life and destroyed him; Socialism will take the world you have destroyed and rebuild it into one great whole. This will surely come to pass!"

Pavel stopped for a second and repeated in stronger, softer accents:

"This will surely come to pass!"

The judges whispered together and made strange grimaces without taking their eyes off of Pavel, and the mother felt that they were contaminating his strong body with their glances, full of envy of his health and strength and freshness. The prisoners listened to the speech of their comrade with wrapt attention—their faces pale, their eyes glowing with happiness. The mother drank in her son's every word, and they became imprinted on her mind in serried ranks. Several times the old man interrupted Pavel, trying to make something clear, and once he even gave a sad smile. Pavel would stop each time only to continue with a calm firmness that forced people to listen to him, subjecting the will of the judges to his own will. But at last the old man cried out and stretched out his hand; in reply Pavel's voice assumed a touch of sarcasm:

"I am about to finish. I have no desire to offend you personally; on the contrary, as I have been sitting here, an unwilling witness of this farce you call a trial, I have been filled almost with sympathy for you. After all, you are human beings, and we are always made indignant at seeing human beings, even those who are hostile to our cause, so shamefully debased in the service of brute force, so utterly deprived of their sense of human dignity. . . ."

He took his seat without glancing at the judges, while the mother fastened her eyes on them with bated breath.

Andrei's face was beaming as he squeezed Pavel's hand. Samoilov, Mazin and the others leaned toward him, and Pavel smiled with

embarrassment at his comrades' enthusiasm. He glanced toward his mother and nodded, as though asking:

"Are you satisfied?"

She replied with a happy sigh, her face flushed with a warm wave of love.

"Now the real trial's begun!" whispered Sizov. "He sure gave it to them, eh?"

She nodded without answering, happy that her son had spoken so boldly—perhaps even happier that he had finished. One question kept throbbing in her mind:

"What will they do now?"

XXVI

Her son had said nothing that was new to her. She was familiar with all his thoughts, but here, before the court, she felt for the first time the strange attraction of his faith. She was amazed at Pavel's composure, and she harboured his speech in her breast like a radiant star of faith in his cause and its ultimate victory. She expected that the judges would enter into hot argument with him now, angrily contradicting him and advancing their own convictions. But Andrei got up, swayed, glanced at the judges from under his brows, and said:

"Gentlemen of the defence. . ."

"You are addressing judges, and not those on defence!" said the ailing judge in a loud, angry voice. The mother detected a mischievous impulse in Andrei's face; his moustaches were quivering and she recognized a familiar feline glint in his eyes. He vigorously rubbed his head with his long, thin hand and gave a sigh.

"Really?" he said. "I was of the opinion that you were not judges, but defendants."

"I must ask you to speak to the point!" observed the old man dryly.

"To the point? Very well. I have already forced myself to accept the fact that you are really judges, men of honour and independence. . . ."

"The court has no need of your recommendation!"

"That so? Well, I'll go on anyway. So let's say you are impartial people, unprejudiced, without any 'yours' and 'mine.' Two people are brought before you. One says: he robbed me and beat me to a pulp; the other says: I have a right to rob people and beat them to a pulp because I own a gun...."

"Are you incapable of speaking to the point?" asked the old man, raising his voice. His hands were shaking, and the mother was glad to see that he was angry. But she was displeased with the way Andrei was conducting himself—somehow it did not harmonize with the speech of her son. She wanted their arguments to be serious and dignified.

The *khokhol* looked silently at the old man before he went on.

"To the point?" he said soberly, wiping his brow. "Why should I speak to the point with you? My comrade has already told you all you should know for the present. Others will tell you the rest when the time comes...."

The old man raised himself in his chair and cried:

"Keep silent! Next—Grigori Samoilov!"

The *khokhol* compressed his lips and lazily let himself down on the bench. Samoilov stood up alongside of him, shaking back his curls.

"The prosecutor called my comrades savages, enemies of civilization...."

"Restrict yourself to that which concerns your trial."

"This concerns it. There is nothing that shouldn't concern honest people. And please don't interrupt me. What is your civilization—that's what I'd like to know?"

"We are not here to carry on a debate with you! Get down to business!" said the old man, baring his teeth.

The behaviour of Andrei had brought about a change in the judges; his words had peeled something off, as it were. Their grey faces became blotched, and cold green sparks glinted in their eyes. They had been irritated by Pavel's speech, but the power of his words had forced them to respect him and refrain from giving expression to their irritation. The *khokhol* had ripped off this restraint and exposed what was underneath. They whispered together, making strange faces and unwontedly quick movements.

"You train people to be spies, you corrupt women and young

girls, you turn men into thieves and murderers, you poison them with vodka, international wars, lies, debauchery and savagery—there's your civilization for you! We are enemies of such a civilization!"

"I must ask you..." shouted the old man. But Samoilov, red-faced, bright-eyed, shouted back:

"We respect and value that other civilization advocated by the people you throw in jail to rot away and lose their minds...."

"Keep silent! Next—Feodor Mazin!"

Little Feodor sprang to his feet as straight and thin as a stiletto.

"I—I swear! I know you've already passed sentence on me," he gasped, and grew so pale that it seemed only his eyes were left. "I—*honest to goodness!" he cried, holding out his hand. "Wherever you send me, I'll manage to escape somehow, and go on working always*—all my life. I swear to it!"

Sizov gave a loud grunt and shifted in his seat. A strange murmur ran through the public, which was succumbing to a rising wave of excitement. A woman sobbed and someone had a spell of coughing. The gendarmes looked at the prisoners in dull amazement and at the public in anger. The judges rocked back and forth, while the old man cried out:

"Next—Ivan Gusev!"

"I have nothing to say!"

"Next—Vasili Gusev!"

"Neither have I!"

"Feodor Bukin!"

The whitish, colour-drained fellow rose heavily and said with a shake of his head:

"You should be ashamed of yourselves. I take hard to learning, but even I can see what's fair." He raised his arm above his head and was silent, half closing his eyes as though looking at something far in the distance.

"What's that?" cried out the old man in irritated surprise as he threw himself back in his chair.

"Phooh! The devil with you...."

Bukin sullenly sat down. There was something of enormous importance in his dark words, something naive and sadly reproachful. Everyone sensed this, and even the judges pricked up their ears, as

though expecting an echo which would be more lucid than what Bukin had said. A frozen silence reigned among the public, broken only by wavering suggestions of weeping. Finally the prosecutor shrugged his shoulders and gave a short laugh, the Marshal of the Nobility coughed, and a wave of whispering again passed over the courtroom.

"Will the judges speak?" whispered the mother to Sizov.

"Everything's over—only the sentence. . . ."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

She could not believe it.

Samoilov's mother moved about restlessly on the bench, pushing Pelagea with shoulder and elbow.

"What's that? How is it possible?" she asked her husband.

"As you see, it's possible all right."

"What'll they give our Grisha?"

"Oh, be still!"

Everyone was conscious of some violation, some dislocation, something broken. People blinked uncomprehendingly, as though they were watching the bright burning of a mass whose outlines were indefinable, whose significance was obscure, but whose force was irresistible. Without comprehending the great thing which had suddenly been revealed to them, people expended unfamiliar feelings on obvious trifles which they understood.

"Listen—why shouldn't they let them have their say?" asked the elder Bukin in a loud whisper. "They let the prosecutor say as much and whatever he liked. . . ."

An official stood near the benches and waved his hand above the people.

"Quiet, quiet," he admonished.

Samoilov leaned behind his wife's back, from where he sputtered broken phrases:

"All right—let's say they're guilty. But give them a chance to explain! Who are they against?—that's what I want to know! I also have my own interests at heart. . . ."

"Hush!" warned the official, shaking his finger at Samoilov.

Sizov shook his head mournfully.

The mother kept her eyes on the judges and noticed that their

excitement kept increasing as they talked together indistinctly. The cold, slimy sound of their voices touched her face, causing her cheeks to tremble and her mouth to be filled with an unpleasant, unwholesome taste. For some reason it seemed to her that they were talking about the bodies of her son and his comrades, about the muscles and organs of these young men, so charged with hot blood and living strength. Such bodies roused in them the mean envy of beggars, the sticky greed of the sick and exhausted. They smacked their lips and regretted the loss of these bodies, capable of working and making riches, of being creative and knowing pleasure. Now these bodies were being withdrawn from circulation; they were being rejected, and this meant that they could no longer be possessed, exploited, or consumed. And for that reason these young men roused in the old judges the gnawing, vengeful irritation of weakened beasts who see fresh food before them but lack the strength to seize it, beasts who are no longer capable of taking their fill of other creatures' strength, but can only growl and howl on seeing a means of satiety escaping them.

Such strange, crude thoughts took more distinct shape in her mind the more attentively she studied the judges. It seemed to her that they made no effort to hide the greed and impotent rage of famished creatures who had once known what it meant to gorge themselves. For her, a woman and a mother, to whom the body of her son had always been, in the final analysis, dearer than what is termed the soul, it was dreadful to watch those dull eyes crawl over his face, touch his breast, his shoulders, his arms, rub against his vital flesh as though the friction would warm the blood flowing in their own atrophied veins and expended muscles. Now they were somewhat revived by the stings of greed and envy caused by a contemplation of these young men whom they were destined to condemn, thus depriving themselves of their bodies forever. It seemed to her that Pavel was aware of this moist, unpleasant touch and looked at her with a shudder.

Pavel looked at her calmly and tenderly, a shade of weariness in his glance. Occasionally he nodded to her and smiled.

"Soon—freedom!" were the words she read in this smile, which was like a caress.

Suddenly the judges rose. The mother also got up involuntarily.

"There they go," said Sizov.

"For the sentence?" asked the mother.

"Yes."

The tension she had been under suddenly broke, overwhelming her with the faintness of exhaustion. Her brows trembled and beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. A weight of hurt and disappointment struck at her heart and was quickly transformed into contempt for the judges and the court. Aware of an aching head, she passed her hand tightly over her brow and looked up: the relatives of the prisoners had gone over to the bars, and the courtroom was filled with the hum of conversation. She also went over to Pavel, pressed his hand and wept, bursting with pain and joy, tangled in a chaos of contradictory feelings. Pavel spoke gently to her and the *khokhol* laughed and joked.

All the women wept, but more from habit than from grief. There was no stunning grief, falling unseen and unexpected; there was only the sad necessity of parting with their children, but even this was softened and alleviated by the impressions of this day. Fathers and mothers looked upon their children with mixed feelings, in which mistrust of youth and the usual sense of their own superiority was strangely blended with a feeling approaching respect. Sad thoughts as to how they should now go on living were eclipsed by the wonder inspired by these young people who spoke so boldly and fearlessly about building another, better way of life. Feelings were suppressed because of the inability to express them; words were lavishly spent, but on such simple things as clothes and laundry and the necessity of watching one's health.

The elder Bukin waved his hand as he tried to convince his younger brother:

"Justice—that's the thing! And nothing else!"

"Take care of the starling," answered the younger one.

"I shall."

Sizov took his nephew by the arm and said:

"Well, Feodor—so it means you're leaving us...."

Feodor leaned down and whispered something in his ear, smiling mischievously. The guard also smiled, but immediately straightened his face and cleared his throat.

The mother spoke to her son just like the other women were doing—about clothes and his health—but her breast was full of a

thousand questions concerning Sasha and herself and him. But above all this soared a surfeit of love for her son, a desire to please him, to be closer to his heart. The dread of something to happen faded away, leaving only an unpleasant shudder at the memory of the judges and the dark impressions lurking in the hinterland of her mind. She was conscious of the birth of a vast, bright joy within her which she did not comprehend and which embarrassed her. Seeing that the *khokhol* was talking to everybody, and realizing that he needed her affection more than Pavel did, she spoke to him.

"I didn't think much of this trial of yours!"

"Why not, *nenko*?" he asked with a grateful smile. "The mill's old, but good as gold...."

"Nothing so dreadful about it—but it don't tell you who's right and who's wrong," she said hesitatingly.

"Oho! So that's what you wanted!" exclaimed Andrei. "You think they're interested in getting at the truth!"

"I thought it'd be dreadful," she said with a sigh and a smile.

"Order in the Court!"

Everyone scurried back to his place.

The senior judge leaned on the table with one hand, while he held a paper in front of his face with the other and began to read in a thin, sibilant voice.

"He's reading the sentence," said Sizov.

The room became quiet. Everyone stood up with eyes glued on the old man. Small, and still, and dry, he most nearly resembled a stick held by some invisible hand. The other judges also stood up: the Head of the Volost with his head on one side and his eyes fixed on the ceiling; the mayor with his hands crossed on his breast; the Marshal of the Nobility stroking his beard; the sickly judge, his bloated colleague and the prosecutor all looking in the direction of the prisoners. Behind the judges, the tsar looked down from his portrait, resplendent in a red uniform, with an air of indifference on his white face across which an insect was now crawling.

"Exile!" said Sizov with a sigh of relief. "Well, thank God it's over. They said 'hard labour.' It'll be all right, mother. Don't worry."

"I knew that's what it would be," she said in a tired voice.

"At any rate, we know what's what. There was no telling what they might do."

He turned to the prisoners who were already being led out.

"Good-bye, Feodor!" he cried. "And all the rest of you! God with you!"

The mother nodded silently to her son and the others. She wanted to cry, but was ashamed.

XXVII

She was surprised on emerging from the courtroom to see that it was already night. Lights were burning on the street corners and stars gleamed in the sky. Groups of people had gathered near the courthouse, the snow crunched in the cold air, young voices could be heard. A man in a grey cowl glanced into Sizov's face and asked quickly:

"What was the sentence?"

"Exile."

"For all?"

"Yes."

"Thanks."

The man walked away.

"See?" said Sizov. "They're interested."

Presently they were surrounded by a dozen young girls and boys who peppered them with questions, attracting other people to the little crowd. The mother and Sizov stopped. They were asked about the sentence, about how the prisoners had conducted themselves, about who had made speeches and what they had said; and in all the questions could be detected an eager curiosity whose sincerity and fervour stimulated a desire to satisfy it.

"Gentlemen! This is the mother of Pavel Vlassov," said someone, and everyone presently became silent.

"Allow me to shake your hand!"

Somebody's strong hand gripped the mother's fingers and somebody's agitated voice said:

"Your son will serve as an example of courage to all of us. . . ."

"Long live the Russian workers!" came a loud cry.

The cries increased and multiplied, breaking out now here, now there. People ran from all sides, crowding about Sizov and the mother. Policemen's whistles shrieked, but they could not drown out the cries. Sizov laughed. To the mother this seemed a happy dream. She smiled and bowed and pressed people's hands, while her throat contracted with tears of joy. Her legs trembled with weariness, but her overflowing heart reflected impressions like the bright surface of a lake.

Someone close to her began to speak in a clear, nervous voice:

"Comrades, today the monster devouring the Russian people has once more closed its greedy jaws on. . . ."

"We better be going, mother," said Sizov.

At that moment Sasha put in her appearance and, taking the mother by the arm, led her to the other side of the street.

"Come away before they start a fight or make some arrests," she said. "Exile? To Siberia?"

"Yes, yes."

"How did he speak? But I know—he was the strongest of all, and the simplest. And of course the most severe. He is naturally tender and sensitive, but he is afraid to show it."

The words of her love, whispered with such fervour, calmed the mother and gave her new strength.

"When will you go out to join him?" she asked Sasha, pressing her arm affectionately.

"As soon as I find someone who can take over my work," replied the girl as she looked confidently before her. "You see I am also waiting for a sentence. Probably they will send me to Siberia too. If they do, I shall ask them to send me to the same place he is."

"In that case, take him my regards," came the voice of Sizov. "Just say, 'from Sizov.' He knows me. Feodor Mazin's uncle."

Sasha turned and held out her hand.

"I know Feodor. My name is Sasha."

"And your patronymic?"

She looked at him and answered.

"I have no father."

"Dead?"

"No, he is not dead." Something stubborn and insistent crept

into the girl's voice and was reflected in her face. "He's a landlord and now the Rural Administrator—he robs the peasants. . . ."

"Hm-m," said Sizov. In the silence that followed he walked on alongside of the girl and kept casting oblique glances in her direction.

"Well, good-bye, mother," he said at last. "I turn left here. Good-bye, my girl. Rather hard on that father of yours, aren't you? Of course, that's your business. . . ."

"If your son were no good, if he harmed the people and you despised him, wouldn't you say so?" cried Sasha impassionedly.

"Well—I suppose so." answered the old man after a moment.

"That means that justice is dearer to you than your son, and it's dearer to me than my father. . . ."

Sizov smiled and shook his head.

"Well, you're a sharp one! If you've the strength to keep it up, you'll get the best of the old folks yet! A lot of steam you've got! Well, good-bye and best wishes! But how about being a little easier on people, eh? Good-bye, Nilovna! When you see Pavel, tell him I heard his speech. Didn't understand all of it, some of it was a bit frightening, but in general it was just right."

He raised his hat and slowly turned the corner.

"He seems to be a nice person." said Sasha, following him with a smiling glance of her large eyes.

It seemed to the mother that today the girl's face was more kind and gentle than usual.

Once home, they sat down close to each other on the divan and talked about Sasha's anticipated trip to Pavel. The mother found the silence restful. Sasha raised her heavy brows and looked into the distance with wide, dreamy eyes, while her pale face assumed an expression of calm contemplation.

"Then when your children are born I'll come and play nurse-maid. And our life there won't be any worse than here. It won't be hard for Pavel to find work—he can do anything with his hands. . . ."

Sasha glanced at the mother inquiringly.

"Don't you intend to follow him now?" she asked.

"What does he want with me?" replied the mother with a sigh. "I'd only be in the way in case he wanted to escape. He would never agree to have me go."

Sasha nodded.

"You're right. He would never agree."

"Besides which, I have my own work to do here," added the mother with a shade of pride.

"Yes," answered Sasha. "That is good."

Suddenly she started, as though throwing off something, and began to speak quietly and simply.

"He won't go on living there. Of course he will run away...."

"And what about you? And the child, if there is one?"

"We shall see when the time comes. He must not take me into consideration, and I shall never let myself stand in his way. It will be hard for me to part with him, but naturally I shall manage. I shall never stand in his way!"

The mother realized that Sasha was quite capable of doing what she said, and she felt sorry for the girl.

"It will be hard for you, my dear," she said, embracing her.

Sasha smiled softly and moved close to the mother.

At that moment Nikolai came in, tired and weary, saying quickly as he took off his things:

"You better get out while you have the chance, Sasha. Two spies have been following me since morning—so openly that it smells of arrest. My instinct never fails me. Something has happened. Incidentally, here's Pavel's speech—we have decided to print it. Take it to Ludmilla and beg her to work as fast as possible. Pavel made a fine speech, Nilovna!... Watch out for the spies, Sasha...."

He rubbed his frozen hands as he spoke, then went over to his desk and began taking papers out of the drawers. Some of them he tore up, others he laid to one side. He looked worn and worried.

"It hasn't been so long since I cleaned out these drawers; the devil only knows where all this new stuff has come from! I think it would be better if you didn't spend the night at home, Nilovna. What do you think? Rather a bore to attend the show. And besides they might take you too. You'll have to be running here and there with Pavel's speech...."

"Whatever would they want with me?"

Nikolai waved his hand in front of his eyes as he said firmly:

"I have a nose for such things. And you can be of great help to Ludmilla. Better take no chances...."

The mother was pleased with the idea of helping print her son's speech.

"If that's how it is—I'll go," she said, adding to her own surprise. "I'm not afraid of anything anymore, thank the Lord!"

"Fine!" exclaimed Nikolai without looking at her. "But you better tell me where my suitcase and linen is. With those grasping ways of yours, you have so completely taken over that I can't even find my own things!"

Sasha was silently burning papers in the stove and mixing the ashes with the coals.

"Time to leave, Sasha," said Nikolai, holding out his hand. "Good-bye. Don't forget to send me any interesting books that happen to turn up. Good-bye, dear comrade. Be careful...."

"Are you counting on a long term?" asked Sasha.

"Who knows? Probably. They have things against me. Hadn't you better go along with her, Nilovna? It's harder to follow two people at once."

"All right," answered the mother. "I'll get into my things."

She watched Nikolai carefully, but all she could detect was a certain anxiety filming over the usual kind and gentle expression of his face. There were no nervous movements, no signs of agitation in this man who had become dearer to her than others. He had always shown equal attention to everyone, had ever been kind and even-tempered, ever tranquilly alone. And now he remained for everyone what he had always been—a man living a secret inner life which was somewhere up ahead of other lives. She knew that he was closer to her than to all the others, and she loved him with a wary love that was not quite sure of itself. Now the pity she felt for him was unbearable, but she dared not show it lest Nikolai become embarrassed and confused, in which case he would appear slightly ridiculous, and she did not want to see him like that.

Once more she entered the room and found Nikolai holding Sasha's hand and saying:

"Splendid! I'm sure that will be just the thing for him and for you. A little personal happiness does nobody any harm. Are you ready, Nilovna?"

He came up to her, smiling and adjusting his glasses.

"Well, good-bye—for three or four months—no more than six, I hope. Six months! That's a big piece of life! Take care of yourself, will you? Here, let's have a final embrace."

Thin and delicate, he put his strong arms about her and looked into her eyes.

"I seem to have fallen in love with you," he laughed. "Keep hugging you this way. . . ."

She kissed his brow and cheeks without speaking, but her hands were trembling. She took them away so that he should not notice it.

"See you're careful! This is what you must do—send a little boy over in the morning—Ludmilla knows such a boy—and let him reconnoitre. Well, good-bye, comrades. Everything is just as it should be."

When they were out in the street, Sasha said quietly:

"If he ever has to go to his death, he will do it just as simply, with the same haste. And when death looks him in the face, he will adjust his glasses, say 'Splendid!' and die."

"I love him," whispered the mother.

"He amazes me, but I don't love him. I respect him tremendously. He is kind and even tender at times, but there is something dry about him—he is not sufficiently human. . . . Seems we're being followed. We better part company. Don't go to Ludmilla's if you feel you are being followed."

"Naturally," said the mother, but Sasha kept on insisting:

"Don't go. Come to my place instead. Good-bye for the present."

She turned quickly and retraced her steps.

XXVIII

A few minutes later the mother was sitting warming herself at the stove in Ludmilla's little room. Ludmilla herself, in a black dress fastened with a leather belt, was slowly pacing the floor, filling the room with the rustle of her skirts and the sounds of her imperious voice.

The fire crackled and roared in the stove, sucking in the air, while the woman's voice flowed on evenly.

"People are more stupid than wicked. They can see only that which is in front of their eyes and can be grasped at once. But everything close at hand is cheap—only things far away are dear. When you actually get down to it, everyone would be happier and better off if life were different—if it were easier and people were more reasonable. But in order to achieve this, it is necessary to go to a little trouble."

Suddenly she halted in front of the mother.

"I don't see people very often, and when anybody comes to see me I go off on a harangue," she said apologetically. "Funny, isn't it?"

"Why?" said the mother. She tried to discover where this woman did her printing, but could find nothing out of the usual. In this room with its three windows facing the street stood a divan and bookcase, a table, chairs, and a bed. In one corner was a washstand, in another the stove. Photographs hung on the wall. Everything was new and clean and in good repair, and over it all the austere figure of the owner threw a cold shadow. The mother felt that something was hidden, but could not guess where. She looked at the doors. She had entered through one connected with a little hall: another one, high and narrow, was located next to the stove.

"I have come on business," she said self-consciously, noticing that Ludmilla was eyeing her closely.

"I know. People don't come to visit me otherwise."

The mother seemed to detect a strange note in Ludmilla's voice. She looked into her face, and saw a wan smile in the corners of the woman's thin lips, while her opaque eyes shone from behind her spectacles. The mother glanced to one side and held out Pavel's speech.

"Here. They would like you to print it as quickly as possible."

Then she told about Nikolai's anticipation of arrest.

Ludmilla silently slipped the paper into her belt and sat down. The fire glowed ruddily on her glasses and its warm smile played over her motionless face.

"When they come for me I shall shoot them," she said quietly and resolutely when she had listened to what the mother had to say. "I have a right to defend myself from violence and am obliged to put up a fight if that's what I challenge others to do."

The glow of the fire slipped off her face, which once more became severe and somewhat haughty.

"This is no way to live," thought the mother sympathetically.

Ludmilla began to read Pavel's speech reluctantly, but kept leaning closer over the paper as she went along, finally thrusting aside the pages one after another with eager impatience. At last she rose, straightened her shoulders and came over to the mother.

"A very good speech," she said.

She stood musing for a moment with lowered head.

"I didn't want to speak to you about your son—I have never met him and I don't like painful conversations. I know what it means to have someone dear to you sent into exile. But—I should like to ask—is it pleasant to have such a son?"

"Very," said the mother.

"And not- terrifying?"

"Not any more," answered the mother with a calm smile.

Ludmilla patted down her plain hair with a swarthy hand and turned to the window. A light shadow flitted over her face—maybe the shadow of a suppressed smile.

"I shall set the type in no time. Lie down. You have had a hard day and must be tired. Lie here on the bed. I shall not sleep, and perhaps I shall wake you up in the night to help me.... Turn out the lamp when you get in bed."

She threw two logs into the stove and went out through the narrow door, closing it tightly behind her. The mother watched her leave and then began to undress, her thoughts on Ludmilla.

"She is grieving over something...."

The mother was dizzy with weariness, but her spirit was strangely calm and everything shone in her eyes with a soft, gentle light which quietly flooded her soul. She was familiar with this calmness. It always came to her after any great emotional stress. Formerly it had somewhat alarmed her, but now it merely caused her soul to expand, reinforcing it with a great and strong feeling. She put out the lamp and climbed into the cold bed, cuddling up under the blanket and soon falling into a deep sleep.

When she opened her eyes the room was filled with the cold white light of a winter's day. Ludmilla looked up from the divan where

she was lying with a book in her hands, and smiled in an unwonted way.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the mother in some embarrassment. "What a creature I am! Is it very late?"

"Good morning!" replied Ludmilla. "Soon be ten. Get up and we'll have tea."

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"I was going to, but when I came over you smiled so peacefully in your sleep I hadn't the heart."

She rose from the divan with an agile movement, went over to the bed and leaned toward the mother. In the younger woman's lustreless eyes the mother detected an expression that was dear and familiar to her.

"It seemed a pity to disturb you. Perhaps you were having a happy dream."

"I wasn't."

"It's all the same. I liked your smile. It was so calm and good and ... all-encompassing."

Ludmilla laughed, and the laugh was soft and velvety.

"It made me start thinking about you. Is your life hard?"

The mother's eyebrows quivered and she started thinking in si-

"Of course it is hard!" exclaimed Ludmilla.

"I'm not so sure," said the mother slowly. "Sometimes it seems to be hard. But it is so full—and everything in it is so serious and surprising and one thing follows the other so quickly...."

The familiar wave of courage rose in her breast, filling her mind with thoughts and images. She sat up in bed and began clothing her thoughts in words.

"It goes on and on—all toward one end.... But sometimes it is very hard. People suffer, are beaten—cruelly beaten, and much happiness is forbidden them. That is very hard!"

Ludmilla threw back her head and embraced her with a glance as she said:

"But you are not talking about yourself."

The mother got out of bed and began dressing.

"How can you separate yourself from others when you love this one, and that one, and are afraid for all of them and pity them all

—all of them crowding together there in your heart. . . . How can you separate yourself from them?"

She stood for a moment there in the middle of the room, only partly dressed, lost in thought. It seemed to her that she was no longer that same woman who had been so full of fears and alarms for her son, absorbed by thoughts of how she could protect his body. That woman no longer existed. She had withdrawn, gone somewhere far away, or perhaps been consumed by the fire of her emotion, and this had purged and lightened her spirit, charging it with new strength. She searched her heart, listening to its pulse, fearing to revive old dreads.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Ludmilla, going over to her.

"I don't know," replied the mother.

Silently they looked at each other and smiled, then Ludmilla went out of the room, saying:

"I wonder what's happening to my samovar out there."

The mother looked out of the window. It was a cold, crisp day, and within her breast it was also bright, but warm. She wanted to talk about everything—to talk long and happily, with a vague feeling of gratitude to someone for all that had entered her soul and was glowing there with the lovely light preceding sunset. A desire to pray, which she had not experienced for a long time, now returned. A young face flashed through her mind and she heard a clear voice call out, "That's the mother of Pavel Vlassov!" She saw the happy, tender eyes of Sasha, the dark figure of Rybin, the firm bronze face of her son, the winking, self-conscious glance of Nikolai, and suddenly all of this merged into one deep sigh, blended into a transparent, rainbow-hued cloud which enveloped all of her thoughts in a feeling of peace.

"Nikolai was right," said Ludmilla as she re-entered the room. "They have arrested him. I sent the boy around as you advised. He said there were policemen in the yard and he saw a policeman hiding behind the gate. And there are spies around. The boy knows them."

"Ah," said the mother, shaking her head. "The poor man. . . ."

She sighed, but without grief, and this fact secretly amazed her.

"Recently he had been doing a lot of reading to the workers here in town. In general, it was just about time for him to be getting

caught," said Ludmilla calmly, but with a frown on her face. "His comrades told him to go away, but he wouldn't listen. It seems to me that in such cases people should be forced to leave, and not persuaded."

At that moment a black-haired, red-cheeked boy with handsome blue eyes and a humped nose appeared in the doorway.

"Shall I bring in the samovar?" he asked.

"If you please, Sergei." She turned to the mother. "He is my ward."

It seemed to the mother that Ludmilla was different today, she was simpler and more congenial. There was much beauty and strength in the graceful movements of her fine body, and this softened the effect of her pale, severe face. The night had deepened the circles under her eyes, and one was conscious of tension, of a taut string in her soul.

The boy brought in the samovar.

"Let me introduce you, Sergei. This is Pelagea Nilovna, mother of the worker who was tried yesterday."

Sergei bowed without speaking, shook the mother's hand, went out of the room, returned with a loaf of bread, and took his place at the table. As she poured the tea, Ludmilla tried to convince the mother not to go home until it was clear for whom the police were waiting.

"Maybe it is for you! They will probably call you up to be questioned."

"Let them!" answered the mother. "And let them arrest me if they want to—no great harm done. If only we distribute Pavel's speech first!"

"I have already set the type. Tomorrow we shall have enough copies for the town and the workers' settlement. Do you know Natasha?"

"Of course!"

"Take them to her."

The boy was reading the paper and seemed not to hear anything, but every once in a while he glanced over the top into the mother's face, and when she met his lively gaze she was pleased and smiled. Once more Ludmilla spoke of Nikolai without lamenting, and the mother found this quite natural. Time passed

faster than usual; it was almost noon when they finished their breakfast.

"Really!" exclaimed Ludmilla.

At that moment someone knocked hurriedly at the door. The boy got up and looked at Ludmilla with narrowed eyes.

"Open the door, Sergei. Who could it be?"

With a calm movement she put her hand into the pocket of her skirt, saying to the mother:

"If it's the gendarmes, you stand over there in the corner, Pelagea Nilovna, and you, Sergei—"

"I know," answered the boy as he went out.

The mother smiled. These preparations no longer upset her—she had no premonition of calamity.

But it was the little doctor who came in.

"First of all," he said quickly, "Nikolai has been arrested. Aha! So this is where you are, Nilovna! Weren't you home at the time of the arrest?"

"He sent me here."

"Hm. I don't think that'll help! And secondly, last night some young people hectographed about five hundred copies of the speech. I saw them—not badly done—clear and distinct. They want to distribute them through the town tonight, but I'm against it. Better to distribute the printed copies in town and save those for some other place."

"I'll take them to Natasha!" said the mother eagerly. "Let me have them!"

She was desperately anxious to spread her Pavel's speech as quickly as possible, to scatter her son's words over the whole earth, and she fastened her eyes pleadingly on the doctor's face as she waited for his answer.

"The devil only knows whether you should undertake this now," he said hesitatingly as he took out his watch. "It is now eleven forty-three. There is a train at five after two and you would arrive at five fifteen. That is evening, but not late enough. And that isn't the point. . . ."

"Not the point?" repeated Ludmilla with a frown.

"What's the point?" asked the mother, moving toward him. "Only that the job be well done. . . ."

Ludmilla gave her a searching glance and said, as she wiped her brow:

"It's dangerous for you to do it."

"Why?" asked the mother with warm insistence.

"This is why!" answered the doctor in quick, broken tones. "You left the house just an hour before Nikolai's arrest. You went to the factory where you are known as the teacher's aunt. Shortly afterwards, forbidden leaflets were found at the factory. All of that forms a nice noose around your neck."

"No one will notice me there!" insisted the mother. "And if they arrest me when I get back and ask me where I was. . . ."

She hesitated for a second, then cried:

"I know what I'll say! I'll go straight from there to the settlement. I have a friend there—Sizov—I'll say that I went straight from the trial to his house—to ease my heart, so to say. He needs comforting too—his nephew's been sentenced. He'll stand by me."

Feeling that they would surely comply to her wish, and desiring to achieve this more quickly, she kept talking more insistently. At last they gave in.

"Well, go ahead," said the doctor reluctantly.

Ludmilla said nothing, merely walking back and forth lost in thought. Her face had become haggard and thin, and the taut muscles of her neck revealed the effort it required to keep her head from drooping on her chest. The mother noticed this.

"All of you keep worrying about me," she smiled, "but you don't worry about yourselves at all."

"That's not true," said the doctor. "We do worry about ourselves. We are obliged to. And we are very harsh on those we see wasting their strength to no good purpose. Well then—you will get the copies of the speech at the station. . . ."

He explained to her how this would be done, then looked into her face and said:

"Well, here's wishing you luck!"

But there was a look of displeasure on his face as he went out. Ludmilla crossed over to the mother.

"I can understand you," she said with a quiet laugh.

She took hold of the mother's arm and began once more pacing the floor.

"I also have a son. He is already thirteen years old, but he lives with his father. My husband is a public prosecutor. And the boy—is with him. What will he become? I often think about that...."

Her voice broke. After a minute she continued quietly and thoughtfully.

"He is being brought up by a conscious enemy of all the people I love and whom I consider the finest people on earth. My son may grow up to be my own enemy. He cannot live with me—I live under an assumed name. I haven't seen him for eight years—eight years! What a long time!"

She stopped at the window and looked out at the pale, empty sky.

"If he lived with me I would be stronger. I wouldn't have this wound always aching in my heart.... Even if he were dead—it would be easier for me...."

"Ah, my dear!" breathed the mother, her heart torn with compassion.

"You are lucky!" murmured Ludmilla with a bitter laugh. "That is wonderful—mother and son side by side—a rare thing!"

"Yes, that is wonderful," exclaimed Pelagea to her own surprise; then, lowering her voice as though confiding a secret she said: "And all of you—Nikolai Ivanovich and everyone who follows the truth—all of you are side by side! All of a sudden people have become kindred and I understand all of you. I cannot understand words, but I can understand everything else."

"Yes, that is how it is," murmured Ludmilla. "That is how it is...."

The mother placed her hand on her breast and continued speaking almost in a whisper, as though she herself were contemplating the words she spoke.

"Our children are marching over the earth. That is what I understand—our children are marching over the earth—over the whole earth—from all corners—to one goal. The purest in heart, the finest in mind—marching unwavering against evil, trampling falsehood under strong feet. Young they are, and healthy, and wholesome, with all their strength pointed towards one thing—justice! They are marching in order to conquer human sorrow. They have formed their

ranks in order to wipe out all misfortune, in order to vanquish ugliness —and vanquish it they shall! One of them has told me they would light a new sun—and they will surely light it! That they would unite all broken hearts—and they will surely unite them!"

She recalled the words of forgotten prayers, lighting a new faith they sprang from her heart like sparks:

"Our children are treading the path of truth and reason, bringing love to the hearts of men, vaulting the earth with a new heaven, lighting the earth with a new fire—the unquenchable fire of the spirit. From its flames a new life is springing, born of our children's love for all mankind. And who is capable of extinguishing these flames? Who? What force can destroy them? What force oppose them? From the earth have they sprung, and all of life yearns for their victory-all of life!"

Worn out by the strength of her emotion, she left Ludmilla and sat down, breathing heavily. Ludmilla also walked away, silently, carefully, afraid of disturbing something. She moved deftly about the room, the deep glance of her lustreless eyes fixed in front of her, and it seemed that she had become taller, straighter, and more slender. Her thin, severe face expressed deep concentration, and her lips were nervously compressed. The silence in the room soon composed the mother; noticing Ludmilla's mood, she asked guiltily:

"Perhaps I have said something I shouldn't?"

Ludmilla turned and looked at her as though frightened; then she spoke quickly, holding out her hand to the mother as though wishing to stop something.

"No, no. That is how it is; that is how. But we shan't speak about it any more. Let it remain as you have put it." Her voice was more calm as she added: "You must leave soon—you have a long way to go."

"Soon. If you only knew how glad I was! Taking to others the words of my son, the words of my own flesh and blood! It is like giving of my own soul!"

She smiled, but her smile was only vaguely reflected in the face of Ludmilla. The mother felt that her joy was being suppressed by the younger woman's restraint, and suddenly she was filled with a stubborn desire to pour her own fire into that stern soul—to make that other woman also respond to the urgings of a heart bursting

with joy. She took Ludmilla's hands and pressed them tightly as she said:

"Dear heart! How good it is to know there is a light to illumine all people, and that the time will come when all will see it and turn to it with their whole hearts!"

A tremor passed over the mother's large, kindly face; her eyes were radiant, and her brows quivered above them like wings, shadowing their shine. She was dizzy with the great thoughts into which she poured everything seething within her breast, everything that she had lived through. She wrung the essence of these thoughts into the bright crystals of words, which grew and multiplied in this autumn heart, lighted by the creative power of spring sun, burning and glowing there with increasing brightness.

"It is like a new God being born to people! Everything for all—all for everything! That is how I understand it. In very truth we are all comrades, all kindred spirits, all children of one mother, who is truth!"

Once more she was caught up in a wave of emotion. She stopped, took a breath, and flinging her arms wide as an embrace, she said:

"And when I say to myself that word—Comrades—I can hear them—marching—in my heart!"

She had achieved her aim. Ludmilla's face flushed, her lips trembled, and large, transparent tears stole down her cheeks.

The mother enfolded her in her arms, smiling silently and taking a tender joy in her heart's victory.

As they were parting, Ludmilla glanced into the mother's face and said softly:

"Do you know how good it is to be with you?"

XXIX

Once out on the street, the frozen air seized her body in harsh embrace, tickled her nose, and for a second deprived her of breath. She stopped and glanced about: on a nearby corner stood an izvoshchik in a shaggy cap; farther down the street walked a man all bent over, with his head drawn between his shoulders, while up ahead of him ran a soldier, chafing his ears.

"Must have sent the soldier to a shop," she thought, and went on her way, pleased to hear how youthful the crunching of the snow sounded under her feet. She reached the station before train time, but the dirty, sooty, third-class waiting room was crowded with people. The cold had driven track workers inside, as well as izvoshchiks and many homeless, ill-clad people. There were passengers as well, including some peasants, a fat merchant in a racoon coat, a priest and his pock-marked daughter, five or six soldiers, and some restless tradesmen. The people smoked and talked, drank tea and vodka. Someone at the refreshment counter let out a peal of laughter; waves of smoke rolled above the heads. The door squeaked when it was opened, and the windowpanes trembled and clattered when it was banged shut. The room reeked with the smell of tobacco and salt fish.

The mother took a conspicuous seat at the entrance and waited. Whenever the door was opened she was washed by a wave of cold air; she found this pleasant, and drank in deep breaths every time. Most of the people were loaded with bundles, and in their heavy winter clothes they would get stuck clumsily in the doorway, cursing and throwing their bundles on the floor or the benches, grunting as they knocked the frost off their sleeves and collars, their beards and moustaches.

A young man with a tan suitcase in his hand entered the door, glanced quickly about, and went straight to the mother.

"Going to Moscow?" he asked.

"Yes, to Tanya," she replied.

"Ah!"

He placed the suitcase on the bench beside her, lighted a cigarette, tipped his hat, and disappeared through the other door. The mother patted the cold leather of the bag, leaned her elbow on it, and began to examine the people about her with an air of satisfaction. A minute later she got up and took another seat, nearer to the exit. She walked with raised head, glancing at the faces she passed, easily carrying the suitcase, which was not very large.

A young man in a short coat with turned-up collar bumped into her. He silently stepped aside, raising his hand to his head. It seemed to her there was something familiar about him. She glanced back and saw that one of his pale eyes was fastened on her. This attentive

gaze pricked her like a knife; the arm with which she was holding the suitcase jerked convulsively, and suddenly her burden grew heavy.

"I have seen him somewhere before," she thought. She tried to stifle the unpleasant sensation in her breast, and refused to define the feeling which slowly but irresistibly froze her heart. But it grew and rose in her throat, filling her mouth with dry bitterness. She desperately wanted to turn around and have another look at this man. She did so and saw him standing in the same place, shifting from one foot to another as though wanting to do something and not being able to make up his mind. His right hand was thrust between the buttons of his coat, his left was buried in his pocket, thus making his right shoulder seem higher than the left.

She went over to a bench and sat down slowly and carefully, as though afraid of wrenching something inside her. Under the stress of her forebodings, she searched her mind and succeeded in recalling the two occasions on which she had seen this man before: once in the open lot at the edge of town when Rybin had made his escape; the second time at the trial. Then the police officer whom she had set off on the wrong track after Rybin had been standing next to him. She realized that she was being shadowed—that was clear.

"Caught?" she asked herself. A minute later she shuddered and answered:

"Maybe not yet." But immediately she made an effort of will and said sternly:

"Caught!"

She glanced about without seeing anything, while thoughts sparked one after another in her mind:

"Should I leave the suitcase and go away?"

This was replaced by a brighter spark:

"What? Abandon the words of my son? Give them over into such hands?"

She clutched the suitcase.

"Should I go off with it? Run away?"

Such thoughts seemed alien, as though someone else had forced them upon her. They burned into her mind and pierced her heart like fiery threads. The pain of them drove her away from her own self, away from Pavel and all that had become so dear to her. She

felt that some hostile force was pressing down on her shoulders and breast, degrading her with deathly fear. The veins at her temples began to throb violently and she felt the warmth at the roots of her hair.

Suddenly she made a supreme effort and threw off her thoughts, stamping out all these mean, feeble little sparks and saying to herself imperiously:

"Shame on you!"

Immediately she felt better—became, in fact, filled with courage, and added:

"Don't disgrace your son! *They* are never afraid!"

Her eyes met someone's dull, timid gaze. Into her mind flashed the face of Rybin. A few seconds' hesitation made everything more compact within her, and the beating of her heart calmed down.

"What will happen now?" she thought as she glanced about.

The spy called a station guard and whispered something to him, indicating her with his eyes. The guard looked at him and backed away. Another guard came up, listened to what he had to say, and frowned. He was an old man—large, grey-haired, unshaven. He nodded to the spy and made his way toward the bench where the mother was sitting. The spy disappeared.

The guard approached unhurriedly, studying the mother's face with displeasure. She shrank back on the bench.

"If only they don't strike me," she thought.

He stopped in front of her, was silent for a minute, then said quietly:

"What you looking at?"

"Nothing."

"That so? You thief, you! Up to such tricks at your age!"

His words were a blow in the face—once—twice! Their hoarse malice was as painful as though he had ripped open her cheek, gouged out her eyes.

"Me? I'm no thief! You lie!" she cried at the top of her voice, while everything about her tossed in the whirlwind of her indignation, the bitterness of her insult. She wrenched at the suitcase and it came open.

"Look! Look, everybody!" she shouted, jumping up and waving a handful of leaflets above her head. Through the roaring in her ears

she could hear the exclamations of the people who came running from all sides.

"What's happened?"

"Over there—a spy. . . ."

"What's that?"

"They say she's a thief."

"Such a respectable looking woman? Tsck, tsck. . . ."

"I'm no thief!" said the mother in a loud voice, somewhat calmed by the sight of the people crowding about her.

"Yesterday there was a trial of political offenders. and among them was my son, Vlassov. He made a speech—here it is! I'm taking it to the people, so's they can read it and know the truth. . . ."

Someone cautiously pulled one of the leaflets out of her hand. She waved them in the air and tossed them into the crowd.

"They'll give it to you for that!" shouted someone in a frightened voice.

The mother saw them snatch up the leaflets and stuff them inside their coats and into their pockets. This made her stand firm on her feet once more. She began to speak more calmly and forcibly, conscious of the pride and joy growing within her. As she spoke she snatched leaflets from her suitcase, throwing them to right and left, into the hands that eagerly grabbed them up.

"Do you know why they brought my son and all who were with him to court? I'll tell you, and you can believe the heart of a mother and her grey hairs. They brought them to court for the simple reason that they told everyone the truth! And yesterday I found out there is no one who can deny this truth—no one!"

The crowd grew and was silent, forming a ring of living bodies about the woman.

"Poverty, hunger and disease—that's what people get for their work! Everything is against us—all of our lives, day after day, we give our last ounce of strength to our work, always dirty, always fooled, while others reap all the joy and benefits, holding us in ignorance like dogs on a chain—we don't know anything! And in fear—we're afraid of everything! Our lives are just one long, dark night!"

"That's right," came someone's dull response.

"Shut her mouth for her!"

At the back of the crowd the mother noticed the spy and two gendarmes, and she hurried to hand out the last leaflets. But when her hand reached into the suitcase, it came in contact with somebody else's hand.

"Take them, take them," she said as she bent over.

"Break it up!" shouted the gendarmes, pushing the people aside. The crowd reluctantly gave way, pressing against the gendarmes and preventing them from advancing, perhaps without even desiring this. The people were irresistibly attracted to that grey-haired woman with the large candid eyes in her kindly face. Isolated in life, torn away from each other, they now found themselves united into one body, listening with deep feeling to the flaming words which perhaps many of these hearts, hurt by life's injustice, had long been searching for. Those who were nearest the mother stood silent, their eyes fixed on hers with eager attention, and she could feel their warm breath on her face.

"Move on, old woman!"

"They'll grab you in a minute!"

"What a nerve she has!"

"Get out of here! Break it up!" cried the gendarmes, making their way ever nearer. The people in front of the mother swayed and caught on to each other.

It seemed to her that they were ready to understand and to believe her, and she wanted to hurry and tell them all that she knew, all the thoughts whose power she had experienced. They rose easily from the bottom of her heart and formed a song, but painfully she realized that her voice was not capable of singing it—it was hoarse and wavering and broken.

"The words of my son are the honest words of a workingman who has not sold his soul. Honest words—by their boldness you shall know them!"

A pair of youthful eyes were fastened on her with fear and ecstasy.

Someone struck her in the breast and she fell on the bench. The arms of the gendarmes flashed above the heads of the people, clutching at collars and shoulders, throwing people to one side, snatching off caps and tossing them to the other side of the room. Everything grew dark and dizzy in the mother's eyes, but she conquered her weariness to cry out with what was left of her voice:

"Band together, people, into one, strong force!"

A gendarme caught her by the collar with a large, beefy hand and shook her.

"Shut up!"

Her head struck against the wall; for a second her heart was dimmed by a cloud of fear, but then it once again burst into flame, dispersing the cloud.

"Get along with you!" said the gendarme.

"Don't let anything frighten you! Nothing could be more bitter than the lives you live! . . ."

"Shut up, I tell you!"

The gendarme took her arm and gave her a shove. Another gendarme took her other arm and together they led her away.

". . . than the bitterness that eats at your heart and gnaws at your breast every day!"

The spy ran ahead of her, shaking his fist in her face and shouting:

"Shut up, you bitch!"

Her eyes flashed and dilated and her jaw quivered. Planting her feet hard against the slippery stone floor she shouted:

"They can't *kill* my spirit— my *living spirit!*"

"You *bitch!*"

The spy struck her in the face.

"Serves her right, the old hag!" cried someone maliciously.

For a moment the mother was blinded by something black and red, and the salty taste of blood filled her mouth.

She was roused by a rattle of short exclamations:

"Don't dare touch her!"

"Come on, fellows!"

"You scoundrel, you!"

"Let him have it!"

"They can't bloody up our minds!"

They pushed her in the back, in the neck, beat her over the shoulders and the head; everything flashed and whirled in a tornado of shouts and wails and whistles, something dull and deafening struck her ears, filled her throat, choked her, the floor gave way beneath her feet, her knees collapsed, her body winced under lancet thrusts of pain, grew heavy, swayed helplessly. But her eyes did not lose their

shine. And they met other eyes, all of them burning with the bright, bold fire which had become so familiar to her, so dear to her heart.

They pushed her through a door.

She snatched free one of her arms and caught hold of the door-jamb.

"Not even an ocean of blood can drown the truth!"

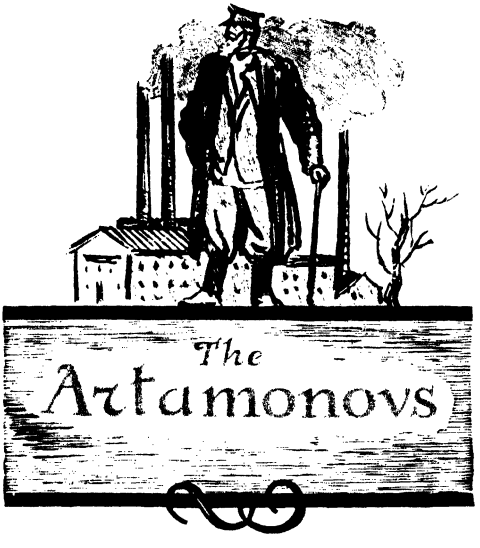
They struck her across the hand.

"You can only make us hate you, foolish people! And all of it will fall on your own heads!"

A gendarme seized her by the throat and began to choke her.

"Miserable creatures..." she gasped.

Someone replied with a loud sob.


The
Artamonovs

TO ROMAIN ROLLAND
MAN
AND POET

I

ABOUT two years after the emancipation, the parish of the Church of St. Nikola noticed an "outsider" at Mass on Transfiguration day. Through the thick of the crowd he pushed, rudely jostling the people, and set up massive candles before the icons most revered in the town of Dryomov. A man of powerful build, with a large, crisp beard, heavily splotched with grey, and a thick crown of blackish hair, as curly as a gypsy's; with a big nose, and blue-grey eyes that looked out boldly from beneath shaggy, beetling brows. It was noticed that, when his arms hung free, his broad palms touched his knees.

He approached the cross among the first, the most prominent townspeople. That displeased them most of all; and after Mass the leading people of Dryomov stopped on the church porch to exchange views about the stranger. Some thought him a cattle dealer, others—a bailiff; and the mayor, Yevsei Baimakov, a peace-loving man of weak health, but good heart, said, coughing mildly:

"Like as not, he used to be a manor serf—a huntsman, or something else of that kind, in charge of the gentry's amusements."

The draper, Ponyalov, nicknamed "Widowed Cockroach," a fidgety sensualist and lover of malicious words, a pock-marked and hideous man, pronounced inimically:

"Did you see his arms—how long they are? And look how he walks—as if it was him all the church bells are ringing for."

Broad-shouldered, big nosed, the man marched down the street, stepping firmly, as on his own land. He wore a blue coat of good cloth, and well-made boots of Russia leather. His hands were thrust into his pockets, his elbows pressed close to his body. Commissioning Yerdanskaya, who baked the wafers for the Eucharist, to find out who the man was, the townsfolk turned home, to the ringing of

the bells, for their holiday meal, with an invitation to meet in Pomyalov's orchard for evening tea.

After dinner, other townspeople saw the stranger across the river, on the "Cow's Tongue" point, on the lands of the princes Ratsky. He moved about among the willow bushes, measuring the sandy point with broad, even paces. Shading his eyes with his hand, he looked back at the town, and at the Oka and its tangled tributary, the marshy, winding little Vataraksha. The people of Dryomov were cautious folk. None had the courage to call out and ask the man who he was, and what he was about. Finally they delegated the policeman, Mashka Stupa—town jester and drunkard. Shamelessly, before all the people, unembarrassed by the women, Stupa pulled off his trousers; but he kept his crumpled shako on his head. Wading across the slimy Vataraksha, he puffed up his drunken belly and approached the stranger at a ridiculous goose step. Very loud, to keep his courage up, he demanded:

"Who are you?"

The stranger's answer was not heard, but Stupa returned to his principals at once, and told the story:

"He wanted to know where I lost my decency. He's got a wicked look in his eyes, just like a highwayman."

In Pomyalov's orchard, that evening, the goitrous wafer baker, Yerdanskaya, famed as a wise woman and a fortune teller, reported to the town's best people, goggling frightfully:

"His name is Artamonov, christened Ilya. Says he's going to live here for his business, only I couldn't find out what sort of business. He came by the road from Vorgorod, and left by the same road a little after three this afternoon."

That was all. They could learn nothing more of interest about the man. It was unpleasant—as though someone had tapped at the window by night, and vanished, bringing wordless warning of approaching calamity.

Some three weeks passed, and the impression had almost faded from the townspeople's memory, when suddenly this Artamonov appeared with three boys, and went straight to Baimakov, declaring assertively:

"Well, Yevsei Mitrich, here are new dwellers under your wise rule. Kindly help me settle here, with you, and build a good life."

Speaking briefly, to the point, he explained that he was a former serf of the princes Ratsky, from their estate near Kursk, on the river Rati, where he had worked as steward for Prince Georgi. After the emancipation he had left, receiving a handsome sum, and decided to start a business of his own: a linen mill. He was a widower. The boys' names: Pyotr, the eldest; Nikita, the hunchback, and Alyosha, the youngest—a nephew, but legally adopted.

"Our peasants don't plant much flax." Baimakov remarked thoughtfully.

"We'll make them plant more."

Artamonov's voice was thick and coarse, and his speech was like a big drum beating. Baimakov, all his life, had walked the earth cautiously and spoken softly, as though afraid of awakening some fearsome being. Blinking his kindly eyes, of a mournful violet, he glanced at Artamonov's boys, who waited stonily by the door. They were of very different types. The eldest resembled his father—broad-chested, bushy-browed, with tiny, bearish eyes. Nikita had the eyes of a girl, large, and blue as his shirt. Alexei was a fine-looking lad, red-cheeked, white-skinned, curlyheaded, with a frank, merry look.

"One for the army?" Baimakov asked.

"No, I need the boys myself. I've got a release."

Artamonov motioned to the boys, commanding:

"Get out."

When they had left the room—quietly, in single file, by order of age—he laid his heavy hand on Baimakov's knee and said:

"Yevsei Mitrich, while I'm at it, I've a match to make: I want your daughter for my eldest."

Baimakov actually took fright, waving his arms and starting up from the bench on which he sat.

"The Lord be with you! I've never seen you before, I don't know anything about you, and you come out with a thing like that! I only have one daughter, and she's too young to be married. And besides, you've never seen her; you don't know what she's like. How can you say such things?"

But Artamonov only smiled into his curly beard, and said:

"You can find out about me from the ispravnik.* He's much indebted to my prince, and the prince has written him to give me help

* Ispravnik—uyezd (district) chief of police.—*Trans.*

in all I undertake. You'll hear nothing bad, I can swear by the holy icons. I know your daughter, too. I know everything in this town of yours. I've been here four times, quietly, and found everything out. My eldest has been here too, and he's seen your daughter—don't you worry about that!"

Feeling like a man in the hug of a bear, Baimakov asked his visitor:

"You wait...."

"I can wait, but not long. I'm too old," sternly replied the masterful stranger. Leaning out through the window, he shouted into the yard:

"Come and bow to your host."

When they had taken their leave, Baimakov turned fearfully to the icons, crossed himself three times, and whispered:

"The Lord preserve us! What sort of people are these? Protect us from harm."

Leaning heavily on his staff, he dragged himself out to the orchard, where his wife and daughter were cooking preserves in the shade of a linden tree. His big, handsome wife asked:

"Who were those young fellows in the yard, Mitrich?"

"Nobody knows. Where's Natalya?"

"Gone to the pantry for sugar."

"For sugar," Baimakov repeated glumly, seating himself on a grassy mound. "Sugar. Yes, it's true what they say: the emancipation is going to make people a lot of trouble."

Glancing at him sharply, his wife asked, with a note of alarm:

"What's wrong? Feeling bad again?"

"My heart is troubled. I have a feeling that man has come to take my place in the world."

His wife tried to console him.

"Don't be silly! There's plenty of people coming into town from the country, nowadays."

"That's just it. They're coming. I won't tell you anything just yet. Let me think it over."

Five days later Baimakov took to his bed, and twelve days later he died. His death threw an even heavier shadow over Artamonov and his boys. Artamonov visited the mayor twice during his illness, and they talked together lengthily, alone. The second time, Baimakov

called in his wife and said, folding his arms wearily on his chest:

"There—talk to her. It looks like I won't be meddling in affairs of this world any longer. Let me rest."

"Come with me, Ulyana Ivanovna," said Artamonov, and left the room, without even glancing back to see whether she was following.

"Go, Ulyana. It seems to be fate," the mayor quietly advised his wife, seeing that she hesitated to follow the visitor. She was a woman of strong character, and clever, one who undertook no action without due consideration; yet, somehow, things turned out so that she returned to her husband, an hour later, and said, shaking the tears from her fine, long lashes:

"Well, Mitrich, it does seem to be fate. Give our daughter your blessing."

That evening she led her daughter, festively attired, to the father's bedside. Artamonov pushed his son forward, and the boy and girl, avoiding one another's eyes, took hands and dropped to their knees. They bowed their heads, and Baimakov, labouring for breath, held over them the ancient, pearl-studded family icon.

"In the name of the Father and the Son.... Lord, do not abandon my only child!"

To Artamonov, he said sternly:

"Remember: you will answer to God for my daughter!"

Artamonov bowed, touching his hand to the floor.

"I know."

Without a kind word for his future daughter-in-law, with barely a glance at her and at his son, he nodded at the door.

"Go."

When the betrothed had left the room, he sat down on the edge of the bed and said firmly:

"Rest easy. Everything will go well. For thirty-seven years, I served my princes, and I never got in trouble. And man isn't God. Man isn't merciful. He's hard to please. You won't regret it either, kinswoman Ulyana. You'll be a mother to my boys, and they'll be ordered to respect you."

Baimakov listened without a word, staring at the icons in the corner. Tears trickled from his eyes; and Ulyana was also crying. But this man went on, regretfully:

"Ah, Yevsei Mitrich, you're leaving us early. You didn't take care of yourself. And just when I need you so bad—it's like a knife at my throat!"

He drew a hand across his beard, in a slashing motion, and sighed loudly.

"I know your affairs. Honest you are, and a good head. You and me together—what couldn't we get done, in another five years! Ah, well, God's will."

Ulyana cried out tearfully:

"Why do you caw like a raven? Why do you frighten us? Maybe...."

But Artamonov got up, and bowed low to Baimakov, as to the dead.

"Thanks for your trust. Good-bye. I have to go down to the river—the barge is in with my stuff."

When he was gone, Baimakova cried indignantly:

"The country lout! Couldn't say a kind word to his own son's betrothed!"

But her husband stopped her.

"Don't fret. Don't worry me."

After a little thought, he said:

"You stick to him. I have a feeling that man's better than our folk here."

The whole town came to honour Baimakov at his burial, and the priesthood of all five churches joined in the services. The Artamonovs followed the coffin immediately behind the wife and daughter of the deceased, to the displeasure of the townspeople. The hunchback, Nikita, walking behind his father and brothers, heard grumbling voices in the crowd:

"A man nobody knows, and he pushes right off into first place."

Pomyalov whispered, rolling his round, acorn-coloured eyes:

"Yevsei, peace to his soul, was a cautious man, and Ulyana's careful too. They'd never do things without good reason. There's a secret in it somewhere. That hawky fellow must have tempted them somehow, or else why should they take him into their kin?"

"Ye-es, it's a dark business."

"That's what I say—a dark business. Counterfeit money, most likely. And to think what a saint Baimakov made himself out!"

Hearing this talk, Nikita bowed his head, and arched his hump as though expecting a blow. It was a windy day. The wind blew at the backs of the people, and the dust raised by hundreds of feet raced after the throng in a smoky cloud, thickly powdering the well-greased, uncovered heads. Somebody said:

"Look at Artamonov, all peppered with our dust. The gypsy's turned grey."

Ten days after the funeral, Ulyana Baimakova and her daughter set out for a nunnery, and Artamonov rented their house. He and the boys lived as though in a whirlwind. From morning to night they were to be seen, striding rapidly up and down all the streets of the town, with a hasty sign of the cross when they passed a church. The father was noisy, indefatigable in his furious energy; the eldest son—glum and reticent, and, seemingly, either timid or bashful. Handsome Alyosha defied the town boys, and winked boldly at the girls. As to Nikita, with his angular hump, he would make off at sunrise to the "Cow's Tongue," across the river. Here carpenters and bricklayers flocked like rooks, erecting a long brick barrack and, some distance off, near the Oka, a big, two-storey house of twelve-inch logs—a house that resembled a prison. Of an evening, the people of Dryomov would gather on the bank of the Vataraksha, nibbling at pumpkin and sunflower seeds and listening to the snorting and whining of the saws, the shuffling of the planes, the resounding blows of the sharp axes. They would speak in mocking tones of the fruitless building of the tower of Babel, and Pomyalov would reassure them, predicting every misfortune to the strangers:

"The spring waters will sap these hideous structures. There might be a fire, too, with the carpenters smoking tobacco, and shavings all over the place."

Consumptive priest Vasili would respond:

"They build on sand."

"When they herd in workers for their mill, we'll have drunkenness, and thievery, and depravity."

To this Luka Barsky, miller and tavern keeper, an enormous man, bloated and padded with fat, would return in a hoarse bass:

"The more people, the more customers. That's all right—let the people work."

Nikita Artamonov afforded the townspeople much amusement.

He cleared a large square of land, cutting and uprooting the willow bushes. Then he spent long days dipping up thick mud from the bottom of the Vataraksha, or cutting peat in the bog, and carting it in a wheelbarrow, bent until his hump pointed straight to the sky. He scattered the mud and peat in little black heaps all over his square of sandy soil.

"He's trying to make a vegetable garden," said the townspeople wisely. "What a fool! Who can fertilize sand?"

At sundown the Artamonovs would wade back across the river, single file, the father at the head, their shadows falling on the greenish water. Ponyalov would whisper, pointing:

"Look, look—the hunchback's shadow!"

And everyone would see that the third shadow, Nikita's, quivered and trembled on the water, and seemed heavier than the longer shadows of the other brothers. One day, after a heavy rain when the water was high, the hunchback caught his foot on a snag, or perhaps slipped into a pit, and disappeared beneath the surface. All the people on the bank guffawed with pleasure, except for little Olga Orlova, the drunken watchmaker's thirteen-year-old daughter, who cried plaintively:

"Oh, oh, he'll drown!"

She was soundly cuffed, and told:

"Don't scream over nothing."

Alexei, wading last, dived, seized his brother, and set him on his feet. When they reached the bank, both soaking wet and black with mud, Alexei advanced straight upon the townspeople, so that they made way before him, and one of them murmured fearfully:

"Ah, the young beast!"

"They don't like us," Pyotr remarked. His father looked back at him, without stopping, and said:

"Give me time—they will."

He scolded Nikita.

"You—scarecrow! Keep your eyes open, and don't make yourself a laughingstock. We're no comedians, drumhead!"

The Artamonovs kept to themselves, seeking acquaintance with none. Their household was run by a fat old woman, dressed all in black, who tied her black kerchief around her head so that the ends stuck up like horns. She spoke very little, and crumbled her words

so strangely that no one could understand her, as if she were not a Russian. There was no information about the Artamonovs to be gotten from her.

"They make themselves out to be monks, the ruffians," people said.

It was ascertained that the father and the eldest son made frequent trips through the surrounding countryside, urging the peasants to plant flax. During one such trip, Ilya Artamonov was attacked by runaway soldiers. With his only weapon, a two-pound weight attached to a rawhide strap, he killed one of the soldiers and cracked another's head. The third ran away. The ispravnik praised Artamonov, and the young priest of the poverty-stricken Ilyinsk parish imposed a penance for the taking of life: forty nights of prayer in the church.

Of an autumn evening, Nikita would read aloud to his father and brothers from the lives of the saints and the sermons of the fathers of the church; but his father would often stop him, saying:

"It's too high-flown, that wisdom, beyond our understanding. We're plain working people, and it's not for us to think about such matters. We were born for simple things. Prince Yuri, peace to his soul—he read through seven thousand books, and he got so deep in all those thoughts that he lost his faith in God. He travelled all over the world, and every king gave him audience. A famous man! But when he built a cloth mill, he couldn't make it pay. Yes, and whatever he put his hand to, it would never work. And so he lived all his life on his peasants."

He would enunciate his words distinctly, pausing to meditate, and to hear the sound of his own speech, before continuing his homily:

"Life will be hard for you. You have to be your own law, and your own protection. Me, I didn't live by my own will—I lived as I was bid. If things were wrong, I could see it, but I couldn't mend it. It was the gentry's affair, not mine. I didn't dare act on my own. I was even afraid to think, for fear of mixing up my own thoughts with the gentry's. Are you listening, Pyotr?"

"I'm listening."

"That's right. I want you to understand. A man's alive, and yet it's just as if he wasn't there. Of course, there's less to answer for. You don't take your own way, you're steered. Life is easier, with nothing to answer for, only—what's the good?"

Sometimes he would talk for an hour, or even two, frequently stopping to inquire whether the boys were listening. He would sit on the stove, his legs dangling, his fingers sunk in his curly beard, and forge his chain of words, link by link, without haste. A warm murk would gather in the clean, roomy kitchen, while the storm whistled out of doors, sliding silkily across the windowpanes; or, perhaps, the world would be blue with frost. Pyotr would sit at the table, with a tallow candle before him, rustling documents and softly casting accounts on the abacus, with Alexei's assistance, while Nikita sat apart, skilfully plaiting osier baskets.

"Now, the tsar, our ruler, has given us freedom. We've got to understand—what's the reason behind it? A person won't let a sheep, even, out of the fold without a reason, and here the whole people's let out—millions of people. That means, the tsar understands there's nothing much to be got out of the gentry, because they use up all they have themselves. Prince Georgi felt it, even before we got our freedom. He told me—serf labour don't pay. And so now the trust is put in us, to work as free men. Even a soldier don't have to drag his gun for twenty-five years, any more. Go ahead and work! Now it's up to everyone to show what he's good for. The nobility—their doom is sealed. You're the nobility—do you hear what I say?"

Ulyana Baimakova stayed at the nunnery for almost three months. When she got home, Artamonov waited only one day before asking:

"How soon do we set the wedding?"

She glared at him indignantly.

"What are you thinking of? Her father dead less than half a year, and you talk.... Don't you know it's a sin?"

But Artamonov sternly cut her short.

"I don't see any sin in it, kinswoman. The gentry do worse things than that, and God stands for them. It's necessity, with me. Pyotr needs a wife."

Then he asked how much money she had. She replied:

"I won't give more than five hundred with my daughter!"

"You'll give more," the big man said, confidently and indifferently, staring straight into her eyes. They sat facing one another across the table, Artamonov leaning on his elbows, both hands sunk in the tangled wool of his beard. The woman frowned, and drew herself up apprehensively. She was in her late thirties, but looked

much younger. Her greyish eyes, set in a plump, rosy face, gleamed with stern intelligence. Artamonov got up, throwing back his shoulders.

"You're good to look at, Ulyana Ivanovna."

"What next?" she demanded, her tone at once angry and ironic.

"Nothing."

He left the room reluctantly, with heavy step. Baimakova turned to look after him, and her glance lingered, in passing, on the cold glass of the mirror. She whispered in vexation:

"The bearded devil. What does he want?"

Oppressed by vague premonitions of danger from this man, she went up the stairs to her daughter's bedroom. But Natalya was not there. Baimakova glanced through the window into the yard. There stood her daughter, by the gate, with Pyotr. The widow ran quickly downstairs and shouted from the porch:

"Natalya! Come home!"

Pyotr bowed to her.

"That's no way, my fine young man, talking to a girl when her mother's not looking. No more of that, now!"

"We're betrothed," Pyotr reminded her.

"That's all the same. We have our own customs here," Baimakova returned. But to herself she wondered:

"What's wrong with me? They're young—why shouldn't they want to be together? It isn't nice of me. As if I envied my own daughter."

Indoors, nevertheless, she tweaked her daughter's hair painfully and forbade her to speak with Pyotr alone.

"You may be betrothed, but who can tell—maybe rain, and maybe snow, maybe yes, and maybe no!" she said severely.

A dark anxiety confused her thoughts. A few days later, she went to Yerdanskaya to ask about the future. All the women of the town carried their sins, their fears and sorrows, to the fat, bell-shaped, goitrous fortune teller.

"There's no need to ask the cards about it," said Yerdanskaya. "I can tell you straight, my dear: you hold on to that man. It's not for nothing I've got such goggle eyes—I understand people. I see into them, like I see into my own deck of cards. See how lucky he is! Everything he starts goes rolling, and all our menfolk are just

slobbering with envy. Don't you be afraid of him, my dear. He don't live like the fox, he lives like the bear."

"That's just it, like a bear," the widow agreed, and sighed. She told the fortune teller:

"I'm frightened. Ever since I first saw him, when he came around asking for my girl. He frightened me. He came so suddenly, as if he fell out of the clouds, a stranger to everyone, and pushing right off into kin. Who ever heard of such a thing? I remember, he talked and I just stared into those bold eyes of his, and said yes to everything, just agreed to everything, as if he had me by the throat."

"That means he believes in his own strength," explained the wise wafer woman.

But all this did not soothe Baimakova's anxiety, though, as she was leaving the dark room, saturated with the heavy odours of drying herbs, the fortune teller added:

"Remember: it's only in fairy tales that fools are lucky."

She was suspiciously loud in her praises of Artamonov, loud and loquacious as a woman bribed. Huge Matryona Barskaya, dark and grim as a salt sander, spoke differently:

"The whole town's groaning and moaning over you, Ulyana. Aren't you afraid of those outsiders? Take care! It's no accident one of the boys is hunchbacked. No light sin his parents must have sinned, for him to be born such a monster."

It was hard on the widow Baimakova, and more and more often she took things out on her daughter, though she realized herself that the girl was in no way to blame. She tried to see as little as possible of her lodgers; but more and more often these people confronted her, shadowing life with alarm.

Winter stole upon the town unnoticed, and descended in a sudden fury of clamorous storms and biting frosts. It heaped the streets and houses with sugary mounds of snow, capped birdhouses and church domes with cotton fluff, and prisoned rivers and rusty swamp water in fetters of white iron. On holidays, the townsfolk gathered on the icebound Oka to do battle with their fists against the peasants of the nearby villages. Alexei joined in every contest; and, each time, returned home bruised and furious.

"What's wrong, Alyosha?" Artamonov would ask. "Do they fight better here than in our parts?"

Alexei would maintain a gloomy silence, rubbing his bruises with a copper coin or a bit of ice, his hawk eyes glittering.

But one day Pyotr said:

"Alexei fights well. It's our own side, the townsfolk, that bruise him up."

Laying his clenched fist on the table, Ilya Artamonov asked:

"Why?"

"Out of hate."

"For him?"

"For all of us taken together."

The father struck the table with his fist. The candle tumbled over and went out. Through the darkness came a muffled growl:

"Hate, and love—you talk like a girl! Don't let me hear the like again!"

Lighting the candle, Nikita said quietly:

"Alyosha shouldn't go to the fights."

"So people will laugh, and say—Artamonov's afraid! Shut up, sexton! Weakling!"

Ilya gave them all a thorough dressing down. A few days later, at supper, he said, with gruff affection:

"You ought to go out after bears, fellows—that's a good sport! I used to go with Prince Georgi, in the Ryazan forests. Spears, we used. It was fine!"

Growing enthusiastic, he described a few successful hunts. A week later, he went to the forest with Pyotr and Alexei, and killed a big bear—an old veteran. Then the brothers went alone, and roused a mother bear. She tore Alexei's sheepskin jacket, and scratched his hip; but in the end the brothers conquered. They brought home a pair of cubs, leaving the dead beast in the forest for the wolves.

"Well, how are your Artamonovs behaving themselves?" the townspeople would ask Baimakova.

"Why, they're all right."

"While winter lasts, swine keep the peace," remarked Pomyalov.

Incredulously, the widow realized that, for some time now, the hostile attitude towards the Artamonovs had begun to offend her, the general dislike for them to breathe its cold on her as well. She saw that the Artamonovs lived in sobriety and concord, persevering in the task they had set themselves, and giving no cause for any

thought of evil. Watchfully observing her daughter and Pyotr, she came to the conviction that this stocky, reticent young man was grave beyond his years. He never tried to press Natalya into a corner, to tickle her, or whisper bad words in her ear, as a town boy would. Baimakova was somewhat disturbed by Pyotr's strange attitude towards the girl, cold, though at the same time solicitous, and even jealous.

"He won't make a tender husband."

One day, however, coming down the stairs, she heard her daughter's voice in the entry:

"Are you going after bears again?"

"We're planning to. Why?"

"It's dangerous. Alyosha got hurt, last time."

"That was his own fault. He was too hasty. So you think about me?"

"I didn't say anything about you."

"You little minx!" the mother thought. She smiled, and sighed. "But he's pretty simple."

Ilya Artamonov told her often, more and more persistently:

"Hurry the wedding, or they'll hurry themselves."

She saw, indeed, that he was right. The girl slept badly, and could not conceal her physical unease. Towards Easter, she took her off again to a nunnery. Returning home, a month later, she found her neglected orchard in model order: the paths weeded, the lichen removed from the trees, the berry bushes trimmed and tied, all by a skilful hand. Turning down the path towards the river, she saw Nikita. He was repairing the fence, which the spring waters had damaged. His bony hump protruded pitifully, sharply outlined under his long linen shirt, and almost concealing his big head and straight, fair hair. To keep the hair back from his face, Nikita had bound it with a supple twig of birch. Grey among the luscious greenery, he called to mind some aged hermit, absorbed to self-oblivion in his task. His axe gleamed silver in the sunlight as he worked, skilfully sharpening a stake. In a thin, girlish voice, he was singing softly—some church tune. The water shimmered, silky green, beyond the fence, and flecks of sunlight played about in it like darting goldfish.

"God speed your work," the woman said, with a warmth quite

unexpected to herself. Turning the mild light of his blue eyes to her, Nikita answered softly:

"Heaven bless you."

"Was it you fixed up the orchard?"

"Yes."

"You did it nicely. Are you fond of orchards?"

Still kneeling at his work, he explained briefly that from the age of nine he had been apprenticed to the prince's gardener. Now he was nineteen.

"For all he's humped, he isn't bitter," the woman thought to herself.

In the evening, when she and her daughter sat at tea in their upstairs parlour, Nikita appeared in the doorway, with a bunch of flowers in his hand and a smile on his sallow, ugly, cheerless face.

"May I offer you a bouquet?"

"What for?" Baimakova asked perplexedly, with a suspicious look at the prettily arranged flowers and grasses. Nikita explained to her that when he lived with the gentry it had been his duty to bring the princess flowers every morning.

"I see," said Baimakova. Flushing a little, she raised her head proudly. "But do I remind you of your princess? She must be beautiful."

"Ah, but so are you."

Baimakova flushed still more. To herself, she thought:

"Did his father put it in his head?"

"Well, thanks for the honour," she said; but she did not invite Nikita to join them at tea. When he was gone, she thought aloud:

"He has nice eyes. Not like his father's. Perhaps they come from the mother's side."

She sighed.

"It looks as if it's fate for us to live with them."

She did not press Artamonov very hard to postpone the wedding until the fall, when a year would have elapsed after her husband's death; but she told him resolutely:

"Only don't you meddle in this business, Ilya Vasilyevich. Let me arrange it all, our own way, the good old way. It will help you, too—you'll get right in among our best people, right in sight of everyone."

"Umph," grunted Artamonov disdainfully. "They can see me well enough as is."

Vexed by his arrogance, she replied:

"They don't like you here."

"Well, then, they'll fear me."

He chuckled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Pyotr, too—he's always droning about likes, and dislikes. You make me laugh."

"Maybe. But I get my share of the dislike, too."

"Don't you worry, kinswoman!"

Artamonov raised a long arm, clenching his fist until the taut skin turned crimson.

"I'm good at breaking people. No one can bother me long. I'll get along without being liked."

The woman said nothing. Shuddering fearfully, she thought:

"The brute!"

And so the day came when her cosy home was thronged with Natalya's friends, the daughters of the town's best families, all richly dressed in brocade gowns of ancient cut, with huge puff sleeves of fine white linen, bright with Mordovian embroidery in coloured silk, with lace at the wrists; all shod in kidskin or morocco slippers, and wearing ribbons in their long braids. The bride-to-be, suffocating in a heavy gown of silver brocade, fastened by gilt open-work buttons from collar to floor, with a jacket of gold brocade thrown over her shoulders, and white and blue ribbons in her hair, sat in the corner under the icons, like a statue of ice, wiping her perspiring face with a lace handkerchief, and "versifying":

Over meadows so gra-assy,
Over flowers, ah, blue as skies,
Rush the waters of the springtime flood,
Frigid waters, ah, and turbid.

Loud and clear, the girls caught up the sinking tones of the maiden's complaint:

Send me forth, then, send the maiden forth,
Send me forth to carry water home.
Send me barefoot through the icy flood,
Send me naked, ah, and unattired.

Alexei, invisible in the crowd of girls, shouted with laughter, crying:

"That's a funny song! They dress the girl up in brocade like a turkey in a tin pail, and then they cry she's naked and unattired!"

Nikita sat near the bride, in a new jacket of blue cloth that bunched up in ugly, ridiculous folds over his hump. His blue eyes, open wide, were fixed on Natalya with a strange expression, as though he feared the girl might melt away and vanish. In the doorway, filling it completely, stood Matryona Barskaya, rolling her eyes and droning, in her deep bass:

"I hear no lament in your song, maidens."

She stepped into the room, with the broad stride of a horse, and began to instruct them sternly in the old customs, in the fear and trembling that must fill the maiden's heart when she prepares for her nuptials.

"It is said, 'Marriage is a stone wall.' Know, then: the wall is strong, not to be broken; the wall is high, not to be overleapt."

But the girls would not listen. It was hot in the room, and crowded. Pushing rudely past the old woman, they raced out of doors, into the orchard. Alexei whirled among them like a bee among flowers, in his yellow silk blouse and wide plush pantaloons, noisy and merry as though he were drunk.

Her eyes goggling, her thick lips pursed offendedly, Barskaya gathered up her damask skirt and ascended the stairs, like a cloud of heavy smoke, to inform Ulyana prophetically:

"Your daughter is merry. It isn't right. It goes against custom. A merry beginning brings a bad end!"

Baimakova was on her knees, rummaging absorbedly in a big, ironbound trunk. Damask, taffeta, red Moscow bunting, Cashmere shawls, ribbons, and embroidered towels were scattered around her, on the bed and on the floor, as in a booth at the fair. A broad sunbeam lay across the bright fabrics, making the colours blaze like a cloud at sunset.

"That's no way, for the groom to live in the bride's home before the wedding. The Artamonovs should have moved."

"Why didn't you say so before? It's too late to talk about it now," grumbled Ulyana, bending low over the trunk to hide her troubled face. The bass voice replied:

"People always called you clever, so I held my tongue. I thought you'd have that much sense. What's it to me? For me, I only want to say the truth. If people won't take it, the Lord will hold it to my credit."

Barskaya stood like a monument, bearing her head as though it were a bowl full to the brim of wisdom. Receiving no answer, she pushed out through the door. Ulyana, kneeling among the flaming colours, whispered in fear and anguish:

"Dear Lord, help me! Don't take my mind."

Again there was a rustling at the door, and she thrust her head hastily down into the trunk, to conceal her tears. It was Nikita.

"Natalya Yevseyevna sent me to ask if you didn't need any help."

"Thanks, dear boy."

"Little Olga Orlova spilled the syrup all over herself, down in the kitchen."

"You don't say! She's a nice little girl, just the bride for you."

"Who'd marry me?"

Out in the orchard, home-brewed beer was in the drinking. At a round table in the shade of a linden tree sat Ilya Artamonov. Gavrila Barsky, Pomyalov, the bride's god-father, Zhiteikin, the blank-eyed tanner, and the wagonmaker, Voroponov. Pyotr stood nearby, leaning against the tree, his dark hair so plentifully greased that his head had a metallic lustre. He listened respectfully to the conversation of his elders.

"Your customs are different," said Artamonov thoughtfully. Pomyalov boasted, in reply:

"We're the real thing here, Great Russia."

"We're no outsiders, either."

"Our customs are ancient."

"They smack of Mordovian, and Chuvash."

Squealing, giggling, jostling, the girls invaded the orchard and thronged around the table, in a bright wreath of colour, to sing greetings to the groom's father:

Oh, great kinsman, here's to you,
To Ilya, ay, to Vasilyevich.
At your first step, may you break a leg,
At your second step, the other leg,
At your third step, may you break your neck.

"There's greetings for you!" cried Artamonov in amazement, turning to his son. Pyotr smiled guardedly, glancing sidewise at the girls and pulling at his ear.

"There's more coming—listen," said Barsky, and laughed aloud.

To our kinsman we're too kind today,
To the robber of our maiden ranks.

"Too kind?" Artamonov's fingers beat a tattoo on the table top. He was clearly aroused, and taken aback.

The girls sang furiously on:

May you fly against the harrow teeth,
Crash on rocks from down the mountain top,
Ah, for fooling and deceiving us,
Ah, for praising and for glorying
Distant places, unknown to us,
Distant hamlets, all desolate,
Sown to sorrow and grief for us,
Sown and watered with tears for us.

"So that's it," cried Artamonov, touched to the quick. "Well, girls, I don't want to make you angry, but I must praise my home parts just the same. Our customs are milder than yours, and our people more civil. We even have a saying: 'The Svapa and Usozha flow into the Seym. Thank the good Lord, it's not the Oka!' "

"Wait! You don't know us yet," said Barsky, and it was hard to tell: was he boasting, or threatening? "Well, tip the girls."

"How much shall I give them?"

"As much as you don't begrudge."

But when Artamonov gave the girls two silver rubles, Pomyalov said angrily:

"You're loose with your money. Showing off!"

"You're certainly hard to please," cried Ilya, angry too. Barsky guffawed uproariously, and Zhiteikin snickered.

The parting of the bride with her girlhood playmates ended at dawn. The guests departed, and most of the household was soon plunged in sleep. Artamonov sat in the orchard, with Pyotr and Nikita, looking about him at the trees, and up at the pink glow of the clouds. Stroking his beard, he said, in a low voice:

"They're a tart people. Not cordial. Pyotr, boy, you do just as your mother-in-law tells you. It's all women's foolishness, but it's got to be done! Where's Alexei? Gone to see the girls home? The girls like him, all right, but not the fellows. Barsky's youngster looks daggers at him.... Yes! You be civil with 'em, Nikita—you're good at that. Be putty for your father. When I make a crack, you fill it in."

He peeped into the huge wooden barrel, and continued glumly:

"They guzzled it all down. They drink like horses. What are you thinking about, Pyotr?"

Fingering his silk sash, a gift from his betrothed, the son replied quietly:

"In the country life is simpler, easier."

"Hmph. What could be simpler—sleeping all day long."

"They're dragging the wedding."

"Have patience."

And at length the day came, a long and difficult day for Pyotr. Sitting beneath the icons, he felt that his brows were drawn together in a grim, forbidding frown. He knew this was not well, that it did not make him pleasing to his bride, but he could not help it. His brows seemed stitched together with a thread he could not snap, and he looked sullenly out from under them at the guests. He threw back his hair, and fresh hops fell from it, scattering over the table and over Natalya's veil. She, too, sat with lowered head, her eyelids drooping wearily. She was very pale, frightened as a child, and trembling with shame.

"Bitter!" roared the scarlet, hairy, bare-toothed mugs, for the twentieth time.

Pyotr turned, wolf-fashion, without bending his neck, raised the veil, and pressed his dry lips clumsily to Natalya's cheek, sensing the satin coolness of her skin, the fearful tremor of her shoulders. He was sorry for Natalya, and he, too, was ashamed. The close ring of drunken guests was yelling:

"The fellow don't know how!"

"Aim for the lips!"

"Wouldn't I kiss her if it was me!"

A woman's drunken voice squealed:

"Just you try!"

"Bitter!" yelled Barsky.

Setting his teeth, Pyotr touched his lips to the moist, quivering lips of the girl. She seemed to be melting away, like a white cloud in the sun. They were both hungry, for they had been given no food since the preceding day. What with the excitement, the sharp smell of liquor, and two glasses of fizzy Don wine, Pyotr felt drunk, and feared his bride might notice his condition. Everything around him swayed and shifted, now merging in one varicoloured whole, now breaking up into rows of red bubbles that were ugly faces. The son looked to his father, in supplication and anger. But Ilya Artamonov, blazing, dishevelled, was staring at Baimakova, shouting straight into her rosy face:

"Kinswoman, I drink your mead to you. It's as sweet as its maker!"

She raised a round, white arm, and the sunlight flashed on her golden bracelet, set with stones of many colours, and gleamed in the pearls on her breast. Like the rest, she had been drinking. A languid smile shone in her grey eyes, and her parted lips quivered temptingly. They clinked glasses, and she drank and bowed to her kinsman. He tossed his shaggy head, crying rapturously:

"You have manners, kinswoman! Princely manners, so help me God!"

Pyotr realized vaguely that his father was not behaving well. Through the drunken yelling of the guests, he heard clearly Pomyalov's spiteful exclamations, Barskaya's rumbling reproaches, Zhiteikin's snickering laugh.

"It's not a wedding, it's a trial," he thought. And again he heard:

"See how he stares at Ulyana, the devil! My, oh my!"

"There's another wedding coming, only without the priest."

For a moment, these words would ring painfully in his ears; but they vanished at once when he felt the contact of Natalya's knee or elbow, sending a dizzy unease through all his limbs. He tried not to look at her, keeping his head turned stubbornly away. But his eyes were not to be controlled. They shifted ever and again in her direction.

"How long does this keep on?" he whispered, and Natalya whispered back:

"I don't know."

"I'm ashamed."

"So am I," came the answer, and he was happy that she felt as he did.

Alexei was with the girls, who feasted in the orchard. Nikita sat indoors, beside a lanky priest with a wet beard and yellow, coppery eyes set in a pock-marked face. Through the open windows facing the yard and the street, the townspeople were looking in: dozens of heads, shifting to and fro against the blue of the sky, appearing and disappearing in constant succession; open mouths, whispering, hissing, shouting. The windows were like open sacks, from which a cascade of noisy heads might at any moment come rolling into the room, like so many watermelons. Nikita particularly noticed the face of Tikhon Vyalov, the ditch digger—red-spotted, with high cheekbones, framed in thick, reddish wool. The eyes, which at first glance seemed colourless, flickered strangely, as though blinking; but it was the pupils that blinked, not the motionless lashes. The lips—thin, sternly compressed, lightly shaded by a curly moustache—were also motionless. The ears lay unpleasantly close to the skull. Vyalov stood with his chest against the window sill. He did not shout or curse when others tried to push him away, but simply brushed them aside with light thrusts of the shoulder or elbow. His shoulders were steeply rounded, and his neck sunk between them, so that his head seemed to grow straight from his chest, and he, too, looked hunchbacked. In his face Nikita found something kindly and prepossessing.

A one-eyed fellow struck a sudden loud blow on the tambourine, and passed his fingers over the leather head. The tambourine whined and droned. Someone whistled shrilly. An accordion struck up. And there was the bridesman, Styopa Barsky, plump and curlyheaded, twirling and stamping in the middle of the room, shouting in time to the music:

Hey, maidens, hey, dear enemies,
Dancers, singers, merry playmates all,
Who has pockets full of clinking gold but me?
Come, then, come, contest the ring and gold with me!

His father stood up, an enormous figure of a man, and roared:

"Styopka! Don't let down the town! Show the Kursk chickabiddies"

Then Ilya Artamonov sprang to his feet, and tossed his shaggy head, his face flushed, his nose scarlet as a glowing ember. He shouted at Barsky:

"Who says chickabiddies! We'll see who knows how to dance! Alyosha!"

Radiant, smiling, Alexei stood for an instant watching the Dryomov dancer. Then, suddenly pale, he was off, whirling around the circle at incredible speed, and squealing like a girl.

"He don't know any words!" cried the Dryomov folk, and Artamonov roared furiously:

"Alyoshka! I'll kill you!"

His feet tapping without pause, Alexei thrust two fingers between his lips and emitted a piercing whistle, after which he chanted clearly:

When Mokei was lord and master,
He drove his servants fast and faster
Now Mokei, gay Mokei,
Waits upon table himself, they say!

"Take that!" Artamonov grunted in triumph.

"Aha!" exclaimed the priest significantly, and raised one finger, with a shake of the head.

"Alexei will outdance your fellow," Pyotr said to Natalya, and she answered timidly:

"He's light on his feet."

The fathers urged on their sons like fighting cocks. They stood shoulder to shoulder, both half drunk—the one enormous, clumsy as a sack of oats, with tears of drunken rapture trickling from the narrow red slits under his brows; the other tense as though on the point of leaping, his long arms twitching, his hands stroking his thighs, his eyes almost insane. Guessing at the movement of the jaws under his father's jerking beard, Pyotr reflected:

"He's grinding his teeth. He's liable to hit out at someone."

"Crude dancing, Artamonov!" came Matryona Barskaya's metallic bass. "No steps! Poor!"

Ilya Artamonov laughed into her face, dark and round as a fry-

ing pan. He laughed up her thick nose. Alexei had won. The Barsky boy was staggering towards the door. Ilya seized Baimakova roughly by the arm, commanding:

"Come on, kinswoman, it's your turn!"

She turned pale. With her free hand, she tried to push him away, exclaiming, in startled indignation:

"Are you mad? Don't you know it's wrong?"

The guests fell silent, grinning slyly. Pomyalov glanced at Barskaya. His words came out like hissing oil:

"That's all right! Dance, Ulyana, to please us! The Lord will forgive."

"The sin's mine!" cried Artamonov.

His intoxication seemed to lift. He advanced, frowning, as though into battle, as though not of his own will. Someone pushed Baimakova forward. The drunken woman lurched and stumbled. Then, throwing back her shoulders, tossing her head, she was off around the circle. Pyotr heard shocked whispers:

"The Lord preserve us! Her husband not a year in the grave, and she marries off her daughter and dances at the wedding!"

He did not look at his wife, but felt that she was ashamed of her mother's conduct, and muttered:

"Father shouldn't be dancing."

"Neither should mother," she replied, her voice low and sad. She was standing on the bench, looking over the people's heads into the close circle. Suddenly dizzy, she clutched at Pyotr's shoulder.

"Careful!" he said caressingly, lifting a hand to her elbow to support her.

Through the open windows, over the heads of the onlookers, poured the reddish light of the setting sun; and in this light, like blind creatures, the man and the woman whirled and circled. People were shouting and laughing out of doors, in the orchard, the yard, the street; but silence hung ever more heavy in the stuffy room. The taut leather of the tambourine droned dully, the accordion shrilled and squealed, and these two whirled feverishly on, ringed in by the close circle of young men and girls. The young folk watched in silent gravity, as though this dance were a matter of extraordinary import. Most of the elders had gone out into the yard, only those remaining who were too dazed with drink to move.

Artamonov stamped his foot and stood still.

"You've got the better of me, Ulyana Ivanovna!"

The woman started. She, too, stood suddenly still, as before a stone wall. Bowing low to the circle, she said:

"Don't think ill of me."

And at once she left the room, fanning herself with her kerchief. Now Barskaya took the floor.

"Separate the bride and groom! Pyotr, you come with me. Groomsmen, take his arms!"

Thrusting aside the groomsmen, the father laid his heavy hands on his son's shoulders, saying:

"Go, and God grant you happiness!"

He embraced his son, then pushed him away. The groomsmen seized Pyotr's arms. Barskaya led them off, spitting to right and left and muttering:

"Tfu, tfu! No illness, no sorrow, no envy, no dishonour, tfu! Fire and water know time and place, not for misfortune, for happiness!"

When Pyotr followed her into Natalya's room, where a high, soft bed stood ready, the old woman sat down heavily on a chair in the middle of the room.

"Listen, and remember!" she began solemnly. "Here are two half rubles. Put them in your boots, at the heel. When Natalya comes, she'll kneel to take your boots off. Don't let her."

"What on earth is all that for?" asked Pyotr glumly.

"That's not for you to understand. Three times refuse, and the fourth time let her take them off, and then she'll kiss you three times, and you give her the half rubles, and say, 'This I give to thee, my slave, my fate!' Don't you forget! Well, then undress and lie down with your back to her, and she'll beg you to let her in for the night. But you keep still, only the third time she asks hold out your hand to her—understand? Well, and then...."

Pyotr stared wonderingly into the broad, swarthy face of his preceptress. She sat there, licking her lips, her nostrils distended, mopping the sweat with her kerchief from her greasy neck and chin, pronouncing coarse, shameless words with masterful precision. In parting, she repeated:

"Put no faith in screams, put no faith in tears." Then she staggered out of the room, leaving the heady smell of drink behind

her. Pyotr was seized by a frenzied anger. He pulled off his boots and hurled them away, undressed quickly, and sprang onto the bed, as though mounting a horse. He clenched his teeth, lest he sob aloud with the humiliation that seethed within him.

"Swamp devils!"

The down bed was hot. He slipped out and went to the window. When he threw it open, he was deafened by the drunken uproar in the orchard, by heavy laughter and girlish screams. Dark figures wandered in the blue dusk beneath the trees. The thin spire of the Church of Nikola pierced the sky, a copper finger. The cross was missing. It had been taken down for gilding. Looking out over the roofs of the town, Pyotr saw the Oka, gleaming mournfully in the yellow light of a shard of melting moon, and, beyond the river, the black outlines of the boundless forests. He recalled another land—a spacious land, bright with fields of golden grain—and sighed. Footsteps and tittering laughter sounded on the stairs. He jumped back into bed. The door opened. There was a rustle of silken ribbons. Shoes creaked. Somebody sniffed tearfully. The hook clicked as the door was fastened. Pyotr cautiously raised his head. In the semi-darkness just inside the door stood a white figure, slowly making the sign of the cross, bowing almost to the ground.

"She's praying. I didn't."

But he had no desire to pray.

"Natalya Yevseyevna," he said softly. "Don't be afraid. I'm scared myself, and all worn out."

With both hands, he smoothed back his hair. Pulling at his ear, he muttered:

"There's no need for that business, taking off the boots and all. It's just foolishness. My heart aches, and that woman talks foolishness. Don't cry."

Timidly, sidewise, she crossed the room to the window. Looking out, she said softly:

"They're still celebrating."

"Yes."

For a long time they spoke thus, pointlessly, both tired and somehow afraid, lacking the resolution to approach one another. Towards dawn, the stairs creaked, and a hand fumbled against the wall. Natalya went to the door.

"If it's Barskaya, don't let her in," Pyotr whispered.

"It's mother," said Natalya, lifting the hook. Pyotr sat up on the bed, his feet dangling to the floor. He was dissatisfied with himself, reflecting drearily:

"I'm no good. I didn't have the nerve. She'll laugh at me."

The door opened, and Natalya said softly:

"Mother wants you."

She leaned against the stove, almost invisible against the white tile. Pyotr went out. In the darkness outside the door Baimakova whispered hotly, frightened and offended:

"What are you doing, Pyotr Ilyich? Do you want to bring shame on me and my daughter? It's almost morning, and they'll soon be here to wake you. I must show the people my daughter's shift, so they'll know she's honest!"

She had laid one hand on Pyotr's shoulder. With the other she kept jerking him, indignantly demanding:

"What is it? Are you weak, or cold? Answer! Don't frighten me!"

Pyotr said dully:

"I'm sorry for her. And scared."

He could not see the widow's face, but it seemed to him that she laughed.

"You go ahead and do your work like a man! Pray to Saint Christopher. Go. Wait, let me kiss you."

Throwing her arms around him, she kissed him with sweet, sticky lips that breathed the warm odour of wine. She was gone before he could respond, and his loud kiss met the air. He returned to the room and locked the door behind him, then stretched out his arms determinedly. The girl moved forward and entered his embrace. Tremulously, she said:

"Mother's had too much wine."

It was not such words Pyotr had been expecting. Backing towards the bed, he muttered:

"Don't be afraid. I may not be handsome, but I'm kind."

She pressed closer and closer to him, whispering:

"I'm falling."

... They liked to feast, in Dryomov. The wedding dragged out for five days. They were at it from morning to midnight, thronging

up and down the streets from house to house, reeling in a drunken haze. The Barskys offered the richest and most ostentatious feast of all; but Alexei thrashed their boy for some insult to little Olga Orlova, and Artamonov was very much surprised when the parents complained to him about it.

"Who ever heard of boys not fighting?"

He showered the girls with ribbons and sweets, and the lads with money, plied the fathers and mothers mercilessly with drink, and embraced all and sundry, crying:

"Hey, everybody! This is something like!"

Artamonov conducted himself boisterously, and drank without measure, as though to quench a fire within him—drank, and did not get drunk. He became perceptibly thinner in these few days. Though he kept away from Ulyana Baimakova, his sons noticed that his eyes often turned to her, in a wrathful, demanding glance. Making a great boast of his strength, he tugged the pole against soldiers from the town garrison, and outwrestled a fireman and three bricklayers. Then Tikhon Vyalov, the ditch digger, came up to him, not proposing, but demanding:

"Now me."

Surprised by his tone, Artamonov looked the stocky ditch digger up and down.

"What are you—strong, or boastful?"

"I don't know," the man replied gravely.

Seizing each the other's belt, they tugged and strained resultlessly for some time. Over Vyalov's shoulder, Ilya winked shamelessly at the women. He was taller than the ditch digger, but slimmer, and somewhat better built. Vyalov thrust a shoulder against Ilya's chest, trying to lift his opponent and throw him to the ground behind him. But Ilya, at once aware, cried:

"That's no trick, brother! That's too simple!"

Suddenly, grunting, he himself threw Vyalov up and over his head, with such force that the ditch digger's legs were numbed by the fall. Sitting up on the grass, and brushing the sweat from his cheeks, Vyalov said shamefacedly:

"He's strong."

"We can see that," jeered the onlookers.

"He's hale," Vyalov repeated.

Ilya stretched out a hand to him.

"Get up!"

Ignoring the proffered hand, the ditch digger attempted to get up alone, but failed. Again he sat with outstretched legs, looking after the crowd with strange, melting eyes. Nikita came up to him, asking sympathetically:

"Does it hurt? Can I help?"

The ditch digger laughed drily.

"My bones ache. I'm stronger than your father, only not so quick. Well, let's follow on, Nikita Ilyich, simple soul!"

He took the hunchback's arm, and they followed the crowd together. Vyalov kept stamping heavily, perhaps in the hope of easing the pain in his legs.

Spent with weariness and lack of sleep, constantly on display, the young couple moved submissively up and down the streets with the bright, noisy, drunken crowd, or ate and drank at table, blushing at the shameless jokes addressed to them on every side. They tried very hard not to look at one another, or even to speak. Walking always arm-in-arm, sitting always side by side, they bore themselves like strangers. Matryona Barskaya was delighted with their conduct, and bragged to Ilya and Ulyana:

"Did I teach your son well? I should think so! Look, Ulyana, how I trained your daughter! And what do you say to your son-in-law? A regular peacock! This isn't me, says he, and it's not my wife!"

In their own room, however, Pyotr and Natalya would cast off together with their clothing all the mannerisms imposed upon them, and dutifully accepted, when in public, and talk together of the day's experiences.

"Don't they drink, though, in your town!" exclaimed Pyotr wonderingly.

"Do they drink less in your parts?" asked his wife.

"Peasants can't drink like that!"

"You don't seem like peasants."

"We were manor folk—that's a sort of aristocracy."

Sometimes they would sit at the window in silence, their arms around one another, breathing the delicious fragrance wafted in from the orchard.

"Why don't you say anything," the wife would ask softly, and, softly, the husband would answer:

"I don't feel like ordinary talk."

He longed for talk that would be different, not ordinary; but Natalya could not fill his need. And when he spoke himself, describing the boundless breadth and expanse of the golden steppes, she would ask:

"No forests, no nothing? Oh, how fearful it must be!"

"Fear lives in the forest," Pyotr answered dully. "What fear can there be in the steppe? There, it's just the earth, and the sky, and me."

Once, as they sat by the window, looking out in silent pleasure at the starry night, they heard some movement in the orchard, near the bathhouse. Somebody was running, crashing through the raspberry bushes. Then came a low, angry exclamation:

"What are you doing, you devil?"

Natalya sprang up, frightened:

"It's mother!"

Pyotr leaned out of the window, his broad back blocking it entirely. By the bathhouse stood his father, pressing his mother-in-law against the wall and trying to throw her down. The woman struggled, striking out at his head and whispering breathlessly:

"Let me go, or I'll scream!"

Then, frantically, she cried:

"Dear heart, don't touch me! Have pity."

Pyotr closed the window noiselessly, caught his wife in his arms and sat her down on his knees.

"Don't look out."

She writhed in his embrace, crying:

"What's the matter? Who is it?"

"Father." Pyotr replied, holding her tight. "Don't you understand?"

"Oh, how can they," she whispered, in shame and fear. Her husband carried her to the bed, and told her quietly:

"It's not for us to judge our parents."

Natalya rocked back and forth, her head in her hands, moaning:

"The sin, the sin!"

"It's not our sin!" said Pyotr, and, recalling his father's words,

added: "The gentry do worse. And besides, it's better that way—he won't come pestering you. The old folk, they take things simply. They don't call it sin to force a daughter-in-law. Don't cry."

Through her tears, his wife said:

"When they danced, that time, I thought.... If he forced her, what are we going to do?"

Wearied by her emotion, however, she soon fell asleep. Pyotr opened the window and looked out into the orchard. Not a living soul, only the sighing breeze, and the trees tossing in the fragrant darkness. Leaving the window open, he lay down beside his wife, reflecting, with open eyes, on what had occurred. It would be nice to live on a little farm somewhere, just he and Natalya....

Natalya woke early. It seemed to her that she had been awakened by pity for her mother, and sympathy with her hurt. Barefoot, in only her shift, she ran quickly down the stairs. The door to her mother's room was always locked for the night, yet now it stood ajar. This frightened her. Looking in, however, at the bed in the far corner, she saw a white mound under the sheet, and dark hair scattered over the pillow.

"She's asleep. How she must have cried and sorrowed!"

Something must be done to console her injured mother. Natalya went out into the orchard. The grass, dew-laden, tickled and chilled her feet. The sun had just come up over the forest, and she was blinded by its slanted rays, still barely warm. She pulled a burdock leaf, silver with dew, and laid it first to one cheek, then to the other, then, refreshed, bent to gather red currant clusters into it. Her thoughts turned, without anger, to her father-in-law. He had a way of slapping her shoulder heavily, and asking, with a chuckle:

"Alive, are you? Well? That's right, live!"

It seemed he could find no other words for her. She was a little offended, too, by his kindly slaps—caresses fit for horses.

"Brute!" she thought, forcing herself to hostility against him.

Birds were twittering, and a silky rustling came from the leaves overhead. A shepherd blew his pipe, far off at the end of the town, and human voices floated lazily, through the clear, bright hush, from the bank of the Vataraksha, where the mill was coming up. Something clicked. Natalya started and raised her head. On an apple tree,

just above her, hung a siskin in a snare, struggling desperately to escape.

"Who set the snare? Nikita?"

A dry twig cracked somewhere in the orchard.

When she returned to the house and looked in at her mother's room, the widow was awake, lying on her back, with an arm under her head and her eyebrows raised in an expression of surprise.

"Who's there?" she cried, starting up in alarm. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I've picked you some currants to have with your tea."

On the table by the bed stood a big carafe that was used for kvass, almost empty. Its stopper lay on the floor. The tablecloth was stained with kvass. The mother's light, stern eyes were circled with a bluish shadow, but they were not swollen with tears, as Natalya had expected. They seemed darker, more deeply set; and her gaze, always somewhat haughty, was now strangely absent and aloof.

"The mosquitoes keep me awake. I'll have to start sleeping in the shed," the mother said, drawing the sheet up around her neck. "I'm all over bites. What made you get up so early? And why'd you walk barefoot in the dew? Your shift is wet. You'll catch cold."

The mother spoke reluctantly, without tenderness, as though absorbed in thoughts of her own. The daughter's anxiety was gradually giving way to the eager, resentful curiosity of one woman towards another.

"I woke up early, and you came into my thoughts. I dreamed about you."

"And what were your thoughts?" the mother inquired, her eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"Just that you sleep all alone now, without me."

It seemed to Natalya that her mother's cheeks flushed, and that her smile, as she replied, "I'm not afraid," was not altogether genuine.

"You'd better go. Your darling's awake—don't you hear him tramping about?" said the mother, closing her eyes.

Going slowly up the stairs, Natalya thought squeamishly, almost inimically:

"He spent the night with her. The kvass was for him. Her neck's all bruised—that's not mosquito bites, it's kisses. I won't tell Petya about it. She's going to sleep in the shed. And yet, she screamed."

"Where've you been?" asked Pyotr, looking closely at his wife. She dropped her eyes, feeling guilty, she did not know why.

"I picked some currants, and went in to see mother."

"Well, how is she?"

"She seems all right."

"So," said Pyotr, pulling at his ear. "So!"

He smiled wryly, and sighed, rubbing the reddish stubble on his chin.

"It looks like that fool woman Barskaya was right—put no faith in screams, put no faith in tears."

Then he asked, sternly:

"Did you see Nikita?"

"No."

"What do you mean, no? There he is now, snaring birds in the orchard."

"Oh, my," cried Natalya, frightened. "And I was out there just like this, in nothing but my shift!"

"There you are!"

"But when does he sleep?"

Pyotr, who was pulling on his boots, grunted loudly. His wife said, glancing at him sidewise, with a little smile:

"You know, for all he's a hunchback, he's nice—nicer than Alexei."

The husband grunted once more, but not so loud.

. . . At sunrise every morning, when the shepherd set out to gather his flock, drawing plaintive music from his long pipe, the sound of axes would begin beyond the river, and the townspeople, driving out their cows, would say to one another mockingly:

"Hark! They're at it again, before the day's begun."

"Greed—the mortal foe of peace."

Sometimes it seemed to Ilya Artamonov that he had overcome the lazy hostility of the town; for the Dryomov folk tipped their hats to him respectfully, and listened attentively to his stories about the princes Ratsky. Almost invariably, however, one or another of them would remark, not without pride:

"Our gentry here are simpler, and poorer, but they're stricter than yours!"

Of a holiday evening, in the shady orchard of Barsky's tavern on the bank of the Oka, he would say to the rich folk, the strong folk of Dryomov:

"My business will bring profit for all of you."

"God grant it," Pomyalov would reply, twisting his lips in a short, currish smile; and it would be impossible to tell: was he about to lick one's boot, or bite? His crumpled features were ill-framed in a thin, hempen beard. His leaden nose sniffed suspiciously at everything, and malice lurked in his acorn-coloured eyes.

"God grant it," he repeated. "Of course, we got on pretty well without you, but maybe we'll get on with you just as well."

Artamonov frowned.

"You speak with double meaning, not like a friend."

Barsky shouted, guffawing.

"That's the kind he is!"

Where Barsky's face should have been, there were a few crimson hunks of meat, carelessly slapped together. His enormous head, his neck, cheeks, arms—all of him was thickly overgrown with coarse bear's wool. His ears were out of sight, and his eyes, seeming unwanted in all this flesh, were hidden behind padded fat.

"All my strength goes into fat," he would say, and roar with laughter, his wide open mouth revealing full rows of huge, blunt teeth.

The wagonmaker, Voroponov, would turn his colourless eyes on Artamonov, and his dry little voice would admonish:

"Business has to be done, but God's work mustn't be forgotten either. Is it not said, 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful.'"

His eyes, colourless and almost blank, seemed to hint that Voroponov guessed at hidden things, and might at any moment astound them all by some extraordinary pronouncement. Sometimes he spoke as though on the very point of such a revelation:

"Of course, even Christ partook of bread, so that Martha. . . ."

"Hold on, hold on," the tanner Zhiteikin—a churchwarden—would put in. "Look out where you're going!"

Voroponov would fall silent, his drab ears twitching. Ilya asked the tanner:

"You, now—do you understand my business?"

"Why should I?" Zhiteikin returned, in genuine surprise. "It's your business, and it's your job to understand it, you queer fish! Yours for you, and mine for me."

Artamonov drank his thick beer, looking out through the trees at the muddy ribbon of the Oka, and, further left, at the green serpent curves of the winding Vataraksha, where it came crawling out of spruce groves and swamps to join the bigger river. Chips and shavings gleamed on the point, splotching the gold brocade of the sand. A russet glow came from the piled bricks. Among the trampled willow bushes, like an open coffin, stretched the long, beef-coloured building that was to be the mill. A warehouse seemed to blaze as the setting sun caught at the lustreless, still unpainted iron of its roof. The slanting rays made molten wax of the yellow walls of the two-storey dwelling house, with its taut golden rafters high against the sultry sky. As Alexei had aptly put it, the house, from the distance, looked like a cithara. Alexei lived out on the point, at a good distance from the town boys and girls. He was hard to manage, hot-tempered and defiant. Pyotr was a heavier nature. There was something turbid about him; he did not yet realize how much could be done by boldness and resolution.

A shadow passed over Artamonov's face. Turning, he glanced at the townspeople from under his bushy brows, and smiled contemptuously. These were a cheap sort, weak in the will to do, and void of spirit.

By night, when the town lay fast asleep, Artamonov would steal, like a thief, along the bank of the river, by back ways, to the widow Baimakova's orchard. Mosquitoes hummed in the warm darkness, as though it were they that spread over the earth the pleasant odours of cucumbers, apples, and dill. The moon rolled among grey banks of cloud, and soft shadows caressed the river. Stepping over the fence, Artamonov stole softly through the orchard, to the yard. Now he entered the dark shed, and an anxious whisper sounded in the corner:

"Are you sure you weren't seen?"

Throwing off his clothes, he grumbled crossly:

"It makes me sick, hiding this way. Like a green boy!"

"Then you shouldn't keep a mistress."

"I wouldn't, either, only the Lord found me one."

"Oh, what are you saying, heretic! You and I are sinning against God."

"Well, well, let that be. Some other time. Ugh, Ulyana, but the people in this town. . . ."

"Don't let them bother you," the woman whispered, and consoled him with long, fierce caresses. When she had rested, she would tell him about the townsfolk: which were to be feared; which were clever, and which dishonest, and which had money to spare.

"They know you need plenty of wood, so Pomyalov and Voroponov are planning to buy up all the timber round about, to make things hard for you."

"Too late. The prince has sold me his timber."

Around them and over them hung impenetrable darkness. They could not see even one another's eyes. They spoke in soundless whispers. The shed smelled of hay, and birch brooms; and a damp, pleasant coolness rose from the cellar below. The little town lay drenched in a heavy, leaden quiet. Now and then a rat would scamper through the straw, or a mouse squeak faintly; and every hour the cracked bell in St. Nikola's belfry would send its dreary, quavering call into the night.

"Ah, the bigness of you." Artamonov murmured ardently, stroking her warm, soft body. "The power! Why didn't you bear more children?"

"There were two, besides Natalya. They were sickly, and died."

"Then your husband was no good."

"You wouldn't believe it," she whispered, "but until you came I didn't know what love was. Women would talk about it, but I never believed them. I thought they were lying, out of shame! I knew nothing but shame with my husband. Going to bed was like going to the block. I used to pray to God for him to fall asleep, and not touch me! He was a good man, peaceable, and clever, only God didn't give him the gift of love."

Her story aroused Artamonov, and at the same time amazed him. Firmly caressing her high breasts, he grumbled:

"So that's the kind of things that happen. I never knew. I thought any man would be sweet to a woman."

He felt stronger, wiser, beside this woman, whom he knew by day as a quiet, even, prudent housewife, respected by the town for her intelligence and literacy. Once, touched by her girlish caresses, he said:

"I know what this costs you. We shouldn't have paired off the young ones—you and I should have married."

"Your boys are good fellows. No harm if they do find out about us. But if the town finds out. . . ."

A shudder shook her whole frame.

"Don't you worry," whispered Ilya.

Another day, she asked curiously:

"Tell me: that man you killed—do you dream about him?"

Calmly smoothing his beard, Ilya replied:

"No. I sleep soundly. No dreams. And why should I dream about him? I didn't even see him. Somebody hit me, and I almost toppled over. I swung my weight, and it hit someone on the head, and then I hit another, and the third ran away."

He sighed, and muttered resentfully:

"Fools run into you, and you have to answer for them to God."

He did not speak for a while. She asked:

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

"You'd better be starting. It's almost dawn. Where will you go—to the mill? Ah, but you'll wear yourself out, all on account of me."

"Never fear. I stood the grey days, and I'll stand the holidays," he boasted, dressing.

He would walk through the cool, pearly shadow of early morning—walk on his own land, his hands thrust under his coat behind him, raising the cloth like a rooster's tail. Trampling the chips and shavings underfoot, he might reflect:

"I'll have to let Alyosha sow his wild oats, till he stops frothing. He's hard to manage, but he's a good lad."

Lying down on the sand, or on a pile of shavings, he would quickly fall asleep. Now dawn spread softly over the greenish sky. The boastful sun unfurled its rays, a peacock train, and then rose,

golden, at their very heart. The building hands, awakening, spied the big, prostrate form, and the warning passed on:

"He's here!"

Tikhon Vyalov, with his high cheekbones, an iron pick over his shoulder, stood looking down at Artamonov with flickering eyes, as though desiring to step over him, but lacking in resolution.

The big man was not awakened by the bustle of the workers, by the shouts and hammering. He lay with his face to the sky, snoring away like a saw that needs sharpening. The ditch digger strode off, with many a backward glance, blinking like one who has been struck over the head. Alexei came out of the house, in a white linen shirt and blue trousers. He made for the river to bathe, treading lightly as on air, and carefully detouring his uncle, as though afraid the faint rustle of shavings underfoot might awaken him. Nikita had driven off before dawn. Almost every day, he brought in a cartload or two of humus from the forest, to spread over the land he had cleared for his orchard. He had already planted birches, maples, rowans, and bird cherry, and was now preparing the ground for fruit trees, digging deep pits in the sand and filling them up with humus, river mud, and clay. On holidays Tikhon Vyalov would lend him a helping hand.

"Planting orchards is no sin, even on holy days," he would say.

Pyotr Artamonov paced the building site, pulling absently at his ear, observing the work. A saw ate lusciously into wood; planes shuffled, wheezing, to and fro; axes tapped loud and clear; mortar splashed wetly onto masonry, and a whetstone sobbed against a dull axe edge. Carpenters, lifting a beam, struck up *Dubinushka*, and somewhere a young voice sang out lustily:

Friend Zachary visited Mary,
Punched her mug to make her merry.

"That's a coarse song," Pyotr observed to Vyalov. The ditch digger, knee-deep in sand, returned:

"It don't make any difference what you sing."

"What do you mean?"

"There's no soul in words."

"A queer fellow," thought Pyotr, turning away. He recalled that,

when his father had offered Vyalov the job of overseer, this man had replied, his eyes fixed on the ground:

"No, I'm no good for that. I can't order people around. Take me on as yardman."

Artamonov had cursed him roundly.

... Autumn came, cold and wet. Rust covered the orchards, and spotted the black iron of the forests. A damp wind whistled over the point, driving the pale, trampled shavings into the river. Every morning, carts drawn by shaggy horses would roll up to the warehouse. The carts were loaded with flax. Pyotr would examine the merchandise, watchful lest these bearded, gloomy peasants try to fool him with "sweaty" flax, dampened to increase its weight, or to pass off the ordinary grade for the long-fibre. It was hard, dealing with the peasants. Fiery Alexei would bicker with them furiously. The father left for Moscow, and then Pyotr's mother-in-law set out too, to pray at a nunnery, or so she said. Of an evening, at tea or supper, Alexei would complain peevishly:

"It's no fun living here. I don't like the people."

This invariably angered Pyotr.

"You're no better than them! Picking quarrels right and left. You boast too much."

"I've something to boast of, that's why."

Tossing his curls, throwing back his shoulders, and puffing up his chest, he would stare impudently, through screwed-up eyes, at his brothers and sister-in-law. Natalya avoided him, and treated him coldly. She seemed to fear something about him.

After dinner, when her husband and Alexei went off to work again, she would go to Nikita's tiny, monkish room and sit down with her sewing in the armchair by the window. The hunchback had made this chair for her himself, carving it skillfully of birch. Entrusted with the office work, he sat at his desk from morning to night, writing and drawing up accounts; but when Natalya came in he would drop his work for a while, and talk to her of the princes, and how they lived, and the flowers that grew in their hothouses. His high, girlish voice was strained, yet caressing, and his blue eyes stared out through the window, avoiding the woman's face. Bending over her sewing, she would fall into a thoughtful silence, like a person alone with himself. Thus they would sit, for an hour, or sometimes two,

hardly glancing at one another; only now and then, timidly, half involuntarily, Nikita would turn the caressing warmth of his blue eyes upon his sister-in-law, and his big, dog ears would redden perceptibly. Sometimes his momentary glance would cause her, too, to look up, smiling kindly at him. It was a strange smile. At times Nikita felt that it concealed a dim understanding of his emotion. At others, it seemed to express a sense of injury, and, simultaneously, to injure him: and he would drop his eyes guiltily.

Rain splashed and murmured outside the window, washing away the faded tints of summer. They heard Alexei shouting somewhere. A bear cub, recently chained in a corner of the yard, roared loudly. A dull clatter rose from the mill, where the women were scutching flax. Alexei came clattering in, soaking wet, spattered with mud, his hat pushed far back on his head—yet reminiscent, nonetheless, of a day in spring. Laughing, he reported that Tikhon Vyalov had chopped off a finger.

"He pretends it was an accident, but it's clear enough: he's afraid of the draft. Me, I'd go like a shot, just to get away from here."

He scowled, and grumbled, like the bear cub:

"Stuck ourselves in a hole, miles from anywhere."

Then he extended a demanding hand.

"Give me some change. I'm going to town."

"What for?"

"None of your business."

As he marched out, he began a song:

See the wench run through the clover.
Bringing patties to her lover.

"Ah, but he'll land in trouble some day," said Natalya. "My friends often see him with Olga Orlova, and she's only fourteen. Her mother's dead, and her father's a drunkard."

Nikita was disturbed by her manner. He seemed to hear too much melancholy, too much anxiety, even a hint of envy, in her words.

He looked silently out through the window. Pine boughs were swaying in the damp air outside, flinging the quicksilver raindrops from the tips of their green needles. He had fostered those pines. All the trees around the house were of his planting.

Pyotr came in, gloomy and tired.

"Time for tea, Natalya."

"It's early."

"It's time, I say!" he shouted. When his wife had left the room, he sat down in her place. He, too, grumbled and complained:

"Father dumped the whole business on my shoulders. I spin like a wheel, and I don't know where I'm rolling. If I'm not running things right, he'll have it in for me."

Nikita spoke to him, in mild and cautious terms, about Alexei and the Orlova girl; but Pyotr only waved his hand, evidently not listening.

"I have no time to bother with girls! I don't even see my wife, except at night, when I'm half asleep. In the daytime I'm blind as a bat. Your head's full of foolishness."

Pulling at his ear, he went on guardedly:

"It's no sort of business for us, this mill. We ought to go out in the steppes, and buy some land, and work it. There'd be less noise, and more results."

Ilya Artamonov returned from his trip in excellent spirits looking years younger. He had clipped his beard, and his shoulders seemed broader than ever, his eyes brighter. He was like a plough reforged. Sitting back easily on the sofa, he said:

"Our enterprise must advance like an army on the march. There will be plenty of work for you, and your children, and your grandchildren. For three hundred years to come. We Artamonovs—we'll bring new life to the country's business!"

He eyed his daughter-in-law searchingly, and shouted:

"Rounding out, Natalya? If it's a boy, I'll give you a fine present."

In the evening, as they were preparing for bed, Natalya said to her husband:

"Father's nice when he's gay."

Her husband answered coldly, with a sidelong glance:

"Of course he's nice—he promised you a present."

After two or three weeks, however, Artamonov's liveliness slumped, and he seemed preoccupied with some absorbing thought. Natalya asked Nikita:

"What's father angry at?"

"I don't know. He's hard to understand."

That same evening, at tea, Alexei said suddenly, very loud and clear:

"Father! Let me off to the army."

"Wh-what's that?" cried Ilya.

"I won't live here."

"Get out!" Artamonov ordered them all; but when Alexei went to the door with the rest, he shouted:

"Wait, Alyosha!"

For a long time he stood looking at the boy, his hands behind his back, his eyebrows twitching. Then he said:

"And I put such hopes in you!"

"I can't live here."

"Humbug! Your place is here. Your mother gave you to me, for mine. Go!"

Alexei took one halting step, but his uncle stopped him again, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"I'm too easy with you. My father would have used his fists. Go."

Yet once more he called to the boy to wait, and added sternly:

"You're going to be a big man—understand? Don't let me hear any more whining."

Alone, he stood for a long time at the window, tugging at his beard, watching the wet, grey snow drift down to earth. When the night outside grew dark as a cellar, he set out for the town. Baimakova's gate was already locked. He tapped at the window, and Ulyana herself came to let him in. Frowning, she asked:

"What's brought you here at such an hour?"

Without pausing to reply, or even to take off his coat, he strode past her into the rooms. Flinging his hat into the corner, he dropped into a chair, and, his elbows on the table, his fingers in his beard, told her about Alexei.

"He was born on the side—my sister fooled around with the master. And there you are. Blood tells."

She tried the shutters, to see that they were well fastened, and blew out the candle. A blue lamp on a silver stand glowed faintly in the corner, under the icons.

"Get him a wife. That will tie him down," she said.

"Yes. That's got to be done. Only that isn't all. Pyotr—he has no spirit in him. It's just too bad. A man without spirit can't make

nor break. He works as if it was still for the master, not for himself, as if he was still a serf. He don't feel his freedom—understand? Nikita—what's there to say about him? He's a cripple. He thinks of nothing but trees and flowers. I thought Alexei would get his teeth into the work."

Baimakova tried to reassure him.

"You're worrying too soon. Have patience. When the wheel starts turning faster, it'll pull them in."

They sat talking until midnight, side by side in the warm hush of the room, with the dim cloud of bluish light shimmering over the timid bud of flame in the icon corner. From complaints of the lack of business spirit in his own boys, Artamonov turned to the townspeople:

"Small-souled creatures."

"They dislike you because fortune favours you. We women love for that, but to a man, another man's good luck is just an eyesore."

Ulyana Baimakova knew how to soothe and console. Artamonov only grunted when she said:

"One thing I'm scared to death of—a baby."

"Business in Moscow's like a pot aboiling," he continued, rising, and embraced her. "Ekh, if only you were a man. . . ."

"Go, my dear. Good-bye!"

He kissed her and left.

. . . During Shrovetide, Yerdanskaya brought Alexei home from town in a sledge, beaten to loss of consciousness, his clothing ripped and torn. Yerdanskaya and Nikita rubbed his body with grated horseradish and vodka, but for a long time he only groaned, and did not speak. Artamonov strode about the room like a wild beast, rolling up his shirt sleeves and pulling them down again, gritting his teeth. When Alexei came to, he roared, waving his fists:

"Who was it? Talk up!"

Opening one swollen eye, dark with pain and anger, gasping for breath, and spitting blood, Alexei wheezed only:

"Finish me off."

Natalya sobbed aloud in fright. Artamonov stamped furiously, and yelled at her:

"Shut up! Get out of here!"

Alexei clutched his head, as though trying to pull it off, and moaned.

Then, throwing out his arms, he rolled over on his side and lay still, his bloodstained mouth wide open with his wheezing breath. A candle flickered on the table beside the bed, and shadows crawled over his battered body, making it seem to swell and blacken. The brothers stood, silent and depressed, at the foot of the bed, while the father paced the room, demanding of some invisible arbiter:

"Won't he come through?"

But after eight days Alexei was on his feet again, though he still coughed soggily and spat blood. He took to steaming himself in the bathhouse, and drinking peppered vodka. A dark, sullen fire kindled in his eyes, and they became still more handsome. He would not say who had beaten him, but Yerdanskaya found out, and reported: Stepan Barsky, two firemen, and Voroponov's Mordovian yardman. When Artamonov asked Alexei whether this was so, he replied:

"I don't know."

"You're lying!"

"I didn't see 'em. They threw something over my head, from behind—a coat, it must have been."

"You're hiding something," said Artamonov. Alexei looked straight at him, with an unwholesome light in his eyes, and said:

"I'm going to get well."

"You should eat more." Artamonov advised, and muttered into his beard: "They ought to be torched, for such a job—get their paws roasted."

He became more attentive towards Alexei, more roughly affectionate; and he worked with demonstrative energy, making no secret of his aim: to inspire the boys with his own passion for labour.

"Put your hand to everything. Don't stick up your nose at any job," he urged them, and himself did much that might have been left to others. In everything he undertook, he displayed a swift, animal instinct, that enabled him to tell just where resistance was strongest, and how most easily to overcome it.

His daughter-in-law's pregnancy dragged out abnormally. When, finally, after two days of torment, Natalya gave birth to a girl, he was sorely vexed.

"What's the use of that?"

"Thank the good Lord for his mercy," Ulyana told him sternly. "Do you know whose day this is? Elena of the Flax!"

"No!"

He seized the church almanac and looked up the date, pleased as a child.

"Take me to her!"

Laying a pair of ruby earrings and five gold pieces on Natalya's breast, he cried:

"There you are! Well done, though it's not a boy!"

And, turning to Pyotr, he demanded:

"Well, old fish, are you glad? I was, when you were born!"

Pyotr was staring apprehensively at his wife's face—bloodless, tortured, barely recognizable. Her weary eyes had sunk into dark pits, whence they looked out at persons and things as though recalling long-forgotten memories. Slowly, she passed her tongue over her bitten lips.

"Why don't she say anything?" Pyotr asked his mother-in-law.

"She's yelled enough," returned Ulyana, and pushed him out of the room.

For two days and two nights he had listened to his wife's cries. At first he pitied her, and feared that she would die. Later, half stupefied by her screams and by the bustle which filled the household, he was too worn for fear or pity. He tried only to get away as far as possible, to some place where he would not hear. But the cries were not to be escaped, for they rang within his brain, evoking the most remarkable thoughts. And wherever he went, he came across Nikita, with an axe or a spade, cutting, chopping, digging, hurrying to and fro with the noiseless tread of a mole. The hunchback seemed to be running in circles. Perhaps that was why he turned up everywhere.

"Looks like she won't come through," Pyotr said to his brother. Thrusting his spade into the sand, the hunchback asked:

"What does the midwife say?"

"She says not to worry, it'll be all right. What makes you shiver

"I've got a toothache."

Sitting on the porch with Nikita and Tikhon, the evening after the child was born, Pyotr said, with a thoughtful smile:

"They put the baby in my arms, and I was so glad I didn't even feel the weight. I almost threw her up to the ceiling. It's strange, a tiny thing like that, and so much suffering on account of it."

Tikhon Vyalov, meditatively rubbing his cheek, said, in his usual quiet tone:

"All human sufferings come from little things."

"What do you mean?" asked Nikita severely. The yardman, yawning, replied indifferently:

"Things just are that way."

They were called into the house for supper.

The child was big and healthy, but after five months it died, poisoned by charcoal gas. The mother, also poisoned, was barely saved.

"Well, it can't be helped," Artamonov told Pyotr at the cemetery. "She'll bear you other children. And now we have a grave of our own here. That's a deep anchor. When a man has his own around him and his own below him, his own above ground and his own under ground—that's when he takes firm root!"

Pyotr nodded. He was watching his wife. Natalya stood, awkwardly bowed, her eyes fixed on the tiny mound at her feet, which Nikita was carefully smoothing with a spade. Brushing the tears from her cheeks with feverish haste, as though afraid to burn her fingers against her red, swollen nose, she whispered:

"Oh Lord, oh Lord. . . ."

Alexei rambled about among the crosses, reading inscriptions. He had grown thin, and looked older. Dark down had begun to grow on his cheeks and chin, making his non-peasant features seem scorched and smoke-blackened. His insolent eyes, sunk deep under their black brows, regarded all the world with dislike. He spoke dully, in a haughty, patronizing manner, with what seemed deliberate indistinctness, and when people failed to make him out, would curse them shrilly.

"You heard me, all right!"

There was a scoffing, unpleasant note in his attitude towards his brothers, and he shouted at Natalya as though she were a servant. When Nikita said reproachfully:

"You shouldn't be so mean to Natasha," he returned:

"I'm a sick man."

"She's peaceable enough."

"Well, and she can keep her peace."

Alexei spoke often of his ill health, and almost always with pride, as of some virtue distinguishing him from ordinary mortals.

Walking home from the cemetery with his uncle, he said:

"We ought to have our own graveyard. It's a disgrace to lie with this lot, even when you're dead."

Artamonov replied, with a short laugh:

"We will. Everything of our own—church, and cemetery, and school, and hospital. Just give me time!"

Crossing the bridge across the Vataraksha, they passed a beggar-like figure of a man, in a shabby, rust-coloured smock, leaning against the rail. He looked like some petty official, ruined by drink. His flabby cheeks were overgrown with stiff grey stubble; his hairy, mumbling lips exposed black stumps of teeth, and a muddy light gleamed in his moist eyes. Artamonov turned his face away and spat. Noticing, however, that Alexei nodded with unusual deference to this human trash, he asked:

"What's the idea?"

"That's Orlov, the watchmaker."

"I can see myself it's Orlov!"

"He's a man with a head," Alexei persisted. "He's been persecuted."

Artamonov glanced sharply at his nephew, but said nothing.

The summer came, hot and dry. Beyond the Oka, forest fires were frequent. By day, the earth was shadowed by an opal cloud of acrid smoke; by night, the bald moon, turned an ugly red, hung among rayless stars that looked like copper nailheads, and the river, mirroring the muddy sky, seemed a chill, viscous stream of subterranean smoke.

After supper, one stifling evening, the Artamonovs sat at tea in the orchard. A group of maples ringed in the table. The trees had taken well, but their leafy crowns could give no shade in the evening murk. Crickets were chirping, beetles droning. The samovar hummed. Natalya silently poured tea. She had undone the upper buttons of her blouse, and her skin showed in the opening, warm and creamy. The hunchback sat with bent head, whittling twigs for bird cages. Pyotr, pulling at the lobe of his ear, said, very low:

"It can't do any good—provoking people, and father does it all the time."

Alexei kept coughing drily, turning his head in the direction of the town as though in expectation.

A bell clanged drearily.

"Alarm? Fire?" cried Alexei, and sprang up, lifting a hand to his head.

"What's wrong with you? It's the church bell, ringing the hour."

Alexei left the table. There was a silence, and then Nikita remarked softly:

"He's got fires on his brain."

"He's always cross," put in Natalya diffidently. "And to think how gay he used to be!"

Sternly, as became the elder, Pyotr reproached his wife and brother:

"You stare at him like morons, both of you. He can't stand being pitied. Let's go to sleep, Natalya."

They left. The hunchback followed them with his eyes. Then he, too, got up, and went to the summerhouse, where he had made up a bed of hay. He sat down on the threshold. The summerhouse stood on a grass-covered mound. Looking out over the fence from the doorway, he could see the houses of the town, a dark flock, shepherded by the church steeples and the firemen's lookout. Dishes tinkled under the maples, where the servants were clearing the tea table. A group of weavers passed along the fence. One carried a dragnet, and one a clattering pail. Another was striking sparks with flint and steel, trying to catch them on tinder in order to light his pipe. A dog growled, and Tikhon Vyalov's calm voice sounded through the quiet night:

"Who goes?"

A hush spread over the earth, strained and taut as a drumhead. Even the weavers' footsteps, crunching faintly in the sand, were echoed by it, painfully distinct. Nikita loved the stillness of such nights. The deeper the hush, the more intensely did his every power of imagination centre round Natalya; the more clearly could he envision her dear eyes, always a little frightened or wondering. And it was so easy to think up all sorts of happy eventualities. Perhaps he would find a great treasure, and give it to Pyotr, and Pyotr would give him Natalya. Or perhaps robbers would attack, and he would perform

such deeds of heroism that his father and brother would give him Natalya of their own free will, as a reward for what he had done. Or sickness might come, and carry off all the family but two: himself and Natalya; and then he would make her see that her happiness lay in him.

It was past midnight when he noticed a new cloud rising from the motionless shadows of the orchards, over the herded houses of the town, ascending slowly into the dark-grey murk of the sky. A moment later, it was lit up redly from below, and he realized that it marked a conflagration. Running towards the house, he saw Alexei scrambling up a ladder to the warehouse roof.

"Fire!" Nikita shouted. His brother replied, still climbing:

"I know. What of it?"

"Why, you were expecting one," said the hunchback suddenly, stopping short in the middle of the yard.

"And if I was, what of it? There's always fires in such dry weather."

"We ought to call the weavers."

But Tikhon had already called them, and they were running off towards the river, shouting noisily.

"Climb up here," said Alexei, who was now seated astride the ridge of the roof. The hunchback climbed up obediently, muttering:

"I hope Natalya won't get scared."

"Aren't you scared Pyotr might thrash another hump onto your back?"

"Why should he?" asked Nikita softly. And the answer came:

"Keep your eyes off his wife."

For a long time the hunchback could not answer. He felt as though he were slipping, sliding down the roof. In another moment, he would be dashed against the ground.

"What do you mean? You should think before you talk," he muttered.

"All right, all right! I'm not blind.... Don't worry," said Alexei, cheerfully as he had not spoken for a long time past. Shading his eyes with his hand, he watched the heavy, rocking tongues of flame that shattered the stillness, transforming it into a muffled roaring. With lively interest, he rattled on:

"It's the Barskys. They've got a good score barrels of tar in their yard. The fire won't spread to the neighbours—the orchards will stop it."

"I must run away," Nikita was thinking, as he looked out into the firetorn darkness. In the red air stood trees that seemed forged out of iron; on the red earth bustled toylike human figures. He could even see the long, thin hooks they thrust into the fire.

"It's burning fine," said Alexei approvingly.

"I'll go to a monastery," thought the hunchback.

Pyotr's voice came up to them, grumbling crossly and sleepily in the yard, then Tikhon Vyalov's leisurely reply. Natalya stood in the window, crossing herself, like a portrait in a frame.

Nikita sat on the roof until nothing was left of the fire but a bed of golden, flickering embers around the black piles of the chimneys. Then he climbed down, and started out through the gate, but bumped into his father—soaking wet, smeared with soot, his cap gone and his coat in tatters.

"Where are you going?" yelled Artamonov with extraordinary fury, and pushed Nikita back into the yard. Catching sight of the white figure on the roof, he shouted at Alexei, more savagely still:

"What are you doing up there? Get down! You've got to take care of yourself, you fool."

Nikita went into the orchard, and sat down on the bench under his father's window. Soon he heard a door slam, and Artamonov's voice, in the room above him, demanded with smothered passion:

"Are you out to ruin yourself? And bring shame on my head? I'll show you...."

Alexei returned shrilly:

"You gave me the idea yourself."

"Shut up! You'd better thank God that rascal can't talk."

Nikita got up and retreated softly, but hastily, through the orchard to the summerhouse.

Next morning, at tea, the father said:

"It was arson. That drunkard, the watchmaker, did it. They beat him up, and it looks like he'll die. Barsky ruined him, people say, and he had a grudge against Styopa, too. It's a dark business."

Alexei sat calmly drinking milk. Nikita's hands were shaking. He

thrust them between his knees, and gripped them hard. The father, noticing his movement, asked:

"What's wrong with you?"

"I'm feeling sick."

"You all feel sick. I'm the only one that's well."

Angrily pushing away his unfinished tea, he left the table.

Artamonov's business was rapidly gathering people. Two versts from the mill, on heathery hillsides, among scattered spruces, cabins were built—small and squat, without gardens or fences, veritable beehives when viewed from a distance. Near a shallow gully, once the bed of a river whose very name was now forgotten, Artamonov set up a barrack for workers who had no families. This was a long building, with a single-pitched roof and three chimneys, with tiny windows, designed to prevent the escape of warmth. The windows made the place look like a stable, and the workers called it, "Stallions' Palace."

Ilya Artamonov became increasingly noisy and boastful; but he did not acquire the hauteur that comes with wealth. He was at home with the workers—feasted at their weddings, acted godfather to their children, and liked to sit around, of a holiday, talking with the older weavers. They gave him the idea of advising the peasants to plant flax on exhausted soil, and on the sites of forest fires. The results were excellent. The old weavers sang the praises of their genial employer, seeing in him a peasant who had gained the smiles of fortune; and they admonished the youth:

"Learn from him how business is done!"

Ilya Artamonov, on his part, told his sons:

"Peasants, working folk, have more sense than townsfolk. People in towns are weak in the bone, and their brains are battered. A townsman is greedy, but he's afraid to dare. His enterprise is shallow, and nothing he does will last. Townspeople know no measure in anything. The peasant, he keeps inside the bounds of truth; he don't fling about from one thing to another. And truth to him is simple: God, for instance, and grain, and the tsar. He's simple through and through, the peasant. Hold on to him. You, Pyotr, you're stiff with the workers. You talk about nothing but business. That's no good. You need small talk, too, and jokes—cheerful talk is easier understood."

"I'm no good at joking," said Pyotr, pulling mechanically at his ear.

"Learn to be good at it. A minute's fun—an hour's run of energy. Alexei's no good with the men either. He shouts too much, and picks on every trifle."

"They're cheats and loafers," Alexei returned, with spirit.

Artamonov rebuked him sternly:

"What do you know about them?" But he smiled into his beard, and covered the smile with his hand so they would not notice it. He recalled how boldly and sensibly Alexei had borne himself in the argument with the townspeople over the cemetery. The Dryomov folk had refused to have mill hands buried in their cemetery, and in the end Artamonov had had to buy a big stretch of alder grove from Pomyalov and clear a graveyard of his own.

"A graveyard," meditated Tikhon Vyalov, as he and Nikita felled the slender, sickly alders. "We use the wrong word in the wrong place. We call it a yard, and it's our home for all eternity. Houses, and towns—those are the yards you pass through to eternity."

Nikita had found that Vyalov worked with an easy proficiency, evincing greater logic in his labour than in his obscure and always unexpected pronouncements. Like Artamonov, he would quickly find the point of least resistance in any task, husbanding his strength and getting things done by craft and skill. But there was a difference, clearly defined: Artamonov set about every task with zeal, while Vyalov seemed to work reluctantly, as though purely out of kindness—like a man who knows that he is capable of better things. In speaking, too, his manner was the same: laconic, condescending, significant, with a shade of casual indifference, as though hinting:

"I know plenty more, besides. I haven't said the half!"

And to Nikita his every word seemed to carry vague hints, arousing a feeling of resentment towards this man, of fear, and at the same time of keen, uneasy curiosity.

"You know a lot," he said to Vyalov. The yardman answered leisurely:

"That's what I live for. If I know, it's no misfortune. I know for myself. What I know is locked up in a miser's strongbox. Nobody sees it. You can rest easy about it."

Tikhon never questioned people about their thoughts. He would

just stare at a person persistently, his bird-eyes flickering, and then, as though he had absorbed the other's thoughts, speak suddenly of things that he was never meant to know. Sometimes Nikita wished Vyalov would bite off his tongue, or chop it off, as he had his finger. Even that he had bungled, crippling the left hand instead of the right. Artamonov, and Pyotr, and all the rest thought Vyalov a fool; but he seemed no fool to Nikita, whose mingled feeling of curiosity and fear towards this strange, high-cheeked man grew steadily. The element of fear was particularly accentuated when Vyalov suddenly remarked, one day, as he and Nikita were walking home through the forest:

"You're still eating yourself. Why don't you tell her, you goose? Perhaps she'd be nice to you. She seems kind."

The hunchback stopped short, his heart sinking in dismay, his feet heavy as lead. He mumbled confusedly:

"Tell what? Tell who?"

Vyalov only glanced at him, and made to stride on. Nikita clutched at the yardman's sleeve, but Tikhon brushed his hand away disgustedly.

"What's the good of shamming?"

Dropping the birch sapling he carried on his shoulder, Nikita cast a desperate look around him. He wanted to strike Tikhon's rugged face, wanted to make him hold his tongue. But Tikhon, staring through screwed-up eyes into the distance, spoke with his usual quiet composure:

"And if she isn't kind, she might pretend to be. Women—they're inquisitive. There isn't a one wouldn't like to try another man, to see if there's anything sweeter than sugar. For us, it isn't much we need. Once, and again—and we're satisfied and well. And you just eat yourself. Try your luck: tell her. Maybe she'll be willing."

Nikita sensed in these words a note of friendly pity, such as he had never before encountered; and his throat contracted bitterly. Yet at the same time he felt that Tikhon was stripping, denuding him.

"You're talking nonsense," he said.

Bells were ringing in the town, calling the people to evening services. Tikhon adjusted his load of saplings and moved on, jabbing at the ground with his iron spade and saying, in the same calm tones:

"Don't you fear me. I'm sorry for you. You're a nice fellow, and interesting. All you Artamonovs are terribly interesting. You're not like a hunchback inside at all, for all the hump on your back."

Nikita's fright dissolved in surging melancholy. His eyes dimmed, and he stumbled like one drunk. He felt like dropping to the ground to rest. Softly, he pleaded:

"Keep it to yourself, will you?"

"I told you—it's locked up, all safe."

"Forget about it. Don't tell her anything."

"I never talk to her. What should I talk to her about?"

They walked the rest of the way in silence. The hunchback's blue eyes grew bigger, rounder, sadder. He would stare over people's shoulders into nothingness, more silent and inconspicuous than ever. But Natalya noticed that something was wrong.

"What makes you so glum lately?" she asked. Nikita replied:

"Too much work"—and made off hurriedly. She felt hurt, for this was not the first time she had sensed a change in her brother-in-law's former affection. It was but a dull life she led. In four years, she had borne two more girls, and now she was heavy again.

"Why do you keep having girls? What's the good of them?" her father-in-law had grumbled, when the second was born. He had made her no gift, and to Pyotr he had complained:

"I need grandsons, not sons-in-law. I didn't start my business for strangers."

His every word imbued the woman with a sense of guilt. Her husband, too, she felt, was ill pleased. Lying beside him at night, her eyes fixed on the distant stars beyond the window, she would stroke her belly, praying silently:

"Dear Lord, a son."

But there were times when she wanted to shout at her husband and father-in-law:

"I'll have girls on purpose, just to spite you!"

She would have liked to do something extraordinary, something that would surprise them all—something wonderful, to make them kinder to her, or something bad, to frighten them. But she could think of nothing concrete, good or bad.

Rising at dawn, she would go down to the kitchen to help the cook prepare the morning tea. Then she would run upstairs to feed

her children, then serve tea to her father-in-law, her husband, and her brothers-in-law, then feed the children again, then sew and mend for the family. After dinner, she would take the children to the orchard, and remain there until evening tea. Lively bobbin girls would peep into the orchard, and contend in praising the children's good looks. Natalya would smile, but give their praise no credit. She saw no beauty in the children.

Sometimes, among the trees, she would see Nikita—the only one of them all who spoke to her kindly. But nowadays, when she asked him to sit with her awhile, he would answer guiltily:

"I'm sorry. I have no time."

Gradually, a bitter thought took shape in her mind. The hunchback's kindness, she felt, had been counterfeit. He was only her husband's watchdog, set to spy on her and Alexei. She was afraid of Alexei, because he attracted her. Should this handsome brother-in-law desire, she would be unable, she knew, to withstand him. But he did not desire. He hardly noticed her. This pricked her vanity, and aroused a feeling of enmity towards the lively, daring fellow.

At five o'clock they had tea, and at eight supper. Then Natalya would bathe the children, feed them, and put them to bed. Afterwards, she would pray lengthily, kneeling, and lie down beside her husband in the hope of conceiving a son. If her husband wanted her, he would grumble, from the bed:

"That's enough. Come on."

She would cross herself hastily, cutting short her prayer, and lie down obediently beside him. Sometimes, very seldom, Pyotr would jest:

"Why do you pray so much? You can't get all you ask for anyway, or there wouldn't be anything left for the rest of the world."

At night, when wakened by a child's cry, after nursing and soothing the baby, she would go to the window and stand looking out at the orchard and the sky, thinking wordlessly about herself, her mother, her father-in-law, her husband—about all the hard day, so quickly past, had brought her. It was strange not to hear the accustomed voices, the songs of the working girls, now gay, now sad, and all the varied clatter and rustlings of the mill, merging in the loud hum of an enormous hive. The days were always filled by

this persistent, hurried tumult. Its echoes floated through the rooms, murmured in the orchard foliage, brushed softly against the windowpanes. The sounds of labour, compelling attention, prevented thought.

But in the stillness of night, when all living things lay silent and asleep, she would recall Nikita's dreadful tales of women captured by the Tatars, and of the lives of sainted hermits and martyrs. Sometimes she would recall tales of gay and happy life; but more often it was painful thoughts that recurred to memory.

Her father-in-law looked at her as if she were not there. That, at best. But sometimes, when he met her alone in the hall or in the rooms, his keen eyes would look her shamelessly up and down, from breast to knee, and he would snort disgustedly.

Her husband was stern and cold, and she felt, sometimes, when he looked at her, as though she were in his way, as though she blocked his view of something different that lay behind her. Often, when he had undressed, he would sit for a long time on the edge of the bed, one hand sunk into the feather mattress, the other pulling at his ear, or rubbing his beard against his cheek, as though his teeth ached. His ugly face would pucker up in a querulous or angry frown, and Natalya would not dare approach the bed. He talked very little, and only of domestic affairs, recurring ever more seldom to his memories of peasant and manor life, so incomprehensible to Natalya. During the winter holidays, Christmas and Shrovetide, he would take her driving through the town. The sleigh would be drawn by a huge black stallion. It had coppery yellow, bloodshot eyes, and it tossed its head with angry vehemence, snorting loudly. Natalya was afraid of this beast, and her fear increased when Tikhon Vyalov declared:

"It's a horse for blue bloods. It won't be ruled by commoners."

Natalya's mother was a frequent visitor. The daughter envied her mother's freedom, the festive gleam that lit her eyes. This envy became the keener, the more painful, when Natalya saw how youthfully Artamonov jested with her mother, how complacently he stroked his beard, admiring his mistress, who posed proudly before him, swaying her hips, shamelessly vaunting her beauty. The town had long since learned of Baimakova's intimacy with her kinsman, and condemned it rigorously. She was shunned by all.

Natalya, too, lost her former friends, the daughters of the town's best families. They were forbidden to visit her—the daughter of a woman sunk in sin, the daughter-in-law of a grim and alien peasant, the wife of a moody and pride-bloated husband. The little joys of girlhood now seemed to Natalya significant and vivid.

It was painful to see her mother, always so straightforward in the past, now stoop to cunning and prevarication. Natalya felt that the widow was afraid of Pyotr, and tried to hide her fear by flattering words, by admiration of his efficiency. She must have been frightened, too, of Alexei's mocking eyes; for she would bandy friendly jokes with him, and whisper with him secretively, and she often made him presents. On his saint's day, she brought him a porcelain clock, adorned with grazing sheep and a woman wreathed in flowers—a beautiful thing, and artfully made. Everyone admired it.

"Someone left it with me for a debt," she explained. "Only three rubles. It doesn't go—it's too old. When Alyosha gets married, he'll have something to fix up his house with."

"I wouldn't mind fixing up mine," thought Natalya.

The mother would inquire about household affairs, instructing Natalya tediously:

"Don't put napkins out on weekdays. They get soiled too fast, with the men's beards and moustaches."

Though she had liked Nikita at first, she now pursed her lips when she saw him, and talked to him as people talk to clerks whom they suspect of dishonesty. She warned her daughter:

"See you don't get too friendly with him. Hunchbacks are sly."

More than once, Natalya thought of complaining to her mother that her husband did not trust her, and had set the hunchback to keep watch on her; but something always stopped her.

Worst of all, however, were the times when the mother, disturbed at Natalya's failure to bear sons, questioned her about her nightly dealings with her husband—questioned her shamelessly, without concealment, her humid eyes screwed up and smiling, her voice sunk to a velvety purr. This curiosity was very hard to bear, and Natasha would be only too pleased to hear her father-in-law call:

"Will you be driving home, kinswoman?"

"I'd rather walk."

"All right. I'll see you home."

Natalya's husband said thoughtfully:

"She's a clever woman, your mother, keeps father well in hand. When she's around, he's not so hard on us. She ought to sell her house and move in here."

"I wouldn't like that," Natalya wanted to say; but she did not dare. More bitterly than ever, she envied her mother for being happy and beloved.

Sitting at a window that opened into the orchard, or out under the trees, with her sewing in her hands, she would hear fragments of talk from beyond the berry bushes, where Tikhon and Nikita were at work on something near the bathhouse. Through the drone of the mill came the yardman's calm voice:

"When folks get the dumps, it comes from too many people. They all dump themselves together, the dummies, and there they are—in the dumps!"

"How true!" thought Natalya; but Nikita's pleasant voice remonstrated:

"You're all mixed up. What about games, and dances? There's no fun without people."

"That's true, too." reflected the woman, marvelling.

All the people she knew talked so confidently, with such firm knowledge—each his own. She could clearly envision it: simple, solid words, fitted smoothly and closely together, fencing off for each speaker his own allotment of a firm and dependable truth. People were distinguished from one another by their words. They adorned themselves with words, jingled them like gold and silver watch chains. Natalya had no such words. She had nothing in which to attire her thoughts. Elusive and misty as the autumn fog, her thoughts only burdened her, dulled her faculties. Ever more often, she would reflect, in mortification and despair:

"I'm stupid, don't know a thing, don't understand a thing."

"Take a bear. He knows where honey lies. That's how he got his name."* Tikhon mumbled among the raspberry bushes.

* An untranslatable play on words. Tikhon interprets the Russian *medved* (bear) as if it were composed of two root words: *myod* (honey), and *vedat* (to know).—*Trans.*

"So it is," thought Natalya. Shuddering, she recalled how Alexei had killed her pet. Until it was thirteen months old, the bear had played around the yard, tame and affectionate as a dog. It would come into the kitchen and rear up on its hind legs, growling softly and blinking its funny little eyes, begging for bread—such a comical creature, but friendly and responsive to kindness. Everyone was fond of it. Nikita would comb its thick, shaggy wool, and take it to the river to bathe, and the bear grew so attached to him that when Nikita was not at home it would sniff the air anxiously, with upraised muzzle, and rush, snorting, across the yard to his office window. More than once, it smashed in the windowpanes, and even broke the sash. Natalya liked to feed it white bread and molasses, and it soon learned to dip the bread into the molasses bowl itself. With joyful grunts, swaying and balancing on its shaggy hind legs, it would stuff the dripping bread into its pink, sharp-toothed mouth, and then lick the molasses from its sticky paw. Its good-natured little eyes beaming with happiness, it would rub its head against Natalya's knees, begging her to play. One could talk to this dear beast—it seemed to understand.

But one day Alexei gave it some vodka. The drunken bear began to roll and caper. It climbed onto the roof of the bathhouse and pulled the chimney to pieces, throwing the bricks to the ground. A crowd of workers assembled, guffawing at the creature's pranks. From that time forth, there was hardly a holiday when Alexei did not give the bear drink, for the people's amusement. The beast grew so accustomed to tipsiness that it would chase after every worker who smelled of vodka, and gave Alexei no peace, rushing to him every time he passed through the yard. They chained it; but it smashed its kennel and went parading around the yard, tossing its head, dragging the log to which its chain was fastened. An attempt was made to catch it. It scratched up Tikhon's leg, knocked down a young worker named Morozov, and bruised Nikita's thigh with a heavy blow of the paw. Then Alexei ran up with a spear, and thrust it into the creature's belly. Natalya, watching from her window, saw the bear sink back on its haunches, its forepaws waving as though begging forgiveness of the people who were shouting so furiously around it. Someone handed Alexei a sharp axe, and, springing upwards, he struck the bear first across one paw, then

across the other. With a loud roar, it fell onto its wounded paws. The blood poured out to right and left, forming dark red stains on the hard earth. Growling piteously, the bear laid down its head, as though inviting a new blow. Then Alexei took a firm stand, his feet spread wide apart, and brought the axe down on the base of the bear's skull, as though it were a block of wood. The brute's muzzle dropped into a pool of its own blood. The axe was sunk so deep into the bone that Alexei had to tug with all his might, driving his foot against the shaggy carcass, before he could pull it out. It was too bad, about the bear. But it was even worse that this gay, fearless, active, mischievous brother-in-law went about with some good-for-nothing wench, and never so much as noticed her, Natalya.

Everyone praised Alexei for his courage and skill. The father shouted, clapping him on the shoulder:

"And you say you're sick! Malingerer!"

Nikita fled from the yard, and Natalya sobbed until her husband demanded, in vexed amazement:

"Suppose a man was killed in front of you? What would you do then?"

He shouted at her, as though she were a child:

"Shut up, you fool!"

She thought he was going to strike her. Winking back her tears, she recalled her first night with him, and how kind he had been, how timid—recalled that in all this time he had never struck her, as all husbands do their wives. She choked down her sobs, and said:

"I'm sorry. I was so fond of the bear."

"It's me you ought to be fond of, not the bear," he returned, more amicably.

The first time she complained to her mother of her husband's sternness, she recalled, the mother had said:

"Men are bees. We're their flowers. They come to us for honey. That's what you've got to understand, my dear, and learn to bear it. Men are the masters in everything. They have more cares than we. Churches, they build, and factories. Look what your father-in-law's built up where nothing was before."

Ever more furiously, Ilya Artamonov hastened to develop and consolidate his business. It was as though some foreboding whis-

pered that his time was short. In May, shortly before St. Nikola's day, a steam boiler arrived for the second block of the mill. The barge that brought it moored by the sandy bank of the Oka, at the point where it was lazily joined by the green waters of the marshy Vataraksha. There was a difficult job ahead: the boiler would have to be dragged some three hundred and fifty yards, over sandy soil. On St. Nikola's day Artamonov gave his workers a fine holiday dinner, with vodka and beer in abundance. The tables were set in the yard. The women decked everything out in pine and birch boughs and bunches of the first spring flowers, and themselves dressed up as brightly as any flowers. The master, with his family and a few invited guests, sat at table among the older weavers, joking boldly with the sharp-tongued bobbin girls, drinking deep, and skilfully stimulating the feasters to merriment. Running a hand over his beard, already grey, he shouted boisterously:

"Eh, friends! But life is good!"

He was admired, and felt it. His intoxication grew still more with the very joy of being the man he was. He glowed and sparkled like this sunny day of spring; like all the earth, smart in the youthful green of grass and foliage and fragrant with the breath of birches and pine saplings, raising their golden cones to the pale blue sky. Spring was early, that year, and warm. Lilac and bird cherry were already blossoming. The whole world rejoiced and celebrated, and even in the hearts of men all that was best seemed to burst into bloom.

An ancient weaver got up: Boris Morozov, a sickly little old man, white and clean as a fresh-washed corpse, his tiny, waxen face tucked cosily away into a grey beard that had turned green with age. Leaning on the shoulder of his eldest son, a man of about sixty, he yelled lustily, waving a bony, fleshless hand:

"Look, I'm ninety years old, ninety and more, and how do you like it? I been a soldier—fought Pugachov, and mutinied myself, too, I did, in the plague year, in Moscow! I fought Bonaparte...."

"And who'd you hug?" Artamonov shouted, close to his ear. The weaver was deaf.

"Two wives, besides outsiders. Look: seven sons, two daughters, nineteen grandchildren, five great-grandchildren—all my work: There they are—all living with you. There they sit!"

"Give us some more!" shouted Ilya.

"You'll get 'em! Three tsars I've outlived, and a tsaritsa, too—now, how d'you like that? All the masters I worked for—they're all dead, and I'm alive! Miles of cloth, I've made. You're the real stuff, Ilya Vasilyevich. You're the one to live. A real master. You like the job, and the job likes you. There's no mean streak in you. You're a branch off our tree, so good luck to you! Success is your lawful wife, and no mistress that's kind for a while and then dumps you! Go to it! Your health, man! Your health, I say. . . ."

Artamonov swept the old man up into his arms and kissed him, shouting emotionally:

"Thanks, infant! I'll make you my manager!"

Amid loud shouts and guffaws, the drunken old weaver, raised high above the table, brandished his skeleton fists and tittered shrilly:

"He's got his own way for everything, his own way."

Ulyana Baimakova brushed the tears of pleasure from her cheeks without concealment.

"So much happiness," her daughter said. Baimakova blew her nose before she could answer.

"That's the sort of man he is. God made him for happiness."

"Here's a lesson for you, youngsters," Artamonov shouted to his boys. "Learn how to get along with people. You watch, Petrukha!"

When the meal was over and the tables cleared away, the women began to sing, while the men tried their sinews in wrestling and other contests of strength. Artamonov was everywhere, dancing and wrestling with the best. They made merry till dawn; and with the first rays of the sun a band of seventy workers, the master at their head, set out noisily for the river bank, like brigands on the raid, with drunken whoops and songs. On their shoulders they carried thick rollers, oaken levers, and heavy coils of rope. The little old weaver hobbled along over the sand behind them, mumbling to Nikita:

"He'll get his way! Him? Don't I know!"

Without accident, they shifted it from the barge to the river bank—the stupid red monster, that looked like a headless bull. They cast their ropes around it, and, grunting in united effort, set it moving on the rollers, along boards laid across the sand. The boiler swayed as it advanced, and its foolish round mouth seemed to Nikita

to gape in wonder at these people's merry strength. The father, drunk, hauled away with the rest, shouting tensely:

"Easy, there, go easy!"

He slapped the red side of the iron monster, urging it on:

"Roll, boiler, roll!"

They were only a hundred yards from the mill when the boiler swayed more violently than usual and sank unhurriedly away from the front roller, digging its stupid mug into the sand. Nikita saw its round mouth blow grey dust over his father's feet. The men crowded angrily around the heavy carcass, trying to push the roller under. But they were tired, and the boiler stuck stubbornly in the sand, seeming to dig in ever deeper, for all that they could do. Artamonov laboured together with the rest, a lever in his hands, shouting:

"All together! All together—now!"

The boiler shifted reluctantly, and sank heavily back again. Nikita saw his father coming out of the crowd of workers, his gait strange and unfamiliar, his face, too, strange and unfamiliar. One hand was thrust under his beard, clutching at his throat. The other groped in the air, like a blind man's. The old weaver hobbled after him, crying:

"Eat some dirt, some dirt!"

Nikita ran to his father. Artamonov hiccuped and spat. A blob of blood fell at Nikita's feet. The father said dully:

"Blood."

His face was grey. His eyes blinked with fright. His teeth chattered, and the whole of his big, efficient body seemed to shrink.

"Are you hurt?" asked Nikita, seizing him by the arm. The father staggered against him and replied, very low:

"I think a vein bust."

"Eat some dirt, I tell you."

"Leave me alone. Get away!"

Again Artamonov spat blood profusely. Perplexedly, he muttered:

"It keeps running. Where's Ulyana?"

The hunchback made to run home, but his father gripped his shoulder firmly. Artamonov stood with bowed head, shuffling his feet in the sand, as though listening to the crunching sound they made—barely audible through the angry shouts of the workers.

"What's the matter?" he asked, and started walking towards the house, with cautious steps, like one crossing over a deep river by a narrow plank. Baimakova was on the porch, saying good-bye to her daughter. When she caught sight of Artamonov, Nikita noticed, her handsome face turned wan, and twisted strangely, like a wheel, to the right and then to the left.

"Ice, quick!" she cried, when Artamonov sank clumsily to the porch steps, hiccuping and spitting blood with increasing frequency. As though in a dream, Nikita heard Tikhon mumbling:

"Ice is water. You can't make blood out of water."

"He ought to chew some dirt. . . ."

"Tikhon, ride for the priest."

"Lift him up and bring him in," ordered Alexei. Nikita took his father by the elbow; but somebody stepped on his toes so hard that for a moment everything went dark. After that, his eyes began to see more keenly than ever, impressing on his brain with morbid eagerness all that the people were doing in his father's crowded room and in the yard. Tikhon was plunging about the yard, astride a big black horse he could not manage. The horse balked at the gate. It reared and circled, angrily tossing its head. The people scattered before it. Evidently, it was frightened by the conflagration kindled in the sky by the rising sun. Then, at last, it dashed out and galloped off; but at the sight of the boiler's huge red bulk it shied, threw Tikhon, and turned back to the yard, snorting and waving its tail.

Somebody shouted:

"Boys! On the run!"

On the window sill sat Alexei, twisting his dark, pointed beard. His sinister, non-peasant face was peaked, and grey as though covered with dust. Unblinking, he stared across the room, over the heads of the people, at the bed on which his father lay, mumbling in a strangely altered voice:

"So I was wrong. It's God's will. Boys, I leave Ulyana to you for your mother—do you hear? Ulya, you help them, in Christ's name. Ah! Send away the outsiders."

"Be still," moaned Baimakova plaintively, slipping bits of ice into his mouth. "There's no outsiders here."

Artamonov swallowed the ice and went on, with a hesitant sigh:

"If I sinned, it's not for you boys to judge. She's not to blame.

Natalya, I was stern with you. Don't take it to heart. Bear sons! Pyotr, Alyosha, don't quarrel. Treat the workers well. They're good folk, the pick. Alyosha, you marry that girl of yours. That's all right!"

"Father, don't leave us," Pyotr pleaded, dropping to his knees; but Alexei nudged him, and whispered:

"Stop! I won't believe...."

Natalya was breaking up ice in a copper bowl, with a kitchen knife. The ice crunched, and clattered against the bowl. And with these sounds mingled the woman's whimpering sobs. Nikita saw her tears drip over the ice. A yellow sunbeam stole into the room, and, reflected from the mirror, formed a shapeless, quivering spot on the wall, trying to erase the red-clad, long-moustached Chinamen on the blue wallpaper, dark as the sky by night.

Nikita stood at Artamonov's feet, waiting for his father to remember him. Baimakova was combing Ilya's thick, curly hair, pausing now and again to wipe away with a napkin the blood that trickled endlessly from the corner of his mouth, and the beads of perspiration breaking out on his forehead and temples. She whispered something, looking into his dulling eyes—whispered fervently, as though in prayer. Laying one hand on her shoulder, the other on her knee, he mumbled, with heavy tongue, his last will:

"I know. May Christ save you. Bury me in our own graveyard, not in town. I don't want to lie there. They can all...."

And again, in great, in overwhelming distress, he whispered:

"Eh, but I was wrong. Oh, Lord.... All wrong."

The priest arrived, a tall, stoop-shouldered man with a Christ-like beard and mournful eyes.

"Wait, Father," said Artamonov, and turned once more to his sons:

"Keep together, you three—don't divide the property! Don't quarrel. Enmity won't bring you anywhere. Pyotr, you're the eldest. You answer for everything—do you hear? Now go...."

"Nikita," Baimakova reminded him.

"Love Nikita. Where is he? Go.... Afterwards.... Natalya, too."

He died, of loss of blood, just after midday, when the sun still shone beneficently at its zenith. He lay with raised head, his

waxen face frowning and full of care, his half-open eyes seeming to stare thoughtfully at his broad hands, folded submissively on his chest.

To Nikita it seemed that the whole household was less grieved and frightened than amazed by this death. He could sense this dull wonder in all but Baimakova, who sat speechless, tearless, beside the dead man—a frozen figure, deaf to the world, her hands lax on her knees, her eyes fixed immovably on the stony face above the snowy beard.

Pyotr held himself straight and stiff, and spoke too much and too loudly, when he entered the room where his father lay, and where Nikita and a fat nun, by turns, were intoning the plaints of the Book of Psalms. Pyotr would look inquiringly into his father's face, cross himself, stand by the bed for two minutes or three, and tiptoe carefully out of the room. Then his stocky figure would be seen in the yard and among the orchard trees, and he would seem to be in search of something.

Alexei was in a fever of activity, making arrangements for the funeral. He would rush the carriage to town and back, then run to his father's room to question Ulyana about the customs and traditions for the burial and the memorial feast.

"Wait," she would reply, and Alexei, hot and tired, would disappear. Natalya would come in, with timid sympathy, begging her mother to have some food or a cup of tea. The mother would listen quietly, and reply:

"Wait."

Nikita had never known, while Artamonov was alive, whether or not he loved his father. He had felt only fear—and, unaffected by this fear, admiration for the spirited activity of this man, who showed him no affection, who, indeed, hardly noticed whether the hunchback was alive or dead. But now it seemed to Nikita that he, and only he, had genuinely, deeply loved his father. He was flooded with a dreary melancholy, a sense of gross and ruthless injury in the sudden death of this strong man; and his chest constricted so that he could hardly breathe. He sat on a chest in the corner, waiting for his turn to read the Psalms. The familiar words passed dully through his brain, while his eyes stared into the warm dusk of the room, at those living, swaying yellow blossoms—the wax can-

dles. Long-moustached Chinamen clung like acrobats to the walls, balancing bales of tea that hung from yokes over their shoulders. Eighteen Chinamen, two in a row, on every strip of wall paper. In one row they were marching upwards, towards the ceiling; in the next—downwards, towards the floor. An oily spot of moonlight fell on the wall, and here the Chinamen marched up and down more briskly.

Suddenly, through the monotonous flow of the Psalms, Nikita heard a low, earnest question:

"Is he—really—dead? Oh Lord?"

It was Ulyana, her voice imbued with such overwhelming sorrow that the nun paused in her reading to reply apologetically:

"He's dead, good woman, he's dead, by the will of God."

This was altogether unbearable. Nikita rose and noisily left the room, carrying in his heart a feeling of the deepest resentment against the nun.

On a bench near the gate sat Tikhon. He was breaking splinters from a bit of wood. One by one, he stuck the splinters into the sand and stamped them down with his foot until they disappeared. Nikita sat down beside him, watching without a word. Tikhon's work reminded him of the eerie town fool, Antonushka. This was a swarthy, shaggy-haired young fellow, with one leg twisted at the knee, and with the round eyes of an eagle owl. Antonushka would trace circles in the sand with a stick, and within these circles build little cages of twigs and splinters. His building done, he would immediately crush it underfoot and shuffle sand and dust over the remnants, singing nasally:

Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel.
Butirma, lullaby, bustarma,
Lullaby, Chi-rist, lullaby.

"So that's how it is, eh?" said Tikhon. He slapped his neck, killing a mosquito, wiped his palm against his knee, and glanced at the moon, caught on a willow bough over the river. Then his eyes turned to the meaty bulk of the boiler.

"The mosquitoes are early this year," he went on calmly. "Yes, mosquitoes live, and. . . ."

Before he could finish, the hunchback, afraid, somehow, of what might follow, reminded him sternly:

"Yes, but you killed the mosquito."

He strode hastily away from the yardman. A few minutes later, at a loss what to do with himself, he returned once more to his father's room and relieved the nun at her reading. Pouring out his sorrow in the words of the Psalms, he did not hear Natalya coming in. Suddenly, the soft rippling of her voice sounded behind him. When she was near, he always felt that he might say or do something extraordinary—something frightful, perhaps. And even in this solemn hour he feared lest, against his will, such words break out. He bowed his head until it was shadowed by his hump, and lowered his voice, which had suddenly broken. And then he heard two voices, mingling tearfully with the chant of the ninth cathisma.

"Look, I've taken his cross to wear."

"Mother, dearest, I'm all alone, too. . . ."

Nikita intoned more loudly, to drown out these tearful whispers; but he could not help listening.

"The Lord wouldn't have our sin. . . ."

"In a strange nest, alone. . . ."

" 'Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?' " intoned Nikita; and in the midst of this cry of fear and despair his memory suggested to him the melancholy proverb: "Life without love is sorrow; and when love comes—double sorrow." Half-ashamed, he felt that Natalya's sorrow held out to him a hope of happiness.

In the morning, Barsky drove out from town, with Yakov Zhiteikin, the mayor, a man with expressionless eyes, nicknamed "Half-Baked": little and round and pasty, as though really made of raw dough. The visitors bowed before the deceased, glancing into the darkened face with a sort of fearful suspicion. Evidently they, too, were amazed at Artamonov's death. Then Zhiteikin said to Pyotr, in his biting, acid voice:

"They say you think of burying your father in your own graveyard—is that so? That will be an insult to the town, Pyotr Ilyich, as if you don't want to have any dealings with us, or live like friends—is that so?"

Gritting his teeth, Alexei whispered to his brother:

"Throw them out!"

"Kinswoman," Barsky droned, attacking Ulyana. "That's no way! You're offending us."

Zhiteikin started questioning Pyotr:

"Was it priest Gleb, maybe, gave you such advice? No, no. Change your mind about that. Your father was the biggest manufacturer in the uyezd, the founder of a new line of business, the pride of the town. The ispravnik, even, he can't get over it, says you must be heathen!"

He rattled on unintermittently, disregarding Pyotr's attempts to put in a word: but when Pyotr finally succeeded in explaining that this was his father's will, Zhiteikin calmed down at once.

"In any case, we'll be at the funeral."

And it became clear to all that he had come with other purposes than that of which he spoke. He sidled towards the corner of the room, where Barsky had pressed Ulyana to the wall and was whispering something to her; but before Zhiteikin could join them, Ulyana cried out:

"You're a fool, kinsman! Get away!"

Her lips were trembling, her eyebrows twitching. Lifting her head proudly, she said to Pyotr:

"These two, and Pomyalov and Voroponov, want me to talk you brothers into selling them the mill. They offer me money for helping them."

"Get out ... gentlemen!" said Alexei, and pointed to the door.

Zhiteikin, hemming, hawing, simpering, elbowed Barsky to the door and out. Baimakova sank down on the chest and began to cry.

"They'd like to blot out his very memory."

Alexei, looking down into his father's face, declared with bitter solemnity:

"I wouldn't want to live and be that kind. I'd rather bust."

"A fine time for bargaining," grumbled Pyotr, and he, too, glanced towards his father.

Coming up to Nikita, Natalya asked him softly:

"And you? Why don't you say anything?"

It was pleasant to be remembered; it was a joy to be remembered by Natalya, and he could not restrain a happy smile as he replied, softly too:

"Why... you and me...."

But she had already turned away, absorbed in thought.

Almost all the best people of the town attended Ilya Artamonov's funeral. The ispravnik came: lean and tall, with a shaven chin and grey sideburns. He limped majestically up the sandy road with Pyotr, and told him twice, in exactly the same words:

"The deceased was excellently recommended to me by His Grace, Prince Georgi Ratsky, and he lived up to that recommendation in every way."

But it was not long before he declared:

"Carrying the dead uphill is difficult!"

And he pushed his way, sidewise, out of the crowd and took his stand in the shade, under a pine, his shaven lips tightly compressed, looking out over the passing throng of townspeople and workers as though reviewing soldiers on parade.

It was a bright day. The sun shone down bountifully on the earth's bright green and yellow, and on the colourful procession moving slowly between two sandy hills and up the slope of a third. Here many a cross already stood, some sharply outlined against the clear blue sky, others sheltered beneath the spreading boughs of a twisted old pine. The sand was sparkling diamonds, crunching under the people's feet; and the deep chant of the priests swayed and trembled over their heads. At the very end came the fool, Antonushka, skipping and stumbling. His round eyes, under hairless brows, were fixed on the ground. He kept stooping to seize dry twigs from the roadside, thrusting them into the bosom of his shirt. He, too, was chanting shrilly:

Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel....

Pious souls often beat him for singing this song. Today the ispravnik shook a threatening finger, and shouted:

"Hush, fool!"

The townsfolk wasted no love on Antonushka, since, being a Mordovian or Chuvash, he could not very well be regarded as a sufferer for Christ. They feared him, however, believing him to herald misfortune; and when, at the funeral feast, he appeared in

the Artamonovs' yard and capered among the tables, yelling meaninglessly:

"Kuyatyr, kuyatyr, the devil in the belfry, oh, my, rain will come, wet will come, kayamas black tears!"—there were those who whispered:

"There, now! The Artamonovs won't have any luck!"

Pyotr heard these whispers. A little later, he noticed that Tikhon Vyalov had caught the fool in a corner of the yard. He heard the yardman asking, quietly but insistently:

"What does that mean—kayamas? You don't know? Here. Get out! Go on, go on."

...A year slipped by, swift as the muddy autumn streams down the mountain sides. Nothing of importance occurred, except that Ulyana Baimakova's hair turned grey, and the sad lines of age appeared on her temples. Alexei changed very perceptibly. He became milder, gentler, yet at the same time developed an unpleasant haste of manner, seeming to lash people on by his gay jokes and stinging interjections. Pyotr was particularly troubled by his free and easy attitude towards the business. He seemed to be playing with the mill—just as he had once played with the bear, only to kill it afterwards. He had a strange weakness for articles such as adorn the life of the gentry. Besides the clock Baimakova had given him, other trinkets appeared in his room—useless, but good to look at. On the wall hung a picture: girls dancing in a ring, embroidered in beads. Alexei was thrifty. Why, then, did he spend money on trumpery? He began to dress differently, too, expensively, stylishly. He took great care of his dark, pointed beard, and shaved his cheeks, growing ever less reminiscent of a simple peasant. To Pyotr, there was something very alien and unclear about this cousin of his. He watched Alexei furtively, with growing mistrust.

Pyotr was cautious, wary, in his approach to the business, just as in his approach to people. He trained himself to an unhurried gait; and he would steal upon his work, screwing up his bearish eyes, as though expecting it to vanish away. Sometimes, weary of business cares, he would feel as though enveloped in a frigid cloud of strange, uneasy tedium. At such moments, the mill would seem to him a beast, of stone, but alive. The beast was crouching, huddled close against the earth, casting shadows that were

like wings, its tail a bristling smokestack. Its brute countenance was a thing of fear. By day, the windows glittered like icy teeth; of a winter evening, they were made of iron, red hot with fury. And the thought would come that the mill's true purpose, its secret aim, lay, not in the weaving of mile upon mile of linen, but in something else, something inimical to Pyotr Artamonov.

On the anniversary of the father's death, after the obit at the cemetery, the whole family gathered in Alexei's bright, pleasant room. Rather nervously, he began to speak:

"It was father's will that we shouldn't quarrel. And he was right. We're like war prisoners in this place."

Nikita noticed that Natalya, who was sitting next to him, started, and threw Alexei a wondering look. Alexei continued, very mildly:

"But if we're not to quarrel, that doesn't mean we should stand in one another's way. The business is for all of us together, but our life is our own for each of us. Isn't that so?"

"Go on," said Pyotr guardedly, staring at something above his brother's head.

"You all know I've been living with the Orlova girl. I want to marry her now. Remember, Nikita—she was the only one to be sorry when you fell in the water?"

Nikita nodded. He had hardly ever sat so close to Natalya as today. It was so pleasant that he did not want to move, or talk, or even listen to what the others were saying. And when something made Natalya start, and her elbow brushed against him he smiled, looking under the table at her knees.

"She's fated for me, I think," said Alexei. "With her I can make life different. I don't want to bring her here to live. I'm afraid you wouldn't get along together."

Raising her grief-filled eyes, Ulyana Baimakova came to Alexei's assistance.

"I know her well. She's a rare hand with her needle, and literate. She supported her drunkard of a father ever since she was a little thing. Only—she likes to have her own way. I don't think Natalya could get on with her."

"I get on with everybody," put in Natalya, offended. Her husband glanced at her, and told his brother:

"Yes, that's your affair."

Alexei asked Baimakova to sell him her house.

"What do you want it for?"

Pyotr supported him in this, telling her:

"Your place is with us."

"Well, I'll go tell Olga." said Alexei. When he was gone, Pyotr jogged Nikita's shoulder, demanding:

"Are you asleep? What are you thinking about?"

"Alexei's doing right."

"Think so? We'll see. And what do you think, mother?"

"Of course, he's right to marry her. Only who can tell how they'll get on together? She's queer. A sort of crank."

"Thanks for such kin," returned Pyotr, with a wry smile.

"Perhaps I used the wrong word," Ulyana went on slowly, as though staring into a dark place, where everything swayed and merged, evading her vision.

"She's foxy. Her father had lots of things, and she brought them to me to hide so he wouldn't sell them for drink. Alyosha would bring them over, by night, and then I'd pretend to give him presents. All these things here are hers. Her dowry. Some of them are valuable. On the whole, I'm not very fond of her—she's too self-willed."

Pyotr stood at the window, with his back to his mother-in-law. Out in the garden, starlings were noisily imitating the sounds of the day. Tikhon's words came to mind:

"I don't like starlings. They look like devils."

A stupid man, that Tikhon. You couldn't help noticing him, just on account of his being so very stupid.

In the same low, reluctant tone, evidently absorbed in thoughts of other things, Baimakova told the story of Olga Orlova's mother, a landowner's wife—a shameless woman, who had run away with Orlov while her husband was still alive, and lived with him for five years.

"He was a craftsman. He made furniture, and repaired clocks, and carved figures out of wood. I have one of them at home—a naked woman. Olga thinks it's a portrait of her mother. They were both drinkers. And when her husband died, they married, and that same year she went bathing drunk, and got drowned."

"That's what you call love," said Natalya suddenly. At these

unbecoming words. Ulyana threw her daughter a reproachful glance, while Pyotr replied, with a short laugh:

"We were talking about drunkenness, not love."

A silence fell. Watching Natalya, Nikita saw that she was stirred by her mother's story. Her fingers twitched, plucking at the fringe of the tablecloth. Her simple, kindly face was flushed, and wore an angry look he had not seen before.

After supper, sitting on a bench among the lilac bushes in the garden, just under Natalya's window, Nikita heard voices in the room above him. Pyotr said thoughtfully:

"Alexei is smart. He's clever."

And all at once Natalya cried, heart-rendingly:

"You're all clever. I'm the only fool. It was right, what he said —like prisoners! I'm the prisoner, in your house."

Nikita gasped in fear and pity. He clutched at the bench with both hands, for some unknown force was spurring him, urging him he knew not whither. And above him, ever louder, sounded the voice of the woman he loved, arousing hot, surging hopes.

Natalya had been braiding her hair when her husband's words suddenly ignited a raging flame within her. She leaned against the wall, pressing back her hands, which itched to strike and rend. Between dry sobs, the words came tumbling out. She did not know what she was saying, did not hear the angry exclamations of her astounded husband. She cried that she was an outsider among them, that nobody loved her, that she was a mere servant in the house.

"You don't love me. You never even talk to me about anything. You come down on me like a stone, and that's all! Why don't you love me? Am I your wife, or not? Is there anything bad about me, I'd like to know! Look at the way mother loved your father. Sometimes my heart would almost break with envy."

"Well, then, love me the same way," Pyotr proposed. He was sitting on the window sill, peering in at his wife's distorted features, in the dark corner of the room. He thought her words foolish; but he felt, with amazement, that her grief was legitimate—understood that it was not a stupid grief. And the worst thing about this grief was, that it held out the threat of protracted ferment, of new cares and alarms, when he had so many cares as it was.

His wife's white, armless figure, in the flowing nightgown,

swayed and quivered until he thought it must melt away. Her voice rose and fell, now whispering, now screaming, as though she were on a swing, flying aloft and dropping low.

"Look how Alexei loves his girl. And he's easy to love, himself. He's always jolly, and dresses like the gentry. And you? Not a kind word for anyone. Never a laugh. I could be such good friends with Alexei, and I've never dared say a word to him, because you set your hunchback to keep watch over me, on purpose, that disgusting, foxy creature."

Nikita got up, and wandered off, stricken, with hanging head, into the orchard. The trees caught at his shoulders, and mechanically he pushed the branches aside.

Pyotr, too, got up. He strode to his wife, seized her by the hair, and bent her head back, peering into her eyes

"With Alexei?" he asked, his voice not loud, but heavy. He was so taken aback by what his wife had said that he could not be angry at her, could not feel the desire to strike her. With increasing clarity, he realized that his wife was speaking the truth, that her life was dull and uninteresting. He knew what dullness meant. But she had to be quieted somehow, and in order to quiet her he banged her head against the wall, demanding softly:

"What's that you said, you fool? With Alexei?"

"Let go—let go—I'll scream."

With his free hand, he gripped her throat and compressed it. His wife's face flushed, and she began to wheeze.

"Hussy," said Pyotr, thrusting her against the wall, and turned away. She swung forward and moved past him to the cradle, where the baby had been whimpering for some time. Pyotr had the feeling that she had walked over him. A dark-blue strip of sky swayed to and fro before his eyes, and the stars capered. Glancing sidewise, he saw his wife, sitting very near. He could have struck her in the face without even getting up. Her face was fixed, almost wooden, but tears ran slowly, lazily down her cheeks. Nursing her little girl, she stared into the corner, through a glassy film of tears, and did not notice that the child could not suckle comfortably. The nipple kept slipping from its lips, and it sucked at the air, whimpering helplessly. Pyotr shook himself, as though after a nightmare, and said:

"Can't you nurse the child properly?"

"A fly in the house," Natalya muttered. "A fly, without wings."

"After all, I'm alone too. There's no two Pyotr Artamonovs."

He felt hazily that this was not what he had wanted to say—more, that there was something false in it. And to calm his wife and avert the danger hanging over him, he must give her truth, a truth simple and clear beyond dispute, so that she would understand it at once, and submit to it, and not bother him with foolish complaints and tears, with these womanish ways that she had never had before. Watching her careless, clumsy movements as she laid the child in the cradle, he went on:

"I have the business to take care of! A mill—that isn't sowing grain, or planting potatoes. It's a problem. And what have you got to worry about?"

At first he spoke sternly, impressively, seeking to attain this elusive truth; but it evaded him, and his tone grew almost plaintive.

"A mill is no simple thing," he repeated, feeling that his store of words was ended, that he had nothing to say. His wife stood silently rocking the cradle, with her back to him. He was rescued by the low, calm voice of Tikhon Vyalov, calling:

"Pyotr Ilyich! Hey, there!"

"What's the matter?" he asked, moving to the window.

"Come out here," said the yardman imperatively.

"Boor!" grumbled Pyotr, and added, turning reproachfully to his wife: "There! No peace, even at night, and you stand here and cry."

Tikhon met him on the porch, hatless, with flickering eyes. Glancing around the bright, moonlit yard, he said, very low:

"Nikita Ilyich just tried to hang himself."

"What? What did you say?"

And Pyotr dropped heavily to the porch step, as though the earth had sunk from under him.

"What are you sitting down for? Come along. He wants you."

Pyotr did not get up, but asked, in a whisper:

"What made him do it, eh?"

"He's conscious now. I poured water on him till he came to. Let's be going."

Tikhon pulled his employer up by the elbow and led him into the orchard.

"He did it in the bathhouse, in the dressing room. Slung a rope from a rafter in the garret, and...."

Pyotr stopped short, repeating:

"What made him do it? Was he heartsick for father, or what?"

The yardman also stopped.

"He got so bad, he kissed her shifts."

"What shifts? What are you talking about?"

Shuffling his bare feet, Pyotr stared down at the yardman's dog, which had come out of the bushes and was looking at him inquiringly, wagging its tail. He was afraid to go to his brother. He felt an emptiness within him, and did not know what he should say to Nikita.

"Eh, but you're blind," the yardman grumbled. Pyotr waited silently for him to continue.

"Her shifts, Natalya Yevseyevna's. They were hanging out with the rest of the wash, to dry."

"But what did he.... Hold on!"

Pyotr kicked the dog away. He suddenly visualized his brother's squat, humped figure, kissing a woman's shift. It was comical, yet at the same time made him spit disgustedly. Then, all at once, he was struck, overwhelmed, by a stinging conjecture. He seized the yardman by the shoulders and shook him furiously, demanding through clenched teeth:

"Did they kiss? Did you see them? Talk up!"

"I see everything. Natalya Yevseyevna don't even know."

"You're lying!"

"Why should I lie? I'm not expecting anything from you."

And Tikhon briefly related to his employer the story of his brother's misfortune. It was as though he were wielding an axe, cutting a window through the murk. Pyotr could feel that the yardman was speaking the truth. Indeed, he himself had had a dim conception of it, from the look in his brother's blue eyes, his eagerness to be of use to Natalya, his petty, but constant solicitude for her.

"So-o," he whispered, thinking aloud. "I was too busy to realize."

He pushed Tikhon forward.

"Come on."

He did not want to be the first to meet Nikita's eye. Coming in through the low bathhouse door, before he could make his brother out in the darkness, he called tremulously, from behind Tikhon's back:

"What got into you, Nikita?"

The hunchback did not answer. He was on the bench by the window, barely visible, the dim light falling on his legs and abdomen. After a while, Pyotr realized that Nikita was sitting up, with bent head, his humped back against the wall. His shirt was torn from neck to hem. Soaking wet, it clung to his body. His hair was also wet, and wet rays spread from a dark star on his cheek.

"What's that—blood? Did you fall?" Pyotr asked in a whisper.

"No. I bruised him a little, in my hurry," replied Tikhon, foolishly loud, and moved aside.

To approach was fearful. Pulling at his ear, Pyotr spoke deploringly, reproachfully, hearing his own words as though some stranger were saying them:

"For shame! You went against God, brother. That's no way."

"I know," returned Nikita hoarsely, his voice, too, the voice of a stranger. "I couldn't stand it. Let me go away, to a monastery. I'll take vows. Listen! With all my heart, I beg you...."

He broke into a wheezing cough, and said no more.

Touched, Pyotr once more began to reproach him, speaking softly and affectionately. At length, he said:

"As to Natalya, that was the devil tempting you, of course."

"Oh, Tikhon," wailed Nikita miserably. "Didn't I beg you, Tikhon, to hold your tongue! Keep it from her, at least, in Christ's name! She'll mock at me, or maybe take offence. Have pity! I'll pray for you all the rest of my life. Don't tell her! Don't ever tell her. Ah, Tikhon, it's all your fault."

He mumbled on, his head unnaturally erect and motionless. That, too, was fearful. The yardman said:

"I'd have held my tongue all right, if it wasn't for this business. She won't hear anything from me."

More and more deeply touched, embarrassed at his own emotion, Pyotr promised firmly:

"I swear by the cross, she won't know anything."

"Thanks! And I'll be off to a monastery."

Nikita lapsed into silence, as though he had fallen asleep.

"Does it hurt?" his brother asked. Receiving no answer, he repeated:

"Your neck—does it hurt?"

"It's all right," said Nikita hoarsely. "You go now."

"Don't leave him," Pyotr whispered to the yardman, backing past him to the door.

But when he came out into the orchard, and breathed deep of the warm, cloying odours of the sweating earth, his soft mood vanished in the onrush of uneasy thoughts. Moving down the path, he trod carefully, so that the gravel would not crunch underfoot. There must be vast stillness, or there could be no ordering these thoughts. Hostile, frightening in their abundance, they seemed to spring not from within, but as invaders from without, from the night's gloom—flitting bats in the darkness. So swiftly did they follow, one upon the other, that Pyotr could not seize them, could not embody them in words, but only glimpsed their intricate loops, knots, designs. They enmeshed him, Natalya, Alexei, Nikita, Tikhon—bound them all in a twisted ring that whirled too fast to be distinguished. And he was at its centre, all alone. In words, he thought very simply:

"I'll have to get Natalya's mother in the house good and soon, and have Alexei move out. A little kindness to Natalya. 'That's what you call love.' Why, it wasn't love made him hang himself, it was just his hump. A good thing he wants to take vows. There's nothing for him in the world. Yes, it's a good thing. Tikhon's a fool. He should have told me sooner."

But what had this to do with those thoughts, elusive, wordless, which so confused and frightened him, making him look out fearfully into the thick, damp murk of the night? In the distance, a thin rivulet of plaintive song wound, faintly luminous, over the mill workers' settlement. Mosquitoes droned. One thing Pyotr Artamonov felt clearly: that he must conquer, must suppress this uneasiness, and do it quickly. Unexpectedly, he found himself among the lilac bushes, under his bedroom window. For a long time he sat there, on the bench, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands, staring down at the black earth underfoot. The earth stirred and seethed, as though about to sink away.

"It's amazing, how Nikita got the better of the sand. When he takes his vows, he'll work in the monastery gardens. He'll like that."

He did not notice his wife's approach, and jumped to his feet in alarm when her white figure rose up before him, as though sprung from the earth. But the familiar voice calmed him a little:

"In Christ's name, forgive my shouting."

"Ah, well, God will forgive. I shouted, too," he returned generously, glad that his wife had come, and that he need no longer search for gentle words to plaster up the breach made by their quarrel.

He sat down, and Natalya sat diffidently at his side. Yes, he must do something to comfort her. He said:

"I know, it's dull for you. There's no fun in our house. Where would it come from? Father got his fun out of work. The way he saw it, there's no such thing as just people. We're all workers, aside from beggars and the gentry. We all live to work. And it's the work that shows, not us."

He picked his words carefully, afraid of saying more than was fit; and, hearing himself, thought that he spoke like a man of weight, a business man, a real master. Yet he had the feeling that all these words were somehow extraneous, that they glided over the surface of his thoughts without revealing them, unable to penetrate them. And it seemed to him that he sat at the edge of a gulf, and there was a someone who might send him hurtling down at any moment—someone who listened to what he said and whispered:

"That is not the truth."

Most opportunely, his wife laid her head on his shoulder, whispering:

"After all, I'm to live with you, all the rest of my life. Why can't you understand?"

He promptly embraced her and pressed her close, listening to her passionate whisper:

"It's a sin, not to understand. You take a girl, and she bears you children, and it's as if you weren't there—there's no heart in you for me. It's a sin, Petya. Have you anyone closer than me? Who'll give you sympathy, when you need it worst?"

He felt as though his wife had lifted him, turned him over in

the air, filling his limbs with a pleasant languor, steeping them in a refreshing coolness. With a feeling akin to gratitude, he murmured:

"I promised him I'd keep still, but I can't!"

And he repeated, hurriedly, all that the yardman had told him about Nikita.

"He kissed your shifts, when they were drying in the yard—he's so far gone! Didn't you know? Didn't you realize how it was with him?"

He felt his wife shudder violently.

"Sorry for him?" Pyotr wondered; but she answered hastily, indignantly:

"I never knew a thing! Ah, the secretive creature! It's true, what they say—hunchbacks are crafty."

"Disgusted? Or acting?" Artamonov asked himself. To his wife, he said:

"He was always gentle with you."

"Well, and what of it?" she returned defiantly. "Tulun's gentle, too."

"Well, but ... Tulun's a dog."

"And he? You set him after me just like a dog, to keep watch over me, and guard me from father and Alexei. I saw well enough! Oh, how disgusting, how hateful he's been to me."

Clearly, Natalya was insulted and indignant. That was evidenced by her shudders, by her jerking fingers, twisting and pulling at her nightgown. But to the man her indignation seemed exaggerated, and, mistrusting it, he dealt the final blow:

"He tried to hang himself. Tikhon found him. He's lying in the bathhouse."

His wife went limp. She cried, in unmistakable terror:

"No!... What are you saying? Good Lord!"

"So she was lying," Pyotr thought. But she threw back her head, as though her forehead had been struck, and whispered, with angry tears:

"What next? It was only father's dying shut people's mouths a little, and now the talk will start all over again—for what sins, oh Lord? One brother tries to hang himself, and another marries nobody knows who, his own mistress. Is that any way to do? Ah,

Nikita Ilyich, how could you be so shameless? Many thanks for such kindness, you heartless thing!"

With a sigh of relief, the husband stroked his wife's shoulder.

"Don't worry. Nobody will know. Tikhon won't talk. He's friendly with him, and besides, he gets his living from us. Nikita wants to take vows."

"When?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, if only it's soon! How can I face him now?"

After a silence, Pyotr said:

"You might go to see him."

But she started back as though he had struck her, crying:

"No, no, don't ask me—I won't go! I can't! I'm scared. . . ."

"Of what?" asked Pyotr quickly.

"Of suicides. I won't go, I don't care what. I'm scared."

"Well, come to sleep," said Artamonov, rising on feet that held him firmly. "We've had enough trouble for one day."

Walking slowly at his wife's side, he felt that, together with its evil, this day had brought him something of worth; that he, Pyotr Artamonov, was a man such as, until this day, he had not known himself to be: a very clever man, and crafty. And he had just now artfully befooled a somebody who had been persistently fretting his soul with obscure thoughts.

"Of course, you're the closest to me," he told his wife. "Who could be closer? Just keep that in mind, that you're the closest. Then everything will be all right."

On the twelfth day following that night, dawn found Nikita Artamonov, with a staff in his hand and a leather sack on his back, striding along a crisp, sandy path, turned dark by the heavy dew—striding briskly, as though anxious to get away from memories of the parting with his family. They had all gathered, heavy with sleep, in the dining room, next to the kitchen. They sat stiffly, and talked stiffly, and it was so clear that none of them had a single heartfelt word to say to him. Pyotr was affectionate and almost gay, like a man who has just put through a profitable deal. Two or three times, he said:

"Well, now we'll have our own supplicator in the family, to pray forgiveness for our sins."

Natalya poured tea, indifferent and very preoccupied. Her small, mouse ears were noticeably red, and had a crumpled look. She seemed moody, and frequently left the room. Her mother sat in thoughtful silence, now and then wetting a finger with her tongue and smoothing down the grey hair at her temples. Only Alexei was moved, unusually for him, and kept shrugging his shoulders, asking:

"What made you do it, Nikita? So suddenly, eh? It's strange to me."

Beside him sat the little, sharp-nosed Orlova girl, her dark eyebrows raised, staring at everyone unceremoniously. Nikita did not like her eyes. They were too big for the rest of her face, and too sharp for a girl, and blinked too often.

It was trying to sit among these people, and the anxious thought kept recurring:

"Suppose Pyotr should tell everybody? I wish it was over."

Pyotr began the parting first. Coming up to Nikita, he embraced him and said, very loud, with a catch in his voice:

"Well, brother, farewell. . . ."

But Baimakova stopped him.

"What are you thinking of? We must all sit down first, and not talk a while, and then, when we've prayed, we can say farewell."

All this was soon done, and Pyotr approached once more, saying:

"Forgive us. Let us know about the endowment, and we'll send it right off. Don't agree to heavy penance. Farewell. Pray often for us."

Baimakova made the sign of the cross over him, and kissed his cheeks and forehead. For some reason or other, she began to cry. Alexei embraced him firmly, looked into his eyes, and said:

"Well, God speed you. Everyone takes his own road. But just the same, I can't understand what made you decide so suddenly."

Natalya approached last of all; but she stopped a little distance away and bowed low, pressing her hand to her bosom and saying faintly:

"Farewell, Nikita Ilyich."

Her breasts were still high as a girl's, though she had nursed three children.

Well, that was all. Ah, there was still Orlova. She thrust him

a hot little hand, hard as a board. Near at hand, her face was even more unpleasant. She asked foolishly:

"Are you really going to be a monk?"

Out in the yard, a score or two of the older weavers had come to say good-bye. The deaf ancient, Boris Morozov, yelled, nodding vigorously:

"Soldiers and monks—there's society's first servants, that's the truth!"

Nikita turned in at the cemetery to take leave of his father's grave. Kneeling before it, he did not pray, but fell into thought. What a turn life had taken! When the sun rose behind him, throwing on the dew-washed sod of the grave a broad, angular shadow, much the shape of surly Tulun's kennel, Nikita bowed his head to the ground and said:

"Forgive me, father."

His voice fell harsh and dull through the delicate hush of morning. After a pause he repeated, louder:

"Forgive me, father"—

And broke into tears, sobbing bitterly as a woman, at the intolerable loss of his one-time clear and ringing voice.

When he had left the cemetery about a verst behind, Nikita suddenly noticed the yardman, Tikhon, standing like a sentry among the roadside bushes, with a spade over his shoulder and an axe stuck in his belt.

"Off, are you?" Tikhon asked.

"I'm on my way. What are you doing out here?"

"I thought I'd dig up a rowan tree, to plant by my window."

They stood for a moment, looking silently at one another. Tikhon turned away his melting eyes.

"Walk on. I'll see you down the road a way."

They moved on in silence. Tikhon was the first to speak.

"Heavy dews we're having. It's a bad sign. Such dews mean drought and bad harvest."

"The Lord forbid."

Tikhon Vyalov mumbled some reply.

"What did you say?" Nikita asked, a little frightened; for from this man he always expected different words than from others, words that made the soul uneasy.

"I said, maybe He will forbid."

But Nikita was sure the ditch digger had said something else, which he did not wish to repeat.

"Why, don't you believe in God's mercy?" he asked reproachfully.

"Why should I?" returned Tikhon calmly. "What we need now is rain. And these dews are bad for the mushrooms, too. With a good master, everything gets done at the proper time."

Nikita sighed and shook his head.

"That's not a fit way of thinking, Tikhon."

"It's fit enough. I don't do my thinking with my eyes."

Another fifty paces passed in silence. Nikita kept his eyes on the ground, following his own broad shadow. Vyalov's fingers tapped the handle of his axe, keeping time with his steps.

"I'll come to see you, Nikita Ilyich, in a year or so—shall I?"

"If you like. You're inquisitive."

"That's true."

He stopped, and pulled off his hat.

"Well, then, fare you well, Nikita Ilyich!" he said, and, rubbing his cheek, added thoughtfully:

"I like you, for your meek heart. Your father's gifts lay in the body, but you—yours lie in your heart, in your soul."

Nikita dropped his staff, shook himself to adjust the sack on his hump, and silently embraced the yardman. Tikhon returned the embrace with a bearish hug, repeating loudly, insistently:

"So I'll be coming."

"Thanks."

At the sharp turn where the road dived into the pine forest, Nikita looked back. Tikhon was standing in the middle of the road, leaning on his spade, his hat under his arm, as though determined to let no one pass. The morning breeze ruffled the hair on his ugly head.

From this distance, Tikhon somehow called to mind the fool, Antonushka. Nikita Artamonov hastened his step. His thoughts revolved around this enigmatic personality, and again and again he seemed to hear:

Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen,
The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel. . . .

II

It was not until the ninth anniversary of their father's death that the building of the Artamonovs' church was completed, and they had it consecrated to the Prophet Elijah. The work dragged out over seven years. This sluggishness was due to Alexei.

"God can wait—what's his hurry?" he would rattle out impiously; and twice in succession he diverted the brick prepared for the church: first to build the third block of the mill, and then to build a hospital.

The consecration ceremonies over, and an obit performed at the graves of their father and children, the Artamonovs lingered in the cemetery until the crowd had broken up. Then, tactfully ignoring Ulyana Baimakova, who remained in the family enclosure, on a bench under the birch trees, they set out slowly for home. There was no need for haste, as the dinner for the clergy, acquaintances, and employees had been set for three o'clock.

It was a cloudy day. The sky wore an almost autumnal frown, and a damp wind, promising rain, wheezed like a tired horse in the tossing crowns of the spruces. Dark human figures slid, swaying, down the reddish strip of sandy road towards the mill, whose three brick blocks, built along three radii of a common circle, seemed to grip the earth like crimson, clutching fingers.

With a wave of his cane, Alexei said:

"Father would have been glad to see how we're getting on!"

"He'd have been sorry when the tsar was killed," replied Pyotr, after a moment's thought. He did not like to agree with all his brother said.

"Well, he wasn't fond of being sorry. And he used his own wits, not the tsar's."

Pulling his cap far down on his forehead, Alexei stopped and glanced back at the women. His wife, small and slender, in a dark, simple dress, stepped lightly over the trampled sand, wiping her eyeglasses with a handkerchief. She looked like a village schoolteacher beside tall, plump Natalya, who wore a black silk cloak with bugle beading on the shoulders, and a dark purple kerchief that went very well with her thick, reddish hair.

"Your wife gets prettier and prettier."

Pyotr made no reply.

"Nikita didn't come for the anniversary this year either. Is he angry at us, or what?"

In damp weather Alexei had pains in his chest and leg, and he walked with a slight limp, leaning on his cane. He was anxious to shake off the dreary impression of the obit, and the gloom of this cloudy day; and, stubborn as always, persisted in his efforts to make his brother talk.

"Your mother-in-law stayed behind to cry. She can't forget him. A fine old lady. I whispered to Tikhon to wait and see her home. She complains her breath comes short, and walking is a strain."

In a low voice, as though under compulsion, the elder Artamonov repeated:

"A strain."

"Are you asleep? What's a strain?"

"Tikhon ought to be discharged," Pyotr replied, looking away at the bristling spruces on the hillsides.

"Why?" asked his brother amazedly. "The man's honest, regular, industrious. . . ."

"And a fool," added Pyotr.

The women came up. Olga told her husband, in a pleasant voice, surprisingly strong for her small frame:

"I've been trying to persuade Natasha to send Ilya to school. But she's afraid."

Natalya, pregnant, swayed from side to side with every step, waddling like a fattened duck. She spoke slowly and nasally, as befitted the elder:

"To my mind, these schools are a harmful fad. Elena writes such words in her letters, you can't tell what she's trying to say."

"School, school, for all of them," Alexei put in sternly, lifting his cap to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. A premature baldness, creeping up from temples to crown, formed two sharp angles, greatly lengthening his face.

Natalya argued, with an inquiring glance at her husband:

"Pomyalov's right. He says learning drives people wild."

"Yes," said Pyotr.

"There!" Natalya cried, well pleased; but her husband added thoughtfully:

"Schooling is necessary."

His brother and Olga burst into laughter; and Natalya said reproachfully:

"How can you laugh? Remember where we're coming from!"

They seized her arms, and walked on more quickly. But Pyotr slowed his step, saying:

"I'll wait for mother."

That unpleasant fellow, Tikhon Vyalov, had upset him. Looking out over the mill from the cemetery, just before the obit, Pyotr had said to himself, aloud—not boasting, but simply expressing what he saw:

"The business has grown."

And at once he had heard, from behind his back, the calm voice of the former ditch digger:

"Business grows like mould in a cellar, of its own power."

Pyotr did not say a word, did not even turn his head. But the obvious, outrageous stupidity of the yardman's words aroused his spleen. A man works; he gives hundreds their daily bread: day and night, he is absorbed in thoughts of his business; he forgets his very self in his cares for it. And all of a sudden some ignorant fool declares that the business lives of its own power, not by its master's mind. And whenever you saw him, this creature would be mumbling something about the soul, and sin.

Artamonov sat down on an old pine stump by the road, and pulled at his ear. He recalled how, one day, he had complained to Olga:

"I never have the time to think about my soul."

She had put him a strange question:

"Why, does your soul live separately from you?"

At first he took these words for a woman's jest. But Olga's bird-like face was grave, and her dark eyes gleamed kindly from behind her spectacles.

"I don't understand," he said.

"And I don't understand it when people talk about the soul apart from the person, as if it was a foundling."

"I don't understand," Pyotr repeated, and lost all desire for conversation with this woman. She was very alien, almost incomprehensible; yet her simplicity attracted, though he feared this seeming simplicity might be a screen for craft.

As to Tikhon Vyalov, Pyotr had always disliked him. He was annoyed by the very sight of the man's spotty face and high cheekbones, his strange eyes, his ears, plastered close to his skull and half hidden in his reddish hair; by his sparse beard, and his gait, not rapid, but efficient, and the whole of his clumsy, thick-set figure. Tikhon's composure, too, was annoying, and somehow enviable. Even his industry irritated. Tikhon worked like a machine, very rarely affording any pretext for reproof; but that, too, was vexing. And most annoying of all was the realization that this man, growing with every passing year more inseparably a part of the household, seemed to feel himself an indispensable spoke in the Artamonovs' wheel of life. Strangely, the children loved him, just as dogs did, and horses. Tulun, the old wolf dog, surly because he was chained, would allow none but Tikhon to approach him; and Pyotr's elder son, unruly Ilya, obeyed the yardman more readily than he would his father and mother.

To rid himself of the sight of Vyalov, Artamonov had offered him other work—as church watchman, or forester. Tikhon had shaken his heavy head in refusal.

"I'm no good for that. If you're tired of me, rest a while. Give me a month's leave, and I'll go visit Nikita Ilyich."

That was just what he had said: "Rest a while." This phrase, so stupid and insolent, coming together with a reminder of his brother, hidden somewhere far away beyond the swamps, in a poverty-stricken forest monastery, evoked an anxious suspicion in Pyotr's mind. Besides the tale Tikhon had told about Nikita after the attempted suicide, there must be something else, something shameful, that he knew. He seemed to be awaiting new misfortunes, and his flickering eyes counselled:

"Keep your hands off. You need me."

He had already paid three visits to the monastery. He would sling a pack on his back, take a staff in his hand, and set out unhurriedly, as though walking the earth out of kindness to it. Indeed, everything he did seemed to be done out of kindness.

On his return, Tikhon would give but slow, obscure replies to their questions about Nikita. The thought would always arise that he was not telling all he knew.

"He's well. Respected. Sends thanks for your messages and gifts."

"What does he say?" Pyotr would ask, in an effort to elicit something more.

"What can a monk say?"

"Well, what?" Alexei would put in impatiently.

"He talks about God. He's interested in the weather—says the rains don't come when they should. Complains about the mosquitoes. They have lots of mosquitoes, out there. He asked about you."

"What?"

"He's sorry for you."

"For us? Why?"

"Because. You live on the run, and he's stopped still, well, and he's sorry for you, because you aren't easy."

Alexei would shout, guffawing:

"What nonsense!"

Tikhon's pupils would contract, and his eyes grow blank.

"Well, I don't know what he thinks. I'm telling you what he said. I'm a simple man."

"Yes, you're simple!" Alexei would tell him mockingly. "Like the fool, Anton."

A breeze blew up, enveloping Pyotr Artamonov in a fragrant warmth, and the day grew brighter. A blue chasm formed among the clouds, with the sun peeping from its boundless depths. Pyotr glanced at the sun, then, dazzled, fell still deeper into thought.

It was mortifying, in a way, that Nikita, after depositing a thousand rubles in the monastery and ensuring himself a lifelong annuity of a hundred and eighty, had resigned his share of the inheritance to his brothers.

"Who makes such presents?" Pyotr had grumbled; but Alexei had been pleased.

"What does he want with money? To fatten those do-nothing monks? He decided right. We have a business, and children."

Natalya had been actually touched.

"So he hasn't forgot the injury he did us," she had said with

satisfaction, brushing a solitary tear from her rosy cheek. "There's Elena's dowry."

This action of his brother's shadowed Pyotr's thoughts; for Nikita's departure for the monastery had been maliciously construed in the town, in an unfavourable light to the Artamonovs.

As to Alexei, Pyotr got along with him well enough, though he could see that his quick-witted brother had picked the easiest part of the business: trips to the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod and, twice a year or so, visits to Moscow. Returning from such visits, Alexei would tell tremendous tales of the prosperity of the Moscow manufacturers.

"They live in style, no worse than the nobility."

"It's easy to live like a lord," Pyotr hinted; but the hint was lost on his brother, who continued enthusiastically:

"When a merchant builds himself a house, it's a regular cathedral! They educate their children."

Though greatly aged, he had regained the liveliness of his early youth, and his hawk eyes were always bright.

"Why keep a frown on your face all the time?" he would ask his brother. More, he would preach to him: "Business has to be done lightly. Business can't stand tedium."

Pyotr could see that Alexei had much in common with their father; but he found him harder and harder to understand.

"I'm a sick man," Alexei would still remind the family. Yet he took no care of his health: drank deeply, gambled heavily night after night, and was evidently loose with women. What was the focus of his life? Seemingly, neither he himself nor his home. Baimakova's house had long been badly in need of repair, but Alexei paid no attention to it. His children were born weak, and died before they were five. Only one had survived—Miron, an ugly, big-boned youngster, three years older than Ilya. Both Alexei and his wife were infected with a ridiculous greed for useless things. Their rooms were crowded with an ill-assorted conglomeration of furniture bought from the gentry, and they both took pleasure in making gifts of it. They had given Natalya a queer sort of wardrobe, trimmed with porcelain, and her mother a big leather armchair and a splendid bed made of Karelian birch and decorated with bronze. Olga was a great hand at beaded pictures, yet her husband would bring her

home pictures of the same sort from his trips through the gubernia.

"You're crazy," said Pyotr, when his brother presented him with a huge desk, intricately carved and fitted out with innumerable drawers. But Alexei only stroked the desk and cried:

"It's a beauty! They don't make things like that any more. They know it, in Moscow."

"You'd do better to buy up silver. The nobility have lots of silver."

"Give me time—I'll buy everything! In Moscow. . . ."

If Alexei were to be believed, Moscow was full of crazy folk, less occupied with business than with the effort to live—every one of them—like the gentry, for which purpose they bought up everything the nobility would sell, from country seats to teacups.

Visiting his brother, Pyotr would always feel, with painful envy, that he was more at ease here than in his own home. It was hard to understand. Nor could he understand what it was he liked in Olga. Beside Natalya, she looked like a parlour maid; but she showed no silly fear of kerosene lamps, and did not believe that kerosene was brewed by students, out of the fat of suicides. Her mild voice was pleasant, and her eyes were fine, their kindly gleam unmarred by her spectacles. But she talked of people and affairs with a provoking childishness, as though regarding them from afar. This perplexed and irritated him.

"Don't you believe anyone's to blame for anything?" Pyotr would ask sarcastically; and she would reply:

"People are to blame, but I don't like to judge."

Pyotr did not believe her.

With her husband, she behaved as though she were older than he, and knew herself to be wiser. Alexei took no offence at this. He called her "aunt," and it was only seldom that he would exclaim, with a shade of vexation:

"That's enough, aunt—I'm tired! I'm a sick man, and it wouldn't do any harm to pamper me a little."

"You're pampered enough and plenty!"

She would smile to her husband, a smile that Pyotr would have liked to see on his own wife's lips. Natalya was a model wife, and a skilled housekeeper. She was unexcelled at pickling cu-

cumbers and mushrooms and making preserves, and the servants in her house worked like the wheels of a clock. Natalya loved her husband tirelessly, with a calm love, thick as cream. She was thrifty.

"How much have we got in the bank now?" she would ask, and add anxiously: "Are you sure it's a good bank, and won't bust?"

When she handled money, her comely face would grow stern. She would press her raspberry lips together, and an acrid, greasy light would appear in her eyes. Counting the filthy, varicoloured bits of paper, she would take them up carefully between her plump fingers, as though afraid the money would blow away like so many flies.

"You and Alexei—do you divide the profits right?" she would ask in bed, when she had sated Pyotr with caresses. "Are you sure he don't cheat you? He's smart! And they're greedy, he and his wife. They grab everything they can lay their hands on, just grab and grab!"

She thought herself surrounded by crooks, and declared:

"I can't trust anyone but Tikhon."

"Then you trust a fool," mumbled Pyotr wearily.

"He's a fool, but he has a conscience."

When Pyotr first took her to the fair at Nizhni-Novgorod, he asked her, wonderstruck at the gigantic scale of this all-Russian mart:

"How do you like it?"

"Very nice," she replied. "Plenty of everything, and all cheaper than at home."

And she began to enumerate the things they needed to buy:

"Half a hundredweight of soap, a case of candles, some loaf sugar, and a sack of granulated. . . ."

In the circus, she covered her eyes when the acrobats appeared.

"Oh, the shameless creatures! Oh, they're half naked! Oh, I shouldn't look at them, with my baby coming. You shouldn't take me to such dreadful places—maybe it's a boy I'm heavy with!"

At such moments Pyotr Artamonov would feel that he was stifling in a boredom green and viscous as the slime in the river Vataraksha, where no fish would live but the fat, stupid tench.

Natalya still prayed as long and with as businesslike an air as ever. Her prayers done, she would sink into bed and industriously incite her husband to enjoy her soft, plump body. Her skin smelled of the pantry where she kept her jars of pickles, her smoked fish and hams. Pyotr felt repeatedly, and with increasing frequency, that his wife's zeal was excessive, that her caresses drained him.

"Let me alone. I'm tired," he would say.

"Go to sleep then, bless you," she would reply dutifully, and herself drop quickly into slumber, her eyebrows tilted as in surprise, her lips smiling, as though her closed eyes gazed at some wonderful vision, never seen before.

At those dreary moments when Pyotr realized with particular clarity his repugnance for Natalya, he would compel himself to recall the fearful day of the birth of their first son. After eighteen dragging hours of torment, his mother-in-law, frightened and tearful, had led him into a room dense with a strangely leaden atmosphere. His wife lay writhing on the crumpled bed, her eyes goggling and wild with searing pain, dishevelled, perspiring, barely recognizable. She greeted him with a wild cry:

"Petya, farewell, I'm dying. It will be a boy.... Petya, forgive...."

Her bitten lips were so swollen that they could barely move, and the words seemed to issue, not from her throat, but from her low-hung belly—monstrously distended, to the point of bursting. Her purple face was bloated. She panted like a tired dog, and, like a dog, thrust out her swollen, mangled tongue. She clutched at her hair, pulling and tearing it. Incessantly, she groaned and cried, as though trying to persuade or vanquish someone who would not or could not concede her wish:

"A bo-oy...."

It was a windy day. A bird cherry tossed and murmured outside the window, setting shadows dancing on the panes. Pyotr saw their antics, and heard the rustle of the leaves. Frantic, he cried:

"Pull the shade! Can't you see?"

And he fled in terror, followed by the woman's screams:

"A-a-a-a...."

After another hour and a half his mother-in-law, too happy and tired for speech, led him once more to his wife's bedside. Natalya

looked up at him with the unearthly glory of martyrdom in her eyes, and said weakly, drunkenly:

"A boy. A son."

He bent over her and pressed his cheek to her shoulder, mumbling:

"Well, mother, I won't forget this while I'm alive. I can tell you that! Well, thanks!"

It was the first time he had called her "mother." All his fear, all his joy, went into that one word. Closing her eyes, she stroked his head with a weak, heavy hand.

"He's a giant," said the big-nosed, pock-marked midwife, displaying the child as proudly as though she herself had borne it. But Pyotr did not see his son. He could see nothing but the corpse-like face of his wife, with dark pits instead of eyes.

"Will she die?"

"Fiddlesticks!" returned the pock-marked midwife briskly. "If people died of that, there'd be no midwives."

Now the giant was in his ninth year, a tall, healthy boy with a lofty forehead and a turned-up nose, his face lit by big, grave eyes of a clear, dark blue. Alexei's mother had had such eyes, and Nikita. Another son, Yakov, had been born a year after the first; but Ilya, by the time he was five, had made himself the most important person in the house. Pampered by all, he was obedient to none, and lived an independent life, getting himself with amazing consistency into the most uncomfortable and dangerous situations. His mischief was almost always somewhat out of the ordinary run, and this evoked in his father a feeling akin to pride.

One day Pyotr found his son in the shed, trying to attach a barrow wheel to an old wooden trough.

"What's it going to be?"

"A steamer."

"It won't go."

"I'll make it go!" said the son, with his grandfather's spirit. Failing in his effort to convince the boy that his work would be wasted, Pyotr thought to himself:

"Persistent as his grandfather."

Ilya was inflexible in the pursuit of his designs; but try as he might, he was unable to build a steamer out of his trough and two

barrow wheels. Then he drew charcoal wheels on the sides of the trough, dragged it to the river, embarked, and got stuck in the mud. Instead of being frightened, however, he simply shouted to some women who were rinsing clothes in the river:

"Hey, goodies! Pull me out, or I'll drown!"

Natalya spanked Ilya, and had the trough chopped up for firewood. From that day on, Ilya noticed his mother no more than he did his two-year-old sister, Tanya. He was a busy little fellow, always working at something: whittling, chopping, smashing, mending. Watching him, his father thought:

"He'll be somebody. A builder."

Sometimes Ilya would ignore his father for days on end. Then, marching suddenly into the office, he would climb onto Pyotr's knees and demand:

"Tell me a story."

"I have no time."

"Neither have I."

Chuckling, the father would push aside his papers.

"Well, then. Once upon a time. . . ."

"I know all about once upon a time. Tell me a funny story."

The father knew no funny stories.

"Better go to your grandmother."

"She's got a cold."

"Well, then, try your mother."

"She'll wash my face."

Artamonov laughed. His son was the only being who could make him laugh so easily and unaffectedly.

"Then I'll go to Tikhon," said Ilya, and made to slide down from his father's knees; but Pyotr stopped him.

"What does Tikhon tell you?"

"Everything."

"Well, but what?"

"He knows everything. He used to live at Balakhna. They build barges there, and boats."

When Ilya tumbled from somewhere and bruised his face, his mother thrashed him, shouting:

"Don't climb over roofs, or you'll be a cripple, a hunchback!"

Scarlet with rage, the boy would not cry, but threatened his mother:

"I'll die on you, if you hit me any more!"

She told the father about this threat. He chuckled.

"Don't spank him. Send him to me."

The boy came and stood in the doorway, his hands behind his back. Every other feeling drowned in curiosity and surging tenderness, Pyotr asked:

"Why are you rude to your mother?"

"I'm not a fool," the son replied angrily.

"You must be a fool, to be rude."

"Because she hits me. Tikhon says, only fools get beaten."

"Tikhon? Tikhon himself. . . ."

But for some reason or other Pyotr hesitated to call the yardman a fool. He paced up and down the room, studying the human being in the doorway, at a loss what to say.

"You hit your brother Yakov."

"He's a fool. And besides, it don't hurt him. He's fat."

"Well, and if he's fat, does that mean you have to hit him?"

"He's greedy."

Pyotr felt that he could not discipline his son, and that his son knew it. Perhaps it would have been simpler, and have done more good, to pull the boy's ears; but he could not raise his hand to that curly head, so poignantly dear. The very thought of chastisement made him uncomfortable before the steady, expectant gaze of the beloved blue eyes. And the sun interfered, too. Somehow, it was always on sunny days that Ilya was most desperately mischievous. Speaking the usual words of admonishment, Pyotr recalled a time when he himself had had to hear out these same words, and they had failed to reach his heart, had made no mark in his memory, had evoked only boredom and, briefly, fear. But blows, even if well deserved, are not easily forgotten. That, too, Pyotr Artamonov knew well.

The second son, round, rosy-cheeked Yakov, in feature resembled his mother. Yakov often cried, seeming actually to enjoy the process. As a preliminary to the flow of tears he would sniff, and puff out his cheeks, and rub his fists into his eyes. He was cowardly.

He ate much and greedily, and then, heavy with food, either slept or complained:

"Mother, I'm tired."

The elder daughter, Elena, was at home only during the summer. She had become a young lady, distant, alien.

At the age of seven, Ilya had begun to study with priest Gleb. Discovering, however, that the son of the mill clerk, Nikonov, was learning to read by a primer with pictures in it, called *Our Own Tongue*, instead of the Psalter, he had told his father:

"I'm not going to study any more. My tongue hurts."

Only after long and careful questioning had he explained:

"Pasha Nikonov's learning our own tongue, and I'm learning somebody else's."

But sometimes, as though checked by some inner barrier, this lively boy would sit for hours, all alone, under a pine tree on the hill, throwing dry cones into the muddy green water of the Vataraksha.

"He's bored," the father would reflect. He too, after whirling for weeks and months in the deafening hum of affairs, would find himself suddenly plunged into a dense fog of hazy thoughts, a blind tangle of tedium; nor could he tell what was the more stupefying: his business cares, or the tedium induced by these essentially monotonous cares. Often, on such a day, he would begin to hate the people he encountered—one for a sidelong glance, another for an ill-chosen word. Thus it was, that cloudy day, that he almost hated Tikhon Vyalov.

Vyalov was approaching, with Pyotr's mother-in-law leaning on his arm. Pyotr heard him say:

"We Vyalovs are a big family."

"Then why don't you live with your relatives?" Pyotr demanded, getting up and taking Baimakova's free arm. Tikhon fell silent and moved away. Sternly and insistently, Artamonov repeated his question. Then, narrowing his colourless eyes, the yardman replied indifferently:

"Why, there's none of them left. They all got done in."

"What do you mean—done in? Who did them in?"

"Two of my brothers got sent to Sevastopol, and they were killed there. And the eldest got mixed up in the rebellion, when the peas-

ants were mad over the emancipation. Their father was in a rebellion, too—he wouldn't have potatoes, when they made folks eat 'em by force. They were going to flog him, so he ran away, and the ice broke under him, and he got drowned. Then my mother had two more with another husband, Vyalov, the fisherman—me, and my brother Sergei."

"And where's your brother?" asked Ulyana, blinking her eyes, still heavy with weeping.

"He got killed."

"You sound like the prayers for the dead," said Artamonov crossly.

"Ulyana Ivanovna was asking me. She was a little upset, and so I. . . ."

He did not finish. Bending, he lifted a dry twig from the road and threw it aside. For a minute or two they walked on without speaking.

"Who killed your brother?" Artamonov suddenly asked.

"Who could kill him? Men kill," said Vyalov calmly. Baimakova sighed, and added:

"Lightning, too."

. . . Midsummer brought difficult days. Beneath a yellow, smoky sky, an oppressive hush, a relentlessly grilling heat, hung over the earth. Fires swept the peat bogs and the forests. A dry, hot wind, rising with sudden and boisterous force, wildly whistling and crying, would tear the withering leaves from the trees—scatter the rusty pine needles left from the year before—swirl up clouds of sand, and drive them before it, mixed with wood shavings, boon, and chicken feathers—jostle the people, trying to tear off their clothes—and finally hide away in the forests, where it made the fires blaze up still more fiercely.

There was much illness at the mill. Through the hum of the spindles, the murmur of the shuttles, Artamonov heard dry, hacking coughs. The faces beside the looms were downcast and bitter, the workers' movements languid. Output declined, and the quality of the cloth suffered perceptibly. There was a great increase in absenteeism; for the men began to drink more heavily, and the women had sick children to tend at home. Day after day the jolly carpenter, Serafim, a little old man with the rosy face of a child, worked

over tiny coffins; nor was it seldom that he had to fit the pale spruce boards together for grown men and women whose earthly tasks were done.

"A holiday is what we need," Alexei insisted. "To cheer them up, and raise their spirits."

Setting off for the fair with his wife, he repeated his advice:

"Give them a holiday, and they'll liven up. Believe me, a good time is the cure for all ills!"

"Go about it," Pyotr told his wife. "And make it a good job—no stinting."

Natalya began to grumble. Angrily, he demanded:

"What now?"

She blew her nose loudly and protestingly into the bottom of her apron, but replied:

"Very well."

They began with special prayers, which priest Gleb conducted with great solemnity. The priest had grown still thinner. His cracked voice, pronouncing the unaccustomed words, rose plaintively, as though his last, failing strength went into his plea. The ashy faces of the consumptive weavers frowned sternly, set in reverent immobility. Many of the women sobbed aloud. And when the priest raised his sad eyes to the smoky sky, the people, too, looked up imploringly through the smoke to the bald, tarnished sun, thinking, perhaps, that the meek priest saw someone in the heavens who knew him and would hear his prayer.

After the services, the women brought tables out into the settlement street, and all the mill hands sat down to brimming wooden bowls of fat mutton and noodles. Ten persons sat around each bowl; and on each table stood a pail of strong, homebrewed beer and a big, wicker-cased bottle of vodka. This quickly raised the spirits of the jaded, disheartened people. The suffocating hush hooding the earth stirred and retreated to the swamps and the burning forests. The settlement rang with merry voices, with the clatter of wooden spoons, the laughter of children, the scolding of mothers, the jests of the youth.

A heavy meal kept them at table for three hours or more. Then, when the drunk had been taken home, the young folk gathered around the neat little carpenter, Serafim, in his blue cotton shirt

and trousers, faded with many washings. The carpenter's pink, sharp-nosed, drunken little face beamed rapturously, and his lively eyes sparkled, between winks, with a spirit that belied his age. There was about this jolly coffinmaker a sort of palpitating lightness, a celestial joyousness, in full keeping with his name. He sat on a bench, with his cithara on his sharp knees, picking at the strings with fingers dark and knobby as horse-radish roots, and singing in the manner of blind beggars—deliberately doleful, nasal, twanging:

Well, good folk, here's a new tale for your pleasure,
For your wisdom to hear and to unriddle!

He winked at the girls. His daughter Zinaida, a bobbin girl, stood majestically among them: handsome, high-bosomed, insolent-eyed. He sang still higher, still more dismally:

The sweet Lord Christ, he sits in the radiance,
In the fragrance and coolness of heaven,
'Neath a linden tree, so tall and gold-blossomed.
There in state, on his throne of white bast fibre,
He distributes shining gold and silver,
He distributes bright jewels of rare beauty,
Awarding rich men for their virtue,
For that they, the rich, are so gentle,
Kind to the poor and the unfortunate,
Loving the poor folk as brothers,
Feeding the hungry and the wretched.

Again he winked at the girls, and suddenly shifted to dance time. With a shrill squeal, his daughter sprang forward, her hands behind her head, gypsy fashion, her broad bosom quivering, and began to dance to the beating time of the strings and her father's ringing chant:

And the silver that they take
Makes their arms and legs to ache!
And the bright gold of desire
Sears their limbs in flame and fire!
Pearls and sapphires that they prize
Bring dull blindness to their eyes!

The boys whistled shrilly, drowning out the strumming of the cithara and Serafim's merry song. Then the girls and women struck up, in swift dance time:

Oh, the ships come sailing swiftly o'er the sea,
Bearing gifts for all the pretty girls we see!

And Zinaida, dancing, rejoined piercingly:

Young Pashka sends Palashka
Yards of sackcloth for shirting;
And Teryoshka sends Matryoshka
Dainty earrings—birch-tree catkins.

Ilya Artamonov sat on a pile of lumber with Pavel Nikonov: a skinny boy, with an oldish, baldish head that was always twisting uneasily on his long neck; with pasty, sickly features and avidly shifting, cowardly grey eyes. The little old man in blue seemed very nice to Ilya. He liked the music of the cithara, and Serafim's gay, comical singing. But all of a sudden that woman in the bright red blouse had to flare up and start whirling about, and spoil everything, evoking wild whistles and a tuneless, shrieking song. This woman became altogether hateful, to his mind, when Nikonov said, very low:

"Zinaida's a wild one. She lives with everybody. With your father, too—I saw him squeezing her, myself."

"What for," asked Ilya stupidly.

"You know well enough!"

Ilya dropped his eyes. He knew what girls were squeezed for, and was annoyed with himself for asking his friend about it.

"You're lying," he said disgustedly, and stopped listening to Nikonov's whispered comments. He disliked this cringing, cowardly boy for his sluggish ways and for his monotonous and uninteresting tales about the mill girls. But Nikonov was a connoisseur where pigeons were concerned, and Ilya was fond of pigeons. Also, he valued the privilege of protecting his weakly companion from the boys in the settlement. Moreover, Nikonov had a gift for describing the things he saw, though he saw nothing but unpleasantness, and talked about it in just the tone of Ilya's younger brother, Yakov—as though in complaint against everyone in the world.

Ilya sat for a while without speaking, then got up and went home. Tea had been spread in the orchard, in the hot shade of the dust-grey trees. There was company at the big table. The quiet priest, Gleb, was there, and the mechanic, Koptev, swarthy and curlyheaded as a gypsy, and the clerk, Nikonov, his face washed so clean that it had no expression left. Nikonov had a tiny, whiskered nose, and a bump on his forehead; and a smile oozed between nose and bump, lifting quivering folds of skin around his narrow slits of eyes.

Ilya sat down beside his father. He did not believe this cheerless man had any dealings with the shameless bobbin girl. The father stroked his shoulder with a heavy hand, but did not speak. They were all drooping with the heat, and streaming with perspiration. Speech had to be forced. Only Koptev's loud voice rang out as though on a winter night, frosty and crystal clear.

"Are we going to the settlement?" the mother asked.

"Yes. I'll go get my cap." said the father. He got up and walked towards the house. Ilya followed, a moment later, and caught up with him on the porch.

"What is it?" asked the father affectionately. And the son asked, looking straight into his eyes:

"Did you squeeze Zinaida? Or didn't you?"

It seemed to Ilya that his father looked frightened. That did not surprise him; for he regarded his father as a timid man, who was afraid of everyone, that being the reason why he spoke so little. Ilya often felt that his father was afraid even of him. Indeed, he was afraid at this very moment. And, to encourage the frightened man, the boy said:

"I don't believe it. I'm only asking."

The father pushed him into the entry and down the hall. Once in his room, with the door shut tight, he began pacing up and down, from corner to corner, breathing heavily, as he usually did when angered.

"Come over here," said Artamonov senior, pausing by the desk. Artamonov junior obeyed.

"What was that you said?"

"It was Pavlushka said it. I don't believe him."

"You don't believe him? I see."

Pyotr's anger evaporated as he stared down at his son's high

forehead and grave, unsmiling face. He pulled at his ear, trying to make up his mind: was it good, or bad, that his son did not believe the silly chatter of just such a youngster as himself—did not believe it, and was evidently holding out this unbelief as consolation? He did not know what to say to his son, or how, and he was very reluctant to strike the boy. But something had to be done, and he decided that blows would be the simplest and most comprehensible measure. Heavily raising an unwilling hand, he thrust his fingers into his son's crisp curls and began to jerk them, muttering:

"Don't listen to fools' talk. Don't listen!"

Then he pushed the boy away, commanding:

"Go stay in your room. And . . . stay there. Yes."

The son went to the door, his head tilted to the side and borne stiffly, as though it were an alien body. Watching him, the father consoled himself with the reflection:

"He's not crying. I didn't hurt him."

He tried to make himself angry.

"Think of that! He don't believe it! Well, I've showed him now."

But this could not smother his sense of pity and injury for his son, or his dissatisfaction with himself.

"It's the first time I've struck him," he thought, looking down disgustedly at his red, hairy hand. "Myself, I must have been thrashed a hundred times, before I was ten."

But this, too, failed to comfort. Artamonov glanced out through the window at the sun, which resembled a grease spot on muddy water, and listened awhile to the drawing din that came from the settlement; then set out reluctantly to visit the festival. On the way, he told Nikonov quietly:

"Your stepson tells my Ilya all sorts of foolishness."

"I'll give him a thrashing," the clerk replied, quite readily—in fact, with every appearance of pleasure.

"Teach him to watch his tongue," Pyotr added. Glancing sidewise into Nikonov's blank face, he thought relievedly:

"It's as simple as all that."

The settlement greeted the master with loud good cheer. Faces beamed in drunken smiles, and flattery was loud. Serafim, shod in

new bast sandals, his white foot-wrappings held in place by red tapes, Mordovian fashion, stamped and twirled before Artamonov, singing hosanna:

Say, now, who comes here?
Why, our lord and pride!
With our mistress dear
Stepping at his side!

Grey-bearded, long-haired, priestly-looking Ivan Morozov rumbled, in a deep bass:

"We're pleased with you. We're pleased."

Another old man, Mamayev, shouted ecstatically:

"The Artamonovs care for their folk like lords!"

And Nikonov remarked to Koptev, loud enough for all to hear:

"These are grateful folk. They know how to value their benefactors!"

"Mother, they're pushing me," complained Yakov, round as a ball in his pink silk blouse. His mother held him by the hand. Smiling graciously at the women, she told him:

"Look at the old man dance."

The blue carpenter spun and leaped indefatigably, chanting one facetious couplet after another:

Ekh, and stamp, and stamp away!
Ekh, stamp away faster!
Leather boots weigh more than bast—
A woman's sweeter than a lass!

Praises were no novelty to Artamonov. He had every reason to doubt their sincerity. And yet, they softened him. Smiling with pleasure, he said:

"Well, thanks, thanks! We get on with one another, don't we?"

To himself, he thought:

"It's a shame Ilya's not here to see his father honoured."

He felt the need to do something kind, to help these people in some way. After a little thought, he declared, pulling at his ear:

"We'll have to double the size of the children's hospital."

Serafim threw up his hands and sprang away.

"Hear that? Hurrah for the master!"

The people cheered, loudly, if unevenly. Natalya, surrounded by women, was deeply touched, and murmured nasally:

"Some of you go bring three more kegs of beer. Tikhon will give them to you. Go ahead."

This still further increased the women's rapture. Nikonov shook his head, exclaiming emotionally:

"A meeting fit for an archbishop!"

"Mo-other, I'm hot," Yakov whined.

The joyful occasion was a little ruffled when the black-bearded stoker, Volkov, with his huge sloe eyes, came running up to Natalya. An emaciated child, half stupefied with the heat, its blue-white skin covered with sores, dangled helplessly over his left arm. Running up to Natalya, he began to shout hysterically:

"What shall I do? My wife died. Of the heat, she did. Help! And left this behind. What shall I do?"

Strange, yellow tears dripped from the stoker's insane eyes. The women tried to push him away from Natalya, clamouring, as though in apology:

"Don't you listen to him. He's out of his mind. His wife was a sinful woman. Consumptive. He's sick, too."

"Take the baby from him, somebody," said Artamonov gruffly, and immediately several pairs of arms were stretched towards the drooping child. But Volkov cursed them loudly and ran away.

On the whole, everything was fine, and bright, and gay, as a holiday should be. Noticing new faces among the workers, Artamonov thought, with a feeling akin to pride:

"Our numbers are growing. If father could see it...."

Suddenly his wife said regretfully:

"You chose a bad time to punish Ilya. He don't see how the people love you."

Artamonov did not answer, but glanced furtively at Zinaida. She was sauntering about, with a dozen girls behind her, singing in a low-pitched, unpleasant voice:

Sidling past me,
Goggling at me,
He's on the point, ah,
Of loving me!

"The hussy!" he thought. "And it's a rotten song, too."

He took out his watch, glanced at it, and, he could not have said why, lied to his wife:

"I'll go home for a minute. I'm expecting a telegram from Alexei."

He strode off rapidly, reflecting upon what he must say to his son. He prepared a number of phrases, very stern, and at the same time affectionate. But when he softly opened the door to Ilya's room, he forgot them all. The boy was kneeling on a chair, his elbows on the window sill, looking out at the crimson, smoky sky. The gathering darkness filled the little room with grey-brown dust. In a big cage hanging by the wall, a blackbird scraped its yellow beak, preparing to go to sleep.

"Well, still sitting here?"

Ilya started and turned his head. Unhurriedly, he got down from his chair.

"There! Listening to all sorts of rubbish."

The boy stood with his head bent, and the father understood that this was deliberate, to remind him of the punishment received.

"Why do you stoop? Hold your head up straight."

Ilya lifted his eyebrows, but would not look at his father. The blackbird began to hop about in its cage, whistling softly.

"He's angry," thought Artamonov. He sat down on Ilya's bed and said, poking the pillow with his finger: "You shouldn't listen to nonsense."

Ilya said:

"But people talk."

His grave, reasonable tone relieved the father. Pyotr went on, more mildly and with greater courage:

"So they do. But don't you heed them. Forget what they say. If you hear people talking filth, you just forget it."

"Do you forget?"

"Why, of course! If I remembered everything I heard, what do you think would have become of me?"

He spoke slowly, carefully picking his words for greater simplicity, and realizing clearly that no words were really needed at all. Soon, tangled in the obscure wisdom of simple words, he sighed and said:

"Come over here to me."

Ilya cautiously approached. Taking the boy between his knees, the father laid his hand on the broad forehead and pressed it lightly upward. But Ilya would not raise his head, and the father took offence.

"What are you sulking about? Look at me."

Ilya looked straight into his eyes, but that only made matters worse, because he asked:

"Why did you hit me? I told you I didn't believe Pavlushka."

Artamonov senior did not answer at once. He realized, to his amazement, that by some miracle his son stood on a level with himself. The boy had risen to adult significance, or, perhaps, reduced the adult to his own level.

"He's too sensitive for his age," Pyotr reflected. Getting up, he said hurriedly, eager to hasten his son's reconciliation:

"I didn't hurt you. Children have to be taught. If you knew how my father used to thrash me! And my mother, too. And the hostler, and the clerk, and the German footman. It's not so bad when your own folks thrash you, but an outsider—that's when it hurts. Your own flesh and blood strikes light, in love."

He paced up and down the room, six steps from door to window, hurrying to end this conversation—almost afraid lest his son put some new question.

"You hear and see all sorts of things you shouldn't, around the mill," he mumbled, keeping his eyes turned away from his son, who stood pressed against the foot of the bed. "I'll have to send you to the city, to school. Would you like that?"

"Yes."

"Well, then. . . ."

He wanted to caress his son, but something stopped him. He could not recall: had his own father and mother ever caressed him after they had hurt his feelings?

"Well, you can go out and play. Only I wish you wouldn't run around with Pashka."

"Nobody likes him."

"There's nothing to like him for, such a sickly pup."

Downstairs again, in his own room, Artamonov stood at the

open window, reflecting that his talk with his son had not come off too well.

"I've spoiled him. He's not afraid of me."

From the settlement came a confusion of sounds: the girls' squeals and songs, loud conversation, the wheezing of an accordion. Tikhon's voice came clearly from the gateway:

"What keeps you at home, child? A holiday on, and you sit here at home. Going to school? That's fine. Untaught is as well as unborn, so they say. Well, I'll be lonely here without you, child."

Artamonov wanted to shout:

"You're lying! I'll be the lonely one!" Maliciously, he thought, "The underhanded sneak! Fawning on the master's son."

When the boy left for the city, where priest Gleb's brother, a teacher, was to prepare him to enter school, Pyotr felt that his heart was empty, his house full of boredom. He had an uncomfortable sense of something out of order: the same feeling that came over him when the night light in his bedroom was not burning. Pyotr had grown so accustomed to the little blue flame that he would start awake, in the endless nights, if it went out.

Before leaving, Ilya behaved so badly as to seem deliberately trying to leave bad memories of himself behind. He was rude to his mother, reducing her to tears. He let all Yakov's birds out of their cages, and gave Nikonov the blackbird he had promised Yakov.

"What's got into you?" the father asked. But Ilya did not answer, only tilted his head to the side. And it seemed to Artamonov that his son was mocking at him, reminding him once more of what he would have liked to forget. It was strange, how much room this small being occupied in his heart.

"Did father ever worry over me that way?"

Memory confidently replied that Pyotr had never found in his father a responsive and well-loved parent, but only a stern taskmaster, far more attentive to Alexei than to him.

"What's wrong, then? Am I kinder than father?" Artamonov asked himself, and paused in perplexity. He could not say of his own self what he was: a kind man, or a bitter. These thoughts gave him no peace, coming up suddenly at inconvenient moments,

besieging him while he was at work. The business was growing energetically, turning hundreds of eyes upon the master, and demanding constant strained attention. Yet, whenever anything reminded him of Ilya, his business thoughts would snap like rotten warp, and it would require great effort to knot them together again. He tried to fill the void of Ilya's absence by increased attention to his younger son—and realized, with sullen disappointment, that Yakov could afford him no consolation.

"Daddy, buy me a goat." Yakov begged. He was always begging for something.

"Why a goat?"

"To ride on."

"That's a silly idea. Only witches ride on goats."

"Elena gave me a picture book, and there's a nice little boy in it, riding on a goat."

The father reflected:

"Ilya wouldn't have taken the picture on faith. He'd have stuck to me till I told him about the witches."

He did not like Yakov's way of pestering the boys in the mill settlement, and then complaining that they hurt him.

The elder son was also pugnacious, a fighter; but he had never once complained of anyone, though often bruised and knocked about by his playmates in the settlement. The younger son was cowardly and lazy. He was always sucking or chewing something. At times there was something about Yakov's actions that was hard to understand, something that seemed to promise little good. At tea, one day, as his mother was pouring his milk, her sleeve caught and overturned a glass of tea, and the hot water scalded her.

"I saw all the time you'd turn it over," Yakov bragged, grinning.

"You saw it, and you didn't say a word. That's no way," his father told him. "Now mother's scalded her legs."

Yakov chewed on, blinking and puffing, without a word. A few days later, his father heard his voice in the yard, spluttering eagerly:

"I saw he was going to hit him. He sneaked along, and sneaked along, and came up from behind, and didn't he just give it to him!"

Looking out at the window, Artamonov saw his son gesticulating excitedly, in lively conversation with that little good-for-nothing, Pavlushka Nikonov. He called Yakov into the house and forbade him to associate with Nikonov. He was about to add something; but after a glance into the boy's eyes—violet whites, and strangely light pupils—he only sighed and pushed him away.

"Go, empty-eyes."

Yakov went as cautiously as though the floor were ice, his elbows pressed to his sides and his hands extended, in the posture of a person carrying some awkward, heavy burden.

"Clumsy. And stupid," the father decided.

About his tall, untalkative daughter, too, there was something of the same dull tedium he found in Yakov. She liked to lie around reading. She would eat a great deal of jam at tea, and at dinner would break her bread fastidiously, with daintily crooked fingers, and manipulate her spoon as though she thought there was a fly in the soup. Her lips, very red and full, were always pursed, and she often told her mother, in a tone quite unsuitable to a mere girl:

"That's not done now. It's out of style."

When her father asked:

"See here, my educated lady, why don't you ever look in at the mill, and learn how the linen is made for your shifts?"—she replied:

"Very well."

She got into a fine dress, took her parasol, a gift from her uncle Alexei, and followed her father submissively, taking elaborate care to prevent her dress from getting caught on anything. A few times she sneezed; but when the workers wished her good health, she only flushed and nodded haughtily, without a word or a smile. Pyotr began to explain the processes; but, noticing that she was looking at the floor instead of the machines, he soon fell silent, hurt by his daughter's indifference to the business which required so much care. Still, as they came out of the loom shop, he asked:

"Well, how did you like it?"

"It was very dusty," she replied, examining her dress for damages.

"You didn't see much," said Pyotr, with a wry smile, and shouted at her disgustedly:

"What are you pulling your skirt up for? The yard is clean, and your skirt's short enough as it is."

Startled, she released her skirt, which she had been holding up between finger and thumb, and murmured apologetically:

"There's such a smell of oil."

This use of finger and thumb was particularly annoying, and Artamonov grumbled:

"You won't take much from life between two fingers!"

One rainy day, when she lay on a couch, absorbed in a book, he sat down beside her and asked what she was reading.

"About a doctor."

"I see. Something scientific."

But when he glanced into the book, he exclaimed indignantly:

"What do you mean by lying? It's verses. Don't try to tell me anyone writes science in verse!"

Hurriedly, confusedly, she told him some tale about how God gave Satan permission to tempt a certain doctor, a German, and how Satan sent a devil to get around the doctor. Artamonov pulled at his ear, trying conscientiously to grasp the purport of this tale; but the ridiculously instructive tone his daughter assumed was very vexing, making understanding difficult.

"This doctor—was he a drunkard?"

He could see that Elena was embarrassed by his question. Paying no more attention to her explanations, he said angrily:

"It's all mixed up. Fairy tales. Doctors don't believe in devils. Where'd you get the book?"

"The mechanic gave it to me."

Recalling Elena's manner of staring thoughtfully, with grey cat eyes, into space, he felt called upon to warn her:

"Koptev is no match for you. Don't get too thick with him."

Yes, Elena and Yakov were duller, more humdrum than Ilya. That he saw ever more clearly. And gradually, by unnoticeable degrees, in place of love for his son, there grew up within him a hatred for Pavel Nikonov. When he met the sickly little fellow, he would think to himself:

"All on account of such a rotten. . . ."

He felt a physical repulsion for this boy. Nikonov walked with stooped shoulders, his head twisting uneasily at the top of his thin

neck. Even when the boy was running, he seemed to Artamonov to be sneaking along like some cowardly misdoer. He worked hard, polishing his stepfather's boots and brushing his clothes, chopping and fetching wood, carrying water, dragging pails of slops from the kitchen, rinsing his brother's diapers in the river. Busy as a sparrow, grimy and ragged, he greeted everyone with an insinuating, doggish smile. Whenever Artamonov came in sight, no matter how far away, he would begin to bow, bending his goose neck until his head dropped to his chest. It was almost a pleasure to Artamonov to see the boy soaking in the autumn rain, or chopping wood of a winter day—trying to warm his stiff fingers with his breath, and balancing, goose-like, on one leg, with the other raised for warmth, the holey, down-at-heel boot almost falling off. His whole body writhed when he coughed, and his blue-white little hands would clutch at his chest.

Learning that Nikonov kept two pairs of pigeons in the bathhouse attic, Artamonov ordered Tikhon to free the birds and to see that the boy stopped climbing to the attic.

"He might fall off the roof and hurt himself. He's such a weakly youngster."

Coming into the office one evening, he found this boy scraping the floor with a knife, and rubbing it with a wet rag, to remove spilt ink.

"Who spilt it?"

"Father."

"Are you sure it wasn't you?"

"I didn't do it! Honest to God!"

"Then what were you crying about?"

Down on his knees, his head bent as though awaiting a blow, Pavel made no reply. Throwing him a glance that made him shrink and cower, Artamonov declared with satisfaction:

"It serves you right."

Then, in a sudden flash of lucidity, he smiled into his beard at the childish, ridiculous dislike he had conceived against this insignificant creature.

"What foolishness I waste my time on!" he thought to himself indulgently, and threw to the floor a heavy copper five-kopek piece.

"There! Buy yourself some sweets."

The boy reached out to take the coin as cautiously as though he feared the copper would sting his gaunt, dirty fingers.

"Does your stepfather thrash you?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's no help for it. Everyone gets thrashed now and then," said Artamonov consolingly. A few days later, when Yakov made some complaint about Pavlushka, Artamonov senior, though he did not believe his son, told his clerk, purely by force of habit:

"Give your stepson a thrashing."

"I thrash him all right," Nikonov assured him respectfully.

When summer brought Ilya home for the vacation period, dressed in unfamiliar clothes, with his hair cut short and his forehead bigger than ever, Artamonov's dislike for Pavel grew still more bitter; for his son stubbornly continued his friendship with this puny ragamuffin. Ilya himself had become poisonously polite, using the formal *vee** in addressing his father and mother. He walked about with his hands in his pockets, acting like a visitor in the house; he teased his brother into a state of tearful desperation, and annoyed his sister until she hurled her books at him. All in all, he behaved abominably.

"I told you so," Natalya complained to her husband. "And everyone says the same. Schooling leads to impudence."

Artamonov said nothing, but watched his son anxiously. It seemed to him that, though Ilya was constantly in mischief, there was no heart in it at all, only deliberate purpose. Pigeons appeared again, strutting and cooing on the ridge of the bathhouse roof. Ilya and Pavel would sit by the chimney for hours, engaged in lively chatter, when they were not busy flying their birds. Once, soon after Ilya's arrival, the father said:

"Well, tell me what it's like at school. I've told you lots of stories. Now it's your turn."

Very briefly and hurriedly, Ilya told him some dull tale about the tricks the boys played on their teachers.

"Why do you play such tricks on them?"

"They pester us," Ilya explained.

"I see. It don't sound good to me. Are your lessons hard?"

"No, they're easy."

* *Vee*—personal pronoun, second person plural. It is used in more formal address, as compared with the familiar second person singular (*tee*).—*Trans.*

"Is that the truth?"

"Look at my report card," Ilya returned, with a shrug. His eyes were fixed on the sky, high over the orchard. The father asked:

"What do you see out there?"

"A hawk."

Artamonov sighed.

"Well, you'd better run out and play. It seems you're dull with me."

Remaining alone, he recalled that he, too, in childhood, had almost always felt either boredom or fear when his father spoke to him.

"They play tricks on their teachers. Such a thing never entered my head, when the parish clerk was teaching me my letters at the end of a strap. Life seems to be easier now, for children."

Before returning to school, Ilya asked—and this was his only request:

"Father, let Pavel keep his pigeons in the attic, out at the bathhouse."

Promising nothing, the father replied:

"You can't cure everybody's troubles."

"Then he may," the son concluded. "I'll go tell him. He'll be glad."

Artamonov senior was hurt because his son, so solicitous to gladden a wretched little nobody, had not cared or tried in any way to gladden his own father's life. And after Ilya's departure he felt himself possessed by an even more persistent dislike for the clerk's stepson. Things reached such a pass that whenever anything went wrong, at home, at the mill, or in town, the image of this ragged, dirty child would push, uninvited, to the very focus of Artamonov's annoyment, as though offering its weak limbs for him to hang on them all his bitter thoughts, all his ugly emotions. The boy multiplied like mould, like the shadows at evening. Flitting like a thievish imp, he came more and more often into view.

One mild day of Indian summer, Artamonov went out into the orchard. He was tired and angry. Evening was falling, and the weary autumn sun simmered, without heat, in a greenish sky which the wind had swept and the rains washed clean. Tikhon Vyalov was at work in a corner of the orchard, raking together the fallen leaves. Their

soft, mournful whispering floated among the trees. Beyond the orchard, the mill was droning, and grey smoke rose lazily, soiling the transparent air. To avoid seeing the yardman, or having to speak to him, Artamonov turned to the opposite end of the orchard, where the bathhouse stood. The bathhouse door, he noticed, was ajar.

"That fellow's in there."

Peeping furtively into the dressing room, he saw the little figure of his enemy, sprawled on a bench in the shadowed corner. His head tilted, his legs spread wide apart, the boy was absorbed in masturbation. For just one instant, Artamonov was glad; but then, remembering Yakov and Ilya, he spluttered, in fear and repulsion:

"What are you doing, you swine?"

Pavel's arm stiffened and flew out. His whole body curved up queerly from the bench. His lips parting in a low cry, he shrank back, a tense little ball, then threw himself towards the door, where the big man was standing. Artamonov, with deliberate pleasure, stopped him by a blow of the right foot against his chest. Something crunched. The boy moaned faintly and toppled sidewise to the floor.

There was a moment when it seemed to Artamonov that by this blow he had cast off from his soul a burden of filthy rags, a weight of which he was weary. But the next moment he glanced out into the orchard, listening, then closed the door and bent over Pavel, saying, very low:

"Well, get up. Let's go."

The boy lay with one arm thrown forward, and one hand pressed to the floor under his bent knee. One leg seemed far shorter than the other. He had the appearance of movement, as though crawling stealthily closer and closer to Pyotr. The outflung arm was unnaturally, fearsomely long. Artamonov staggered, catching at the door frame for support. He pulled off his cap, and with its lining wiped his forehead, suddenly broken out in copious perspiration.

"Get up. I won't tell anybody," he whispered; but he already knew that he had killed the boy, already saw the little ribbon of dark blood oozing out on the floor from beneath his cheek.

"Dead," Pyotr thought. And the plain, short word brought deafening reverberations. He thrust his cap into his coat pocket and crossed himself, looking stupidly down at the pitifully twisted little figure. His brain throbbed fearfully in primitive thought.

"I'll say it was an accident. I hurt him with the door. Yes, the door. It's a heavy door."

He looked around, and sank heavily to the bench in the shock of finding Tikhon behind him, with his broom in his hand. The yardman's watery eyes were fixed on Nikonov. His fingers scraped his stony cheek, and he seemed deep in thought.

"There," Artamonov began loudly, gripping the edge of the bench with both hands. But Tikhon interrupted. Shaking his head, he said:

"A weak little fellow, and clumsy. How many times I told him, 'Don't go climbing up there!' "

"What's that?" asked Pyotr, frightened, but hopeful.

" 'You'll break your neck,' I told him. You said the same thing, too, Pyotr Ilyich—remember? For any kind of play, you've got to be spry. Unconscious, is he?"

Squatting, the yardman sought the pulse at Pavel's wrist and throat, and laid a finger on the boy's cheek. Then he wiped the finger on his apron, with a scraping sound, as though he were striking a match, and said:

"Looks like he's done for. A sickly little creature, he was. It didn't need much to finish him."

Tikhon's speech was calm, his movements slow, his whole aspect quite as usual; yet his employer waited suspiciously, expecting stern words of condemnation. Tikhon glanced up through the square hole in the ceiling, listened awhile to the cooing of the pigeons, and said, as simply and calmly as before:

"By the door, he always climbed. He'd get up on the bench, and put his foot on the doorknob, and from there he'd get up to the top of the door, and then reach out to the hole and pull himself up by his arms. Only there wasn't much strength in his arms, and so he lost his grip and fell, and he must have hit his heart against the corner of the door."

"I didn't see it happen," Pyotr said. The instinct of self-preservation prompted swift surmises:

"Is he lying? Pretending? Setting a trap for me, so I'll be in his hands? Or don't he really understand, the fool?"

The last seemed more likely. Tikhon was acting stupidly. With a shake of the head, as though butting out at someone, he sighed:

"Eh, a speck of dust! And why do that kind come into the world? I'll go tell his mother. The stepfather won't be any too sorry, I guess. To him, the boy was just an extra mouth."

Artamonov followed the yardman's talk suspiciously, alert for any sign of sham; but Tikhon spoke, as always, in the tone of a man untouched by curiosity.

"Hark!" he said, and drew his brows together, listening. Somewhere outside, a woman was calling crossly:

"Pashka! Pashka-a-a!"

Tikhon rubbed his cheek.

"Pashka indeed! Get your tears ready."

"He's just a fool," Artamonov decided, and went out into the orchard, pulling his cap from his pocket and carefully examining its broken peak.

For two or three weeks he lived unbalanced by a constant, surging sense of obscure fear, a daily menace of new and undefined calamity. Another moment, and the door would open, and Tikhon would push in, saying:

"Well, of course, I know all about it...."

Outwardly, however, all went well. Obedient to the habit of birth and burial, people accepted the boy's death as a simple matter of course. Nikonov tied a new black tie around his yellow neck, and his washed-out face assumed an expression of modest consequence, as though he had received some long deserved reward. The mother of the murdered boy, a tall, gaunt, horse-faced woman, silent and tearless, was anxious to hasten her son's burial—or so it seemed to Artamonov. She kept smoothing the white ruffles at the head of the coffin, adjusting the paper band of saintly images on the blue forehead, pressing down with careful fingers the bright new copper kopeks that covered the eyes, crossing herself again and again, with unseemly rapidity. Her arm grew so tired, Pyotr noticed, that twice during the funeral services she was unable to lift it. She tried to cross herself, but her arm dropped as though the bone had snapped.

Yes, as far as that was concerned, everything went smoothly. The Nikonovs even thanked him, tediously and loquaciously, for his contribution to the funeral expenses, though, fearful of arousing Tikhon's suspicions by overgenerosity, he had given little. Artamonov still found it hard to believe the yardman quite so obtuse as he had

seemed that day at the bathhouse. This was the second time the bathhouse had pushed this man to the fore, wedging him ever more deeply into Pyotr's life. A strange thing, and shivery. It even occurred to Artamonov to have the bathhouse burned down, or broken up for firewood. It was getting old, anyway, and the boards were beginning to rot. A new one would have to be built, in a different part of the orchard.

Watching Tikhon attentively, he found no change in the yardman's life. As always, his very existence seemed a reluctant concession, granted in kindness of heart, against his own will; as always, he was untalkative; surly as a policeman with the mill workers, who detested him, and particularly, disgustedly rude to the women. Only with Natalya did his manner change. To her he spoke as though she were, not the wife of his employer, but some relative of his own: an aunt, perhaps, or an elder sister.

"What makes you so chummy with Tikhon?" Pyotr had asked repeatedly; and his wife always replied:

"I've got so used to him."

Had the yardman had any friends, or visited anywhere, Pyotr might have thought him a sectarian. Many such, of various types, had appeared in the last few years. But Tikhon had no friends, except for the carpenter, Serafim; and he liked to go to church, where he prayed devoutly, though he always opened his mouth unseemingly wide, as if about to yell. Sometimes the sight of Tikhon's flickering eyes made his employer's face cloud sombrely. It seemed to Artamonov that a threat lay hidden in their watery depths. He felt the desire to take the man by his collar and shake him well, to shout:

"Talk up!"

But Tikhon's pupils would contract and lose expression, and the stony composure of his features would deaden Pyotr's alarm. Anton the fool, while he lived, had often come to the yardman's lodge, or sat on the bench by the gate with him of an evening. Tikhon had often tried to question the half-wit.

"Don't talk nonsense. You just think a while, and then tell me. Kuyatyr—who's that?"

"Kayamas," Anton would squeal rapturously. And he would begin his song:

Oh, Chi-rist is arisen, is arisen....

"Hold on!"

The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel....

"What are you after?" Artamonov had demanded, with an annoyance he himself could not have explained.

"The meaning of his outlandish words."

"But they're fool's words."

"Well, even a fool must have some sense of his own," Tikhon had said stupidly.

Altogether, it was best not to talk to him. There came a stormy, sleepless night when Artamonov felt that he could no longer bear this dead weight on his soul. Waking his wife, he told her the story of the Nikonov boy. Natalya heard him out in silence, blinking sleepily, and remarked, with a yawn:

"I never remember dreams."

But suddenly she started up in alarm.

"Oh, I'm so afraid Yasha might start doing that!"

"Doing what?" her husband asked amazedly.

And when she had explained to him tangibly what she was afraid of, he reflected, pulling at his ear in mortification:

"It was no use telling her."

That night, through the murmurs and shrieks of the winter storm, besides a heightened sense of his own loneliness, he attained something that seemed to clarify and explain the murder he had committed. He had killed that vicious boy, a dangerous playmate for Ilya, out of love for his son, and fear for him. This thought eased him a little, providing intelligible foundation for the dark hatred he had borne the Nikonov boy. But what he wanted was to rid himself entirely of this burden, to shift it onto other shoulders. He sent for priest Gleb, thinking to speak about this mortal guilt apart from the ordinary confession of more venial sins.

The lean, stoop-shouldered priest came in the evening, and sat down quietly in a corner. It was always his way to thrust his lanky frame deep into some corner, the darker and the closer the better, as though he were hiding away from shame. The dark folds of his shabby cassock almost merged with the dark leather of the armchair, and only his face was dimly visible against the sombre background. Drops of melted snow sparkled glassily on his hair, over the temples. One bony hand, as usual, clasped his long, sparse beard.

Lacking the resolution to plunge straight to the point, Artamonov began to talk about how rapidly the people were degenerating; about their exasperating indolence, drunkenness, debauchery. The theme soon tired him, and he fell silent, pacing up and down the room. Then the priest's voice came flowing from the shadowy corner, and what he said was very much like a complaint.

"Nobody gives the common folk a thought, and themselves, they aren't accustomed to take any thought for their spiritual needs. They don't know how. Educated people.... Well, it's not for me to judge. Anyway, there aren't many such among us. And, you know, they can't seem to find their place in our everyday life, in the life of the people. They seek much, it's true, but not what is essential. Mutiny draws them, and that leads to persecution by the authorities. Somehow, nothing seems to go right with us. Only one voice resounds, ever louder, through the empty clamour, calling upon the conscience of mankind, striving imperiously to awaken it. That is the voice of a certain Count Tolstoy, a philosopher and man of letters. A most remarkable man; and his speech is daring to the point of insolence. But inasmuch... you see, the Orthodox church...."

He spoke for a long time about Tolstoy; and, although Artamonov did not entirely understand, the priest's hushed voice, rippling gently from the shadows, and his all but fabulous portrayal of this extraordinary man, turned the listener's thoughts away from self. Though not forgetting the purpose for which he had called the priest, Pyotr found himself gradually yielding to a feeling of pity for him. The poor folk in the town, he knew, thought Gleb a little touched, because the priest was a stranger to cupidity; because he was equally gentle with all; because he performed all the services well, and the funeral service with particular pathos. All this to Artamonov seemed only natural. Such was the office of the priesthood. What attracted him to Gleb was the universal dislike the priest encountered among the Dryomov clergy and the leading townsfolk. But a pastor of souls should be stern. It is his duty to find and utter words of a very special quality, words that pierce and cut; it is his duty to excite fear of sin, repulsion against sin. This power Gleb lacked, as Artamonov knew. And when he had listened for some time to the priest's hesitant talk, to the wavering words that seemed to be afraid of hurting someone's feelings, he suddenly declared:

"The reason I disturbed you, Father Gleb, was to let you know I won't be taking the sacrament this year."

"Why not?" the priest asked absently; and, receiving no reply, added: "You're accountable to your own conscience."

It seemed to Artamonov that Gleb spoke these words in the very tone of callous indifference that distinguished the yardman, Tikhon. Being poor, the priest had no rubbers, and the snow he had brought in on his heavy, peasant boots had melted into puddles on the floor. He kept shuffling his feet through these puddles, talking on and on, deploring but not condemning:

"When you see what's going on, there's only one thing to console you: life's evil, as it increases, collects in one mass, as though to make it easier to overcome. It's always that way, I've observed: a little core of evil appears, and then, like the thread on a spindle, more and more evil collects around it. Scattered, it's hard to overcome; but united, it may be struck off at one blow by the sword of justice. . . ."

These words remained in Artamonov's memory. In them, he found a certain consolation. Pavel—there was the core. Had not all Artamonov's ugly thoughts focussed around him, attracted as to a lodestone? And once more he reflected that some share in his guilt might justly be accounted to his son. With a deep breath of relief, he invited the priest to tea.

The dining room was bright and cosy, its warm air fragrant with savoury smells of food. On the table stood the boiling samovar, puffing out little jets of steam in high good humour. Pyotr's mother-in-law, in her armchair, was singing pleasantly to her four-year-old granddaughter:

The blessed mother of light
Made her gifts as she found right:
To Apostle Peter, haze
Of the sultry summer days;
Saint Nikola, him she gave
Rule of rolling tide and wave;
For Elijah, prophet and seer,
She bade forge a golden spear.

"A pagan song," said the priest, with a propitiatory smile, as he drew up his chair.

In the bedroom, Pyotr's wife told him:

"Alexei is back. I saw him. He goes wilder over Moscow every trip. I'm afraid. . . ."

That summer, red spots had appeared on Natalya's white neck and smooth, rosy cheeks. They were tiny as needle pricks; but they annoyed her nonetheless, and twice a week, before going to bed, she would diligently rub a honey-coloured salve into the skin. She was busy with this at the moment, seated before the mirror, her bare elbows plying back and forth and the high mounds of her breasts swaying heavily under her shift. Pyotr lay in bed, his arms folded behind his head, his beard pointing up at the ceiling. Glancing sidewise at his wife, he decided that she resembled some sort of a machine, and that her salve smelled of boiled sturgeon. When Natalya got into bed, after earnestly whispered prayers, and, obedient to the habit of her healthy body, offered herself to her husband, he pretended to be asleep.

"A core," he thought. "Me, too: a spindle. Turning and twirling. And who does the spinning? Tikhon says: man spins, and the devil weaves sackcloth. Of all the idiotic fools!"

The business, which Alexei was energetically developing, spread ever further along the sandy hills that overhung the river. The hillsides lost their golden colouring. The silvery glint of mica began to disappear, the sparkling points of quartz to fade. The shifting sand was trampled firm. With every year, the spring brought greener and more luxuriant growths of grass and weeds. Plantain sprang up along the trodden paths, and lop-eared burdock. The orchard trees sowed new growths around the mill. Rotting autumn leaves fertilized the fattening sand. The mill grumbled ever louder, breathing an atmosphere of alarms and cares. There was a whirring of hundreds of spindles, a murmur of hundreds of looms, a breathless panting of machines from morn to night, a busy din of industry swirling unintermittently over the mill. It was pleasant to feel oneself the master of all this—surprisingly pleasant, evoking pride.

But there were times, more and more often, when a weariness came over Artamonov. He would begin to recall the countryside, where he had spent his childhood—the clear, quiet little river Ratt, the broad expanses, the peasants' simple life. And he would feel that he had been caught in an unseen, but unrelenting grip, which turned and twisted him at will; that the daylong din, flooding his brain,

left no room for any thoughts save those connected with the business; that the curly smoke of the mill chimneys shadowed all the surrounding world with drear despondency and tedium.

In such moods, the thought of the mill workers would be particularly disquieting. Their strength, it seemed to him, was steadily waning; they were losing their peasant endurance, becoming infected with a womanish irritability—touchy beyond all measure, and insolent in speech. New traits of thriftlessness and instability had appeared among them. In the old days, when Pyotr's father was alive, they had been more peaceful, more at one. They had not drunk so much, nor been so brazenly dissolute. Now everything was tangled up. The workers had gained in spirit, and even, as it seemed, in understanding; but they took less care about their work, and less thought for one another. They all had an unpleasant, sneaky way of looking at Pyotr, as though taking his measure. The young people were particularly rowdyish and disrespectful. The mill very quickly killed all peasant traits in the youth.

Volkov, the stoker, had to be sent to the gubernia insane asylum. Yet it was only five years since he had appeared at the mill, a fine-looking, vigorous man, with a lively wife, driven from the countryside by a fire that had razed their home. After one year, the wife had started playing loose, and Volkov had begun to beat her. The beatings had ended in consumption. And now they were both gone. Artamonov had observed many such cases of rapid decline. In five years, there had been four murders—two in drunken brawls, one in revenge, and one out of jealousy: an elderly weaver stabbing a bobbin girl. Violent quarrels, ending in serious injuries, were frequent.

Alexei seemed quite unaffected by all this. Generally, Alexei was growing harder and harder to understand. There was something about him reminiscent of that neat little jester, carpenter Serafim, who worked with equal skill and pleasure at whittling bows and whistles for the mill children, and nailing coffins for them. Alexei's hawk eyes were alight with assurance that all was going well and always would go well. He already had three little mounds in the cemetery. Only one son, Miron, held on firmly, tenaciously to life. Thrown clumsily and carelessly together of long bones and cartilage, Miron seemed to creak and rattle in every joint. He had a habit of cracking his knuckles violently, producing a loud, crunching sound. At the age

of thirteen, he already wore spectacles, which somewhat shortened the sweep of his long, beaked nose and shaded the unpleasant lightness of his eyes. He never went anywhere without a book in his hand, his finger thrust between the pages to mark his place, so that book and arm seemed grown together. He spoke to his father and mother like an equal—more, he argued with them, and they seemed to like it. As to Pyotr, clearly sensing his nephew's dislike, he paid him back in the same coin.

There was no sort of propriety at Alexei's. To Artamonov senior, the difference between his own life and his brother's seemed almost the same as between a monastery and a showbooth at the fair. Alexei and his wife had no friends among the townsfolk; but their crowded rooms—regular storehouses of battered old knickknacks and furniture —would be thronged, of a holiday with people of the most doubtful quality: the mill doctor, Yakovlev, with his gold teeth, a spiteful, mocking man; the loud-mouthed mechanic, Koptev, a drunkard and gambler; Miron's teacher, a student whom the police had debarred from further study, and his snub-nosed wife, who smoked and played the guitar. There were others, too, all sorts of human wreckage. They all reviled the clergy and officialdom with equal insolence, and each of them was clearly convinced of his own cleverness. These people were not genuine, Artamonov felt in every fibre of his being. And he could not understand what use his brother, half-owner of a big and important business, could have for them. Listening to their loud talk, he would recall the priest's complaint:

"They seek much, but not what is essential."

He did not ask himself: what, then, was essential? Where did the essence lie? He knew. It lay in the business.

His brother's favourite appeared to be that noisy gypsy, Koptev. The mechanic always looked drunk. There was a driving energy about him, and even, perhaps, a certain wisdom. More often than any of the others, he would exclaim:

"That's all nonsense, pure philosophy! Industry—there's the thing! Machinery!"

But Artamonov senior suspected in Koptev a heretical, destructive kernel.

"A dangerous fellow," he told his brother. Alexei seemed very much surprised.

"Koptev? Nonsense! He's a wonder. Efficient, hard-working, clever! We need thousands like him!"

Chuckling, he added:

"If I had a daughter, I'd make him my son-in-law, and chain him to the job!"

Pyotr turned glumly away. When the company were not playing cards, he would sit alone, in his favourite armchair, soft and wide as a bed, pulling at his ear as he listened to the talk. He could not agree with any of these people, and would have liked to argue with every one of them. And it was not only because they all disregarded him, the senior partner, that he felt such a desire to argue. There were other reasons, as well; though he could not have explained them, these other reasons, even to himself. But he was no talker. Only rarely, constrainedly, would he put in a word.

"Priest Gleb was telling me the other day about a certain count. . . ."

And immediately Koptev barked at him:

"What's he to you, that count? To you, to you? The last sigh of peasant Russia."

Shouting thus, he poked a finger most disrespectfully in Pyotr's direction. All the others, listening, began, like Koptev, to resemble gypsies, that homeless, wandering tribe.

"Moths," Pyotr reflected. "Parasites."

One day, he said:

"It's all wrong, that saying—that business is no bear, to run away to the forest. Business is a bear, and why should it run away? It's got hold of us, and it hugs us tight. Lord and master, that's what business is to a man."

"Hear, hear," barked Koptev. "Where could one hear such wisdom? From whom? Now we know the danger!"

And Alexei demanded sarcastically:

"Where do you get your ideas—from Tikhon?"

Pyotr was highly offended. At home, he told his wife:

"Keep your eyes on Elena. That gypsy, Koptev, hangs around her, and Alexei's all for him. Elena's too good a catch for him. Look around for a husband for her."

"There's no fit husbands here," said Natalya thoughtfully. "We'll have to try the city. But it's really too early."

"See they don't catch you napping," Artamonov returned. He chuckled, and his wife tittered coyly.

When he managed to slip free for a while, to break away from the narrow ring of business cares, he would find himself once more engulfed in a thick fog of dislike for the people around him, of dissatisfaction with himself. There was only one bright spot—his love for his son; but this love, too, was tarnished, shadowed by the boy Nikonov, or, perhaps, driven below the surface by the weight of blood-guilt. Watching Ilya, he sometimes felt the urge to tell him:

"See what I did, out of fear for you."

His mind was not artful enough to hide that the fear for his son had come only an instant before the murder; but Pyotr knew that in this fear alone could he seek justification, however slight. Still, when Ilya was near, he avoided the very mention of Nikonov, lest he let slip some hint of the crime he would have liked to picture as a deed of valour.

Ilya, Pyotr saw, was developing rapidly, but in a strange direction. The boy was growing more restrained. He spoke more civilly to his mother, and had given up his teasing of Yakov, now also at school; he liked to romp with his younger sister, Tatyana, and went no further than mild irony with Elena. But in all he said and did there was something of estrangement, of preoccupation with other things. Pavel Nikonov had been replaced by Miron. The two cousins were almost always together, talking away indefatigably, with milling arms. They read and studied together, out in the summerhouse in the orchard. Ilya was hardly ever at home. Of a morning, he would appear briefly at tea, and then make off for his uncle's house, in town, or disappear into the woods with Miron and swarthy, curlyheaded Goritsvetov—a small, pushing fellow, prickly as a brier bush, with a lounging gait and eyes so derisively cocked that they seemed crossed.

"What makes you run around with such a little sheeny?" Natalya asked her son disgustedly. Pyotr noticed that the boy's fine eyebrows twitched.

"Sheeny's an insulting word, mother. You know perfectly well Alexander is priest Gleb's nephew, so he's Russian. And he leads the class, in school."

The mother snorted contemptuously:

"Sheenies always push up to the front."

"How do you know?" returned the son. "There's only four Jews in the whole town, and they're all poor, except the druggist."

"Yes, and forty little sheenies. And if you go to Vorgorod, they're all over the place, and the same at the fair."

Ilya repeated, with vexing persistence:

"Sheeny's a bad word."

Then the mother clattered her spoon against her saucer and shouted at him, flushing:

"Are you trying to teach me? I know what I'm talking about! I've got eyes in my head. I can see the way he tries to get around every one, the little lickspittle, even Tikhon, and so I say, he's mealy-mouthed as a sheeny, and they're dangerous—that kind. I knew such a soft-spoken fellow, once...."

"That's enough!" put in Pyotr sternly. On the point of tears, she complained:

"What is this, Pyotr Ilyich? A person can't say a word!"

Ilya sat in frowning silence. His mother reminded him:

"I brought you into the world."

"Thanks," said Ilya, and pushed away his empty cup. The father glanced at him sidewise and chuckled shortly, pulling at his ear.

Pyotr knew, from his wife's tone, that she was afraid of her son, as she had once been afraid of kerosene lamps, and, more recently, of an intricate coffeepot Olga had given her, which she was sure would some day explode. He, too, experienced something akin to the mother's ludicrous fear of her son. The lad was hard to understand. All three of them were hard to understand. What did they find to amuse them in Tikhon, the yardman? They would sit at the gate with him, of an evening, and Artamonov senior would hear the yardman's voice raised in instruction:

"That's true. The less you carry, the lighter you go. But as for corners, don't you believe it. How can there be corners in the sky? There's no walls there."

The boys would laugh. Ilya's laughter was velvety and brief, Miron's dry and caustic. Goritsvetov laughed less readily than the others; he would always break off determinedly, urging:

"Hold on! It's not funny at all!"

And again Tikhon's obscure wisdom would flow lazily forth:

"You boys should study more about human beings. What's a man, anyway? And what work is for which, and what's his destiny? That's what you need to ponder over. And then there's words. They have to be studied through and through. Take a word like 'endeavour.' It's a nice, smooth word. You all use it. Only, if you stop to think, there's no end to anything, ever!"

And Tikhon would repeat his old saying, so familiar to Pyotr:

"Man spins the thread, and the devil weaves sackcloth. Time without end, that's how it goes."

Again the youngsters would laugh, and Tikhon would laugh thickly with them. Then he would sigh:

"Eh, bright eyes! Wise, but undersize!"

In the evening shadows, the boys seemed smaller, more insignificant than by sunlight, while Tikhon seemed to swell and spread, and talked even more foolishly than in the daytime.

Ilya's conversations with Tikhon intensified Artamonov's dislike for the yardman, and at the same time imbued him with vague-unreasoning fear. He asked his son:

"What do you find in Tikhon?"

"He's an interesting person."

"What's interesting about him? His foolishness?"

Ilya replied quietly:

"Even foolishness needs to be understood."

The answer pleased Artamonov.

"That's true. The world is full of foolishness."

But a moment later he realized:

"Tikhon's very words!"

His son aroused in him hopes of a very special nature. When Ilya stood at the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, whistling softly as he watched the workers in the yard; when he moved unhurriedly through the loom shop, or turned his light step towards the settlement, the father would reflect with satisfaction:

"He'll be a keen master. And it won't be like me he'll come into the business—hitched up and driven off."

It was a little disappointing that the boy was so untalkative. When he did speak, it was in terse, studied words that aroused no desire to continue the conversation.

"He's a little dry," Artamonov reflected. But it was sufficient

consolation to note how Ilya differed from the other boys—how favourably he compared with that noisy chatterbox, Goritsvetov; with languid, lazy Yakov, and with his cousin Miron. Rapidly losing the traits of youth, Miron talked bookishly, bore himself arrogantly, and, on the whole, resembled some bureaucratic official to whom the printed word contains precise specifics, not to be gainsaid, for all contingencies of life.

The vacation weeks sped by with elusive speed, and the boys prepared to leave. Somehow, it worked out that Natalya loaded Yakov with parting advice, while the father spoke to Ilya, saying anything but what he would have liked to. For how could he say that life was dull for him, in the mosquito swarm of monotonous business cares? One does not speak to youngsters of such things.

Artamonov senior was so hungry for something different, for some experience outside the everyday course of life—inevitable as snow, rain, mud, heat, dust—that at length he found, or invented, what he sought. Travelling through a remote, wooded section of the uyezd, he was caught on the road by a June storm of rain and hail, with pealing thunder and blue flashes of bursting clouds. Water, indistinguishable in the sudden murk, streamed down the narrow forest road. The earth dissolved under the horses' hoofs, rising in liquid mud to the hubs of the carriage wheels. At eerie intervals, a cold blue flame hung for an instant over the molten seething of the earth, and in its menacing light, through the glassy fringe of rain, the shuddering trees sprang blackly skywards out of the dripping darkness on either hand. The invisible horses stopped short, snorting, the water squelching around their restless feet. Yakim, the fat coachman, a meek soul, spoke to them soothingly. The hail soon stopped, and its icy rattle died in the forest; but the rain came down thick and heavy, in millions of leaden drops, lashing the foliage and filling the darkness with an angry roaring.

"We'll have to go to the Popovs," said Yakim.

And so, as in a dream, Artamonov found himself, in dry clothes that cramped his limbs, sitting at table, too bashful to move, in a warm room sunk in pleasant semi-darkness. A nickel-plated samovar hummed on the table, and a tall, slender woman, in a dark dress that fell in ample folds, was pouring tea. Fine grey eyes lit her pale face, under a turban of reddish hair. Very simply and resignedly,

her mild voice carrying no hint of complaint, she spoke of her husband's recent death and her intention of selling her property and moving to town, to set up a private school.

"That's your brother's advice. He's an interesting man, so lively and original."

Pyotr grunted enviously as he looked around the room. Travelling through the gubernia with his father, in his youth, he had often been in the homes of the gentry; but he had found nothing particularly attractive in them. The people, the furnishings, had evoked only a sense of oppressive constraint. In this home, there was nothing oppressive. The atmosphere was one of kindliness and truth. A big lamp under a frosted shade cast a milky light over the dishes and silver on the table. Its soft glow caressed the smooth, dark head of a little girl, bent over a sketchbook, with a green shade over her eyes. The little girl was drawing, with a fine-pointed pencil, humming something to herself, but so softly as not to interfere with her mother's quiet speech. The room was not large, and it was full of furniture. Every article seemed to be an integral part of the room, and at the same time to live of itself, to express something all its own; and the same was true of the three bright paintings on the walls, one of which, just opposite Pyotr, depicted a white horse out of some fairy tale, with proudly arched neck, and mane incredibly long—almost sweeping the ground. It was all amazingly cosy and peaceful, with the mistress' pleasant voice floating to his ears like a pensive song, as though from afar off. In such surroundings one could live one's life through without alarms, and never do evil. With such a woman as wife, one could respect her, could speak with her of everything.

Beyond the coloured glass of the verandah door, bursts of bluish flame, no longer fearsome, convulsed the pitchy sky.

Artamonov left at daybreak, carrying with him as a treasured memory the impression of kindly peace and cosiness, and the almost incorporeal image of the quiet, grey-eyed woman who had created this cosiness. As his carriage rolled across the puddles, which reflected so impartially the gold of the sun and the splotchy black of the wind-torn clouds, he reflected, with envious melancholy:

"That's how some people live."

For some reason or other, he did not tell his wife about this new acquaintance, nor did he mention it to Alexei. That made it all the

more embarrassing when, a few weeks later, coming into his brother's parlour, he saw Popova beside Olga on the sofa. Alexei thrust him forward, saying:

"Meet my brother, Vera Nikolayevna."

Smiling, she held out her hand.

"We're already acquainted."

"What's this?" cried Alexei. "Since when? Why didn't you tell me?"

Pyotr sensed the insinuation in his brother's surprise, and he felt a strange bristling at the roots of his beard. Pulling at his ear, he replied:

"I ... forgot."

Alexei shouted, pointing shamelessly:

"Look—he's blushing! What a clever answer, little boy! Who could forget such a lady, after seeing her once? Look—his ears itch—they're growing!"

Popova smiled, but her smile carried no offence.

They drank iced mead, from tall cut-glass tumblers. The mead, a gift to Olga from this woman, was a golden, amber yellow, and pricked the tongue merrily. It put all sorts of clever words into Pyotr's mind, only he never had a chance to say them, because his brother rattled away incessantly.

"No, Vera Nikolayevna, don't you be in any hurry to sell. Your place needs a buyer who's looking for peace and quiet. It's a place to find heartsease. Our kind won't give you any sort of price. What have you got? No land, and hardly any timber, and what there is, is bad. And besides, who wants timber, in these parts, except the rabbits?"

Pyotr put in:

"You shouldn't sell."

"Why not?" asked Popova, absently sipping her mead. With a sigh, she added: "I have to."

Pyotr did not like the way Olga glanced at him, or the way her lips twitched, restraining a smile. He turned glumly back to his mead, without answering Popova.

Two days later, in the office, Alexei declared that he intended to lend Popova money on her furniture.

"Her place isn't worth anything, but the stuff she has. . . ."

"Don't," said Pyotr, very determinedly.

"Why not? I know prices and values."

"Don't."

"But why?" cried Alexei. "I'll go out there with an expert, and price everything."

Pyotr shook his head doggedly. He wanted very badly to dissuade his brother from this loan, but he could find no arguments against it. Instead, he suddenly proposed:

"Let's go halves. Half from you, and half from me."

Alexei laughed, staring hard at him.

"Beginning to play the fool?"

"If I am, it's about time," said Pyotr Artamonov loudly.

"Look out for yourself—it's the wrong party," his brother warned him. "I've tried. She's a fish."

After two or three encounters with Popova, Artamonov learned to dream about her. He would imagine this woman beside him, and immediately there would open up before him a life of amazing ease and comfort, beautiful to the eye and, for the heart, imbued with pleasant peace; a life in which there would be no need for daily contact with dozens of lazy inefficients, always dissatisfied, always shouting, complaining, always lying and cheating, surrounding him with an importunate flattery that was no less vexing than their ill-concealed and steadily growing hostility. It was easy to picture a life free of all this, a life far removed from the fat red spider that was the mill, with its ever spreading web. He could see himself as a sort of big tomcat, kept in sheltered peace, loved and petted by his mistress, and desiring nothing more. Nothing.

Just as the Nikonov boy had once formed a dark focus for all that was bitter and disagreeable, Popova now became a magnet attracting only light, agreeable thoughts and intentions. He refused to accompany his brother to Popova's estate, with a crafty little old man in spectacles, who had been engaged to appraise her belongings. But when Alexei got back, the transaction completed, he said:

"Sell me the mortgage."

Alexei was unpleasantly surprised. He put endless questions: why, and wherefore—and finally declared:

"Listen here, it isn't worth my while! She won't be able to pay

up, and her stuff is valuable—understand? You'll have to add something."

The bargain was struck. Grimacing, Alexei said:

"I wish you luck. It's a good job."

Pyotr, too, felt that he had done a good job. He had presented himself with a haven of rest.

"What about your wife? Shall I keep mum?" asked his brother, winking.

"That's your lookout."

Alexei glanced at him searchingly, and said:

"Olga thinks you're in love with Popova."

"And that's my lookout."

"Don't bark at me. At our age, most men do some playing around."

Pyotr answered, rudely and angrily:

"You leave me alone."

Soon he began to notice that Olga's tone towards him, while friendlier than ever, had somehow acquired a hint of compassion that was not at all to his liking. Sitting in her parlour, one autumn evening, he asked:

"Has Alexei been talking nonsense to you about Popova?"

With a friendly touch of her light fingers on his hairy ones, she said:

"It won't go any further."

"It won't go anywhere at all," Artamonov returned, bringing a clenched fist down on his knee. "It will stay inside of me. It's not for you to understand. Don't you say anything to her."

It was not lust he felt towards Popova. In his dreams she appeared, not as a woman whom he desired, but as an indispensable appurtenance to the kindly comfort of her home, to the living of a good and proper life. When this woman moved to town, however, he began to see her often, at Alexei's; and a moment came when he was overwhelmed. Dropping in one day, he found Olga indisposed. Popova stood at the bedside, the sleeves of her blouse rolled up, dipping a towel into a basin of water. She bent over the water, then straightened up—amazingly well-formed, with small, girlish breasts—irresistibly attractive. Artamonov stopped in the doorway, staring silently from under drawn brows at her white arms, her firm calves, her hips, sud-

denly faint with a surging desire that made him feel her arms around him. Forcing himself to nod in reply to her greeting, he entered the room and sat down by the window. Cheerlessly, he asked:

"What's wrong with you, Olga? You shouldn't take sick like that."

Never before had a woman affected him so shatteringly, so overpoweringly. It frightened him, bringing vague premonitions of risk and peril. He sent his carriage for the doctor, and himself left hurriedly on foot, taking the road to the mill.

It was late February. A thaw had set in, carrying promise of approaching storm and snow. A grey mist hung over the earth, hiding the sky and narrowing space around and over Artamonov to the dimensions of an overturned bowl. Damp, cold dust sifted slowly downwards, settling heavily on beard and moustache and making breathing difficult. Striding through the yielding snow, Artamonov felt himself crushed, annihilated, just as he had felt on the night of Nikita's attempted suicide and the day of the murder of Pavel Nikonov. The kinship in gravity between these two experiences was clear to him; and the third, consequently, seemed all the more perilous. It was obvious that he could never succeed in making this lady his mistress. And he already realized that his sudden flaring passion for Popova was breaking and sullying something he held very dear, reducing this woman to the ranks of the ordinary. What a wife was, he knew only too well; nor had he any cause for thinking that a mistress might be in any way better than the woman whose vapid, compulsory caresses now almost failed to arouse him.

"What do you want?" he asked himself. "Lechery? You have a wife for that."

Always, at moments when something was threatening him, Artamonov felt a strained anxiety to pass the danger by as quickly as possible, to leave it behind, and never glance back at it. Facing menacing danger was like standing on brittle spring ice, on a deep river, in the darkness of night. He had experienced this horror in adolescence, and his whole frame shrank at the memory.

A few days passed in dull, torpid misery. Then, early one morning, coming out into the yard after a sleepless night, he found the dog, Tulun, lying on the snow in a pool of blood. In the lingering darkness, the blood looked black as pitch. He touched the shaggy carcass with his foot. The dog's grinning mouth moved in the snow,

and a bulging eye glared at the toe of his boot. Artamonov shuddered. Opening the low door to the yardman's lodge, he asked, from the threshold:

"Who killed the dog?"

"I did," said Tikhon, who was drinking tea from a saucer balanced on his spread fingers.

"Why?"

"It's been biting folks again."

"Who was it this time?"

"Zinaida—Serafim's daughter."

After a moment's thoughtful silence, Pyotr said:

"It's a pity."

"Of course. I brought the dog up since it was a pup. Only it started growling at me, too, lately. Well, even a man would go crazy, if you kept him chained."

"That's true," said Artamonov. He went out, closing the door very carefully behind him, and thinking to himself:

"Even he talks sense sometimes."

He stood in the yard for a while, listening to the rustle and hum of the mill. In a distant corner, a gleam of yellow marked the window of Serafim's lean-to, built against the stable wall. Artamonov went over to the window and looked in. A lamp stood on the table. Zinaida, in nothing but her shift, sat bowed over some sewing. When he entered the room, she asked, without lifting her head:

"What did you come back for?"

But then she glanced towards the door. Dropping her work, she sprang to her feet and cried, with a smile:

"Oh, Lord! And I thought it was father."

"I hear Tulun bit you."

"Didn't he, though!" she said, as though it were something to boast of. Putting her foot up on a chair, she pulled up her shift. "Take a look!"

Artamonov glanced at the white leg, bandaged just below the knee. Coming up close to the girl, he asked dully:

"What were you doing out in the yard so early? Eh?"

She glanced inquiringly at him, and chuckled in understanding. She put out the light with a vigorous puff down the lamp chimney, and said:

"We'll have to lock the door."

Half an hour later Pyotr Artamonov, pleasantly exhausted, was walking unhurriedly towards the mill, pulling at his ear and spitting now and again in amazed recollection of the bobbin girl's shameless caresses. Once or twice he chuckled, with the feeling that he had just fooled somebody, got the better of somebody, very cleverly.

He broke into the dissipations of the mill girls like a bear into an apiary. Their life exceeded all that he had heard about it, startling him, at first, by its joyous nakedness of words and feelings, by its utter unrestraint, the defiant shamelessness with which all was laid open to view. It was of this shamelessness that their songs wept and sang. Love, they called it—Zinaida and her friends; and it had a bitter pungency more intoxicating than wine.

The mill clerks, Artamonov knew, called Seráfim's little lean-to "the trap," and Zinaida "the pump." Serafim himself called his dwelling "the nunnery." Sitting on his bench by the stove, with his cithara hanging by an embroidered towel flung over one shoulder, he would toss his curly head, contort his rosy features, and cry, winking at them all:

"Make merry, nuns! That's what they are, nuns, Pyotr Ilyich—don't you see? They've taken a vow to the merry devil, and I'm their prior, a sort of priest, tra-ta-ta! Give us a ruble, to make life jolly!"

He would thrust the money into his leg wrappings, and sing spiritedly, twanging the strings of his cithara:

A lady, roasting in Hell's flame,
Begged for fried ice—in God's name!
But the Devil's stokers
Cooled the poor fool with pokers.

"You seem to know no end of jokes and songs," his employer would exclaim; and the old man would chatter on boastfully:

"A sieve! I'm like a sieve. Sift any junk you want to through me, and I'll sift out a song. That's the kind of man I am—a sieve!"

Once he said:

"It was the gentry taught me. The Kutuzovs—they were fine gentry. And then there was Yapushkin, of the gentry too, and didn't he drink! He played poor, the fox—tramping around with a pack

on his back, peddling all sorts of trash. And all the time, he kept writing things down, everything he saw and heard. Well, he wrote, and he wrote, and then he went to the tsar. 'Look,' he says, 'Your Majesty, what our peasants are thinking!' The tsar looked, and read all those writings, and he felt very bad. And soon he ordered freedom for the peasants, and he ordered a bronze monument to Yapushkin. In Moscow, they were supposed to build it. And Yapushkin, they weren't to touch him, but send him alive to Suzdal, and give him all the liquor he wanted, and charge it to the treasury. Because, you see, Yapushkin wrote down all sorts of secrets about the people, only they went against the tsar, and they had to be kept mum. And out there in Suzdal, Yapushkin drank himself to death, and, of course, they stole his writings."

"That's all lies," remarked Artamonov.

"I never lied in my life, except to the girls. That's not my trade," the old man returned. It was always hard to tell when he was joking, and when he was in earnest.

"People that know the truth, lie," he chattered on. "Me, I can't lie, because I don't know the truth. Though, if you want to know, I can tell you one thing. I've seen plenty of truth, in my day, and my motto is: truth's like a woman—nice while it's new."

He may not have known the truth, but he did know an endless series of tales about the gentry, about their amusements and misfortunes, their cruelty and their wealth. And when he told these tales he would invariably add, with evident regret:

"Yes, but now they're done for. They've slipped out of focus, can't see their way. Off at a tangent!"

He described a circle around his head, then, quickly dropping his arm, described another circle near the floor.

"They played around too much," he concluded, winking, and sang:

Once there were some gentlefolk,
Lived in idle luxury,
Till they'd squandered, right and left,
All their father's property.

Serafim told stories of bandits and witches, of peasant rebellions, of unfortunate love, of fiery serpents that came by night to inconsolable widows; and he spoke so interestingly that even his unruly

daughter would be still, drinking in his tales as greedily as a child.

In Zinaida, Artamonov observed with distaste a commingling of furious debauchery with calculating practicality. More than once he recalled Pavel Nikonov's slander, now become prophecy.

"Why did I choose this one?" he would demand of himself. "There are prettier girls. Won't I look nice, when Ilya finds out about her!"

He noticed, too, that Zinaida and her friends seemed to regard their pastimes as a sort of unavoidable incumbency, much in the manner of soldiers on duty. At times it occurred to him that their very shamelessness was but an effort to fool both themselves and others. He was soon repelled by Zinaida's greed for money, her importunate begging. This trait was far more noticeable in her than in Serafim, who spent all his money on sweet Teneriffe, which for some reason or other he called "turnip wine," and on his beloved marmalade, sweet buns, and garlicky sausage.

Artamonov liked this light-hearted old man, so amusing a companion and so skilful a worker. Everyone, indeed, liked Serafim. At the mill, they called him "the Consoler." There was more truth than mockery in the nickname, as Pyotr could see; and even the mockery was affectionate.

That made it all the harder to understand and to digest the friendship between Serafim and Tikhon. And Tikhon seemed deliberately trying to intensify his employer's dislike. This being the twentieth year of Vyalov's service with the Artamonovs, Natalya decided to mark his name day with particular solemnity.

"It isn't often you come across people like him," she told her husband. "Just think: in twenty years, he's never given us any trouble. Quiet, and steady, like the flame of a good wax candle."

As a special honour to the yardman, Pyotr himself took him his gifts. Serafim was in the lodge, dressed in his holiday best. Tikhon stood behind him, with bent head, staring at his employer's toes.

"Here—the watch is from me, and the broadcloth from the mistress. Yes, and here's some money."

"There's no need for money," Tikhon mumbled. After a pause, he added:

"Thanks."

He invited his employer to try the Teneriffe Serafim had brought him. The little carpenter immediately began to chatter:

"You know how to value us, Pyotr Ilyich, and we know how to value you. We look at it this way: a bear loves honey, and a smith forges iron. The gentry were the bears, to us, and you're the smith. We can see how big your business is, and how much work it takes."

Vyalov had been fingering the silver watch. His eyes still fixed on it, he said:

"Business . . . is a railing . . . for a man. It's what we hold on to, walking along the edge of the pit."

"There!" cried Serafim, pleased. "That's right! Or else we'd fall in, you see!"

"That's not for you to talk about," declared Artamonov. "Because you're no business owners. You can't understand such things."

He sought stronger expressions, but failed to find them, though Tikhon's words had angered him at once. It was not the first time Tikhon had clad his stubborn, obscure thought in these terms; and with each repetition they annoyed his employer more. Pyotr sniffed and pulled at his ear, glaring at the yardman's rough-hewn, much-greased head, still seeking in vain for words with which to crush him.

"There's different kinds of business, of course," Serafim put in conciliatingly. "Bad, and good. . . ."

"The best knife won't feel good on your throat," muttered Tikhon.

His employer felt the desire to curse him roundly. Barely suppressing this impulse—for it was Tikhon's name day—he demanded sternly:

"What's wrong with you—always jabbering some silly nonsense about business? I just can't understand."

Tikhon, staring under the table, agreed:

"Yes, it's hard to understand."

The carpenter spoke up again:

"You see, Pyotr Ilyich, he thinks there should only be harmless kinds of business."

"Hold on, Serafim. Let him talk for himself."

Then Tikhon, unmoving, his head bent so that his employer could see the drab bald spot, big as a hand, on his crown, sighed:

"Business is what the devil taught Cain."

"Hear him go!" cried Serafim, slapping his knee.

Artamonov got up, and told the yardman angrily:

"You'd do better not to talk about what you can't understand. Yes."

He left the lodge, highly indignant, reflecting that Tikhon ought to be discharged. He would discharge him tomorrow. Well, not tomorrow. Next week. In the office, he found Popova waiting for him. She greeted him coldly, like a stranger. Sitting down, she thumped the floor with her parasol. She began to talk about the interest on her mortgage, which she was unable to pay at once.

"That doesn't matter," said Pyotr quietly, without looking at her. She went on:

"If you don't want to extend the term, you have the right to refuse."

Having said this, in an offended tone, she thumped the floor again and left, with such unexpected rapidity that she was closing the door behind her by the time he looked up.

"She's angry," Artamonov thought. "I wonder what at?"

An hour later he was sitting in Olga's parlour, banging his cap against the sofa for emphasis, saying:

"You tell her—I don't want any interest, and I don't want her money, either. As if it was much! And she's not to worry, understand?"

Bending over her bright skeins of silk and boxes of beads, Olga replied thoughtfully:

"I understand, all right, but I don't think she will."

"Well, see that she does. What's your understanding to me?"

"Thanks," said Olga. Her spectacles flashed as she looked up, in a glassy smile that he found very provoking.

"There's nothing to joke about," he said rudely. "I'm not expecting to root in her garden. I'm not after that. Don't you think it!"

"Ah, you men," said Olga, sighing, with a doubtful shake of her smooth head.

Pyotr cried:

"Believe me! I know what I'm talking about."

"Ah, but do you?"

Her sigh was sympathetic, Artamonov realized. Her eyes, behind the spectacles, were compassionate, almost tender. But that only ruffled his temper the more. He sat staring at the begonias on the window sill, with their graceful clusters of flowers among meaty leaves that looked like animal ears. He would have liked to tell her something clear enough to be conclusive, only the right words would not come. Finally, he said:

"What I'm sorry about is that place of hers. It's a wonderful place, yes, it is! She was born there."

"She was born in Ryazan."

"Well, she was used to living there. What's the difference? And it was out there my soul first fell asleep in peace."

"Woke up, you mean," said Olga.

"It's all the same, for the soul, whatever you call it—falling asleep, or waking up."

He talked on and on, himself not understanding any too well what he was saying. Olga listened, her chin on her hand. When he had talked himself out, she said:

"And now listen to me."

She told him that Natalya knew of his diversions with the bobbin girl; that she was hurt, that she wept and complained. But this did not touch Artamonov.

"Foxy," he said, with a wry smile. "She never so much as hinted to me that she knew. So she complained to you? Hm. And yet, she don't like you."

He thought a moment, and added:

"They call Zinaida 'the pump.' They're right! She's pumped all the muck out of me."

"That's foul talk," said Olga, grimacing, and sighed. "I remember, I once said to you that you treated your soul like a foundling. That's just exactly it, Pyotr. You're afraid of your own self, as if you were your worst enemy."

He took offence at this.

"You go too far. What do you think I am, a youngster? Why don't you stop a minute, and realize: here I sit talking to you, and my soul is wide open, and who else can I talk to like that? You can't do much talking with Natalya. Sometimes, I feel like slapping her. And here you.... Ugh, you women!"

He put on his cap and left, gripped suddenly by a speechless tedium. His mind turned to his wife. He had given her no thought for a long time past—had hardly noticed her, though every night, after whispering with God, she laid herself down with habitual affection at his side.

"She knows, and she pushes in just the same," he thought wrathfully. "The pig."

His wife was a familiar path, which Pyotr could have trodden blind without misstep. He had no desire to think about her. But he recalled that his mother-in-law, who was slowly dying in her armchair, with swollen frame and crimson, monstrously bloated features, had begun to regard him with increasing hostility. Tears flowed piteously from her eyes—once beautiful, now glazed and rheumy. Her distorted lips moved, but she could not speak: her tongue lolled, powerless, out of her mouth, and she had to push it back with her left hand, also half dead.

"She has feelings. I'm sorry for her."

It required a greater exertion of will than he had expected to cut short his shameless doings with Zinaida. And as soon as that was over, new thoughts appeared to torment him, side by side with his memories of the bobbin girl. It was as though a second Pyotr Artamonov had been born, and lived side by side with the first, following him everywhere. He could feel this new double swelling, growing more tangible, becoming a hindrance in all that he, the real Pyotr Artamonov, was called upon to do and accomplish. Craftily seizing upon the fits of musing abstraction which at times came suddenly over him, it would insinuate bitter, mortifying thoughts:

"You work like a horse—what for? You've had enough for a lifetime. It's time your son got to work. You love your son—so you murdered a harmless boy. A fine lady caught your eye—so you ran wild."

And always, after such thoughts, life would seem duller, more colourless.

He somehow failed to notice just when it was that Ilya grew up. Nor was this the only event that passed him by, all but unperceived. The same was true of Natalya's efforts for their daughter Elena, whom she finally married off to a lively young fellow with a little black moustache, the son of a wealthy jeweller in the gubernia seat. The

same was true of the death of his mother-in-law, who finally passed away one sultry June day, just before a storm. As they were laying her on the bed, thunder pealed, startlingly close.

"Shut the doors and windows!" cried Natalya, letting fall her mother's leg and clapping her hands to her ears. The swollen heel thudded dully on the floor.

Pyotr Artamonov actually thought, for a moment, that he did not recognize his son in the tall, well-built young man who walked into his office. Ilya wore a grey summer suit. His olive face had grown thinner, and a moustache was sprouting on his upper lip. Yakov, fat and broad, still wearing his school uniform, was more like himself. The sons greeted their father politely, and sat down.

"Well," said the father, pacing up and down the office. "So your grandmother is dead."

Ilya did not reply. He was lighting a cigarette. Yakov declared, in a strange new voice:

"It's a good thing she picked vacation time, or I wouldn't have come."

Artamonov let his younger son's inept remark pass without comment. His attention was concentrated on the elder. Ilya's features had changed considerably, gaining in strength and character. His hair, now darker than in childhood, shaded his forehead, making it seem less high; and his blue eyes had grown deeper. It was amusing, and embarrassing, somehow, to the father to recall that he had once shaken this grave young man in the dignified suit by his curls. Indeed, it was hard to believe that it had really happened. As to Yakov, he had simply become taller, larger, remaining plump and round as ever, with the same opalescent eyes and childish mouth.

"You've grown, Ilya," said the father. "Well, get used to the business, and in three or four years you can take the helm."

Ilya looked up at his father. He was toying with his cigarette case, a wooden one, badly chipped at one corner.

"No. I'm going to study a while yet."

"Long?"

"Four or five years."

"Well, well! And what are you going to study?"

"History."

It displeased Artamonov that his son had begun to smoke. And

that cigarette case was trash. He might have bought something better. Still more displeasing was Ilya's intention to continue his schooling, and the fact that he had brought it up at once, in his first few minutes at home.

Pointing out through the window at the roof of the mill, where little puffs of steam spurted from the opening of a narrow pipe, punctuating the rumbling din of labour, he said impressively, but in as mild a tone as he could muster:

"There's history for you, puffing away out there. That's what you've got to study. Our job is weaving linen, and history—that's not our affair. I'm fifty. It's time I was relieved."

"Miron will relieve you, and Yakov. Miron's going to be an engineer," Ilya replied. He flicked the ash of his cigarette out through the window. The father said:

"Miron's my nephew, not my son. But we'll talk all that over later."

The boys got up and went out. The father looked after them, his eyes wide with surprise and injury. Had they nothing at all to say to him? They had sat in his office for five minutes. One had spoken like a fool, and then sat yawning sleepily; the other had smoked the room up with tobacco, and upset him from the very start. There they were in the yard. He could hear Ilya's voice:

"Shall we go take a look at the river?"

"No. I'm tired after the road."

"The river will still be there tomorrow, and mother's grieving over grandmother's death, and worn out with the funeral arrangements."

Obedient to his habit of hastening to meet unpleasantness, in order to thrust it off, to get around it, as quickly as possible, Pyotr Artamonov gave his son only a week's respite. During this week, he noted that Ilya used the formal *vee* in speaking to the workers, and that in the evenings he would sit for hours on the bench by the gate, talking with Tikhon and Serafim. Once, standing at his window, Pyotr even overheard a fragment of their conversation. Tikhon's lifeless voice droned idiotically:

"So, so! Beggars—mendicants, they call them. Mend—I can't! Why can't they? It's true, Ilya Petrovich—if people would stop being greedy, there'd be enough of everything to go around!"

And Serafim crowed cheerfully:

"Yes, I know! Ages ago, I heard about it."

Yakov behaved more comprehensibly. He hung around the mill buildings, eyeing the girls, and climbed to the stable roof to look out over the river during the dinner hour, when the women went there to bathe.

"Just a bull calf," thought the father glumly. "I'll have to tell Serafim to look after him, and see he don't catch anything."

Tuesday was a grey, pensive, quiet day. For about an hour, early in the morning, a fine rain pattered lazily and stingily over the earth. Towards noon the sun peeped out, threw a reluctant glance at the mill and the juncture of the two rivers, and hid away again in the clouds, burying itself in their soft grey fluff as Natalya buried her rosy cheeks in her downy pillows at night.

Just before evening tea, Artamonov asked Yakov:

"Where's your brother?"

"I don't know. He was sitting on the hill a while ago, under the pine tree."

"Go call him. No, don't. Tell me, how do you two get on together?"

It seemed to him that his younger son smiled, barely perceptibly, before answering:

"Well enough. We don't fight."

"And is that all? I want to know the truth."

Yakov dropped his eyes and thought for a moment.

"When it comes to ideas, we don't agree too well."

"What ideas?"

"Generally, about everything."

"Well, and what's your disagreement?"

"He always goes by books, and I simply use my head. What my head tells me."

"I see," said the father. How to gain further particulars, he did not know.

He threw a duck coat over his shoulders, and took his walking stick, topped with a silver bird's claw grasping a malachite ball—a gift from Alexei. Stopping outside the gate, he shaded his eyes with his hand and looked out towards the hill by the river. There was Ilya, in a white shirt, lying under the tree.

"And the sand is damp today. He might catch cold. He's too careless."

Unhurriedly, weighing candidly in his mind every word of what he must say to his son, the father approached the hill. The grey grass blades snapped crisply underfoot. Ilya lay face downwards, reading a thick book, tapping the pages now and then with the end of a pencil. At the sound of footsteps he twisted around to look, and, seeing his father, laid the pencil between the pages of his book and slammed it shut. Then he sat up, his back against the trunk of the tree, and looked with friendly eyes into his father's face. Artamonov senior, short of breath with his climb, sat down nearby, on an arched root, thinking:

"I won't talk business today. There's plenty of time. We'll just have a chat about other things."

But Ilya, hugging his knees, said quietly:

"So you see, father, I've made up my mind to dedicate myself to science."

"Dedicate yourself," repeated the father. "As if it was the priesthood!"

He had meant to speak lightly, but the words came out in a sullen, almost angry tone. Vexed with himself, he brought his stick down violently on the sand. And then began something altogether incomprehensible, altogether undesired. Ilya's blue eyes darkened, and his brows knit. Tossing back the hair that shaded his forehead, he said, with unfilial persistence:

"I'm not going to be a manufacturer. I haven't got it in me."

"That's Tikhon's talk," put in the father scornfully.

Ignoring this interruption, the son went on to explain why he did not wish to be a manufacturer, or, in general, the master of any business. He spoke lengthily—perhaps a full ten minutes; and more than once, in the course of his speech, the father caught something that seemed to strike true, something pleasantly in harmony with his own vague, unformulated broodings. On the whole, however, it was clear to him that his son's talk was childish and unreasonable.

"Hold on," he said, poking his stick into the sand by his son's foot. "Hold on. That's not right. That's nonsense. You have to have someone on top. The rank and file can't get anywhere without someone on top. Who's going to work, if there's nothing to gain by it?

That's what everybody says: 'What do I stand to gain?' We're all spun on that spindle. Look at all the sayings: 'To the marrow he'd be a saint, only his soul for gain doth pant.' Or this one: 'Even a saint prays for profit.' Or, 'Even a machine likes to be greased, for all it has no soul.' "

He was quite calm. Recalling pertinent sayings and proverbs, he larded his speech liberally with their savoury wisdom. It was good to be speaking so composedly, not hesitating for words, but finding them without effort; and he was sure the conversation would end well. The son listened silently, sifting sand between his fingers, from hand to hand, freeing the reddish pine needles that were mingled with it and then blowing them from his palm. But suddenly he declared, as composedly as his father:

"All that means nothing to me. We can't guide ourselves by such precepts any longer."

Artamonov senior got up, leaning on his stick. His son did not offer to help him.

"So. Then what your father tells you isn't true?"

"There's another truth."

"That's a lie. There is no other."

Swinging his stick in the direction of the mill, the father said:

"Look—there's the truth! Your grandfather started it, and I put my whole life in it. And now it's your turn. It's as simple as that. What else do you expect? We worked. Why should you play? You want to live like a saint on other people's shoulders, eh? Not a bad idea! History! Forget about history. It isn't a girl. You can't marry it. What do you want with your damnfool history? What on earth good is it? I won't let you loaf."

Feeling that his tone had become too harsh, Pyotr Artamonov made an attempt to gloss things over.

"I understand. You want to live in Moscow—it's more fun there. Alexei, too...."

Ilya took up his book, blew the sand from its cover, and said:

"Give me permission to study."

"No!" the father shouted, driving his stick deep into the sand. "And don't ask for it again."

Then Ilya also got up. Staring into space over his father's shoulder, with eyes that had suddenly lost all colour, he said quietly:

"Well, then, I'll have to get along without permission."

"If you dare! . . ."

"No one can forbid a person to live as he sees fit," said Ilya, tossing his head.

"A person? You're my son, not a person. You—a person? Every rag you have on belongs to me."

This burst out involuntarily. It should not have been said. And the father went on more mildly, with a reproachful shake of the head:

"Is that how you repay my care? Ah, you young fool."

Ilya's cheeks were flushed, and his hands were shaking. He tried to hide them in his pockets, but they would not go in. And Artamonov, fearing lest his son go too far, lest he blurt out something irreparable, hurried on himself:

"All for your sake, I took a human life . . . maybe."

"Maybe" was added because Artamonov realized, as the words came out, that they should never have been said, in such circumstances, to this boy who obviously had no desire to understand a thing.

"Now he'll ask, whose life," he thought, and strode quickly away down the sandy hillside. But his son called after him, and the words were deafening:

"Not only one life. Look—there's a whole graveyard full of victims of the mill."

Artamonov stopped and looked back. Ilya stood with outstretched hand, pointing with his book at the crosses outlined against the dreary sky. The sand crunched under Artamonov's feet. He recalled the offensive talk about the mill and the graveyard he had already heard, just a few minutes past. Moreover, he was anxious to cover up his slip of the tongue, to efface it from his son's memory. And, lunging swiftly, bearishly up the hill, brandishing his stick, hoping to frighten his son, Artamonov senior yelled:

"What did you say, you dog?"

Ilya darted behind the tree.

"Stop! Are you crazy?"

The father swung his stick against the tree trunk. The stick split, and he flung the broken remnant to his son's feet. It stuck quivering in the sand, its green top pointing slantwise back at him. He said grimly:

"I'll make you clean privies!"

And he hurried away, staggering, almost sliding down the hill. His mind was awhirl, stumbling among incoherent words of sorrow and of wrath, like a shuttle in a tangled warp.

"I'll throw him out. Need will bring him back. And then, privies. I'll have no nonsense!"—came fragmentary thoughts, lashing out from the dancing web; and at the same time there were other thoughts, hinting dimly that he had not done well, that he had gone too far, had made too much of his injury.

Coming out on the bank of the Oka, he sank down wearily on the sandy bluff and wiped the perspiration from his face. His eyes turned to the river. A little shoal of dace flashed in a shallow inlet, piercing the water like swift steel needles. A bream appeared, with pompously spread fins. It swam about for a while, then turned on its side, peering up at the dreary clouds with one red eye, and sent out a stream of bubbles, like white smoke in the water.

Artamonov shook a threatening finger at the bream, and said aloud:

"I'll teach you how to live!"

And at once he looked over his shoulder; for the words had rung false. The river's placid flow had begun to wash away his wrath, and the grey, warm hush brought reflections whose burden was a numb bewilderment. Most bewildering of all was the sudden brevity with which the son whom he had loved, who for twenty years had been the object of his anxious and unremitting thoughts, had slipped out of his heart, leaving behind only a bitter ache. It was Artamonov's firm persuasion that, all these twenty years, he had been thinking daily, tirelessly, only of his son—had lived only in the hopes he laid in him, in the love he bore him, in the expectation of things extraordinary when the boy should grow to manhood.

"Like a match—flared up, and it's gone! But why?"

A faint glow flushed the grey sky. At one point a brighter spot appeared, like the greasy lustre of worn cloth. Then a chipped shard of moon peeped out. The air grew cool and damp, and a light mist rose over the river.

Coming home, Artamonov found his wife undressed, her left foot lifted to her round right knee, cutting her toenails with frowning effort. Glancing at her husband, she asked:

"Where did you send Ilya?"

"To the devil," he replied, beginning to undress.

"You're always so cross," sighed Natalya. Her husband did not answer. He was breathing heavily, deliberately making as much noise as he could about his preparations for bed. A rain began to patter at the windowpanes, and a damp rustling spread through the orchard.

"Ilya's gotten to be awfully high and mighty, all on account of his schooling."

"He's got a fool for a mother."

The mother sniffed. Crossing herself, she climbed into bed. Pyotr, still undressing, baited her with savage pleasure.

"What are you good for? Nothing. Your children don't respect you. What did you ever teach them? All you know how to do is eat and sleep. Yes, and smear your face."

His wife murmured into the pillow:

"Who sent them to school? I told you...."

"Be still!"

He also fell silent, listening to the steady crescendo of the raindrops in the leaves of the bird cherry Nikita had planted.

"The hunchback picked himself an easy lot. No children, no business. Bees. Me, I wouldn't bother with bees, even. If anyone wants honey, he can go get it himself."

Natalya turned over on her back, as gingerly as though she were lying on ice, and laid a warm cheek against her husband's shoulder.

"Did you have a row with Ilya?"

Ashamed to describe the encounter on the hill, he mumbled:

"You don't have rows with children. You row them."

"He's gone away to the city."

"He'll come back. Bread don't grow on trees. He'll get a taste of life without money, and he'll come back, never fear. Go to sleep and let me alone."

A moment later, he said:

"No more school for Yakov."

And still a moment later:

"Day after tomorrow, I'm going to the fair. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

"Why? What does it mean?" Artamonov puzzled. He closed his

eyes, but still he saw before him the boyish face, the lofty forehead, the glittering eyes that had bored into him so insufferably.

"Took his father down like discharging a hired man, the blackguard! Like refusing a beggar."

He could not get over the strange rapidity of the breach. It suggested that Ilya had long before made up his mind to break away. But what had prompted him to such a step? Recalling his son's harsh, condemning words, Artamonov reflected:

"It was Miron put him up to it, the dirty dog. And all that stuff about business hurting humanity, that comes from Tikhon. Fool, fool! Where did he put his faith? And he went to school, too! What did he learn there? He pities the workers, but he has no pity for his own father. And off he runs, to coddle his righteousness in a corner by himself."

At this thought his sense of injury flared still higher.

"No, you don't! You won't get out of it!"

He recalled Nikita, escaped to a peaceful haven.

"They all load the work on me and run away."

But Artamonov caught himself at once. That was not true. Alexei had not run away. Alexei loved the business as their father had loved it. He was greedy, insatiably greedy, and everything came to him simply, easily. One day, Pyotr recalled, when there had been a drunken brawl at the mill, he had said to Alexei:

"The people are going bad."

"That's noticeable," Alexei had agreed.

"They all seem bitter over something or other. They've all got the same look in their eyes."

With this, also, Alexei agreed. Chuckling, he said:

"That's true too. Sometimes it comes back to me: Tikhon had just the same look in his eyes, way back on your wedding day, watching father wrestle with the soldiers. Then Tikhon pushed in to wrestle too. Remember?"

"Why drag Tikhon in? He's simply feeble-minded."

Then Alexei began to speak seriously:

"I've noticed you often talk about that—the people are going bad, the people are getting spoiled. But after all, that's no concern of ours. That's a job for the priests, and the teachers, and, well—who else? All sorts of doctors, officials. It's their job to see that the people

don't get spoiled. That's the goods they have to sell, and you and me—we're the buyers. Everything in the world gets spoiled, in the course of time. You're getting old, for instance, and so am I. But you wouldn't tell a girl to give up living, just because some day she'll be a hag."

"He's smart," thought Artamonov senior. "Devilish smart."

He thought with envy of his brother's vivacity, of his brisk chatter, strung with jests and sayings of a new and unfamiliar order. Then his mind reverted to Nikita. Their father had willed that the hunchback be their consoler, and instead he had got himself into a silly mess, all for a woman's face, and he was gone.

Artamonov senior turned over many things in his mind, that rainy night. And, seeping like smoke through his bitter meditations, thoughts of another sort came crowding in—alien thoughts, whispered as though by the darkly murmuring rain—thoughts that hindered self-justification.

"But what wrong did I do?" he demanded of these alien thoughts; and though no answer came, he began to feel that, perhaps, an answer existed. As day was breaking, he suddenly made up his mind to visit his brother, in the monastery. There, perhaps, in a soul secluded from temptations and alarms, he might find consolation, even decision.

But as the post horses approached the monastery, after long jolting over country roads, Artamonov thought wearily:

"It's nice and simple, keeping in a corner. You just try and run around in the open! Pickles won't spoil in the cellar, but they rot fast enough in the sun."

He had not seen his brother for four years now, and their last meeting had been cold and tedious. The hunchback had seemed to Pyotr embarrassed and upset by his arrival. He had winced and shrunk, drawing into himself like a snail into its shell. In querulous tones, he had talked, not of God, not of himself or the family, but only of the needs of the monastery, of the pilgrims, and the poverty of the people. His words had come reluctantly, with visible effort. When Pyotr offered him money, he had replied, with quiet indifference:

"Give it to the prior. I don't need it."

It had been evident that all the monks looked up to Father Nikodim; and the prior, a huge, rawboned, hairy man, deaf in one

ear—he looked like a forest goblin dressed up in a cassock—had turned the uncanny light of his jet black eyes on Pyotr's face and said, with quite unnecessary loudness:

"Father Nikodim adorns our poor retreat."

The monastery stood on a low hill, in a close ring of pines, hidden from view by their heavy crowns. It greeted Artamonov with a dreary chiming of thin-voiced bells, calling to evening prayer. The tall, stiff gatekeeper, looking like a barge pole needlessly topped by a small, childish head in a crumpled and faded skullcap, stammered. as he opened up:

"W-w-w-wel. . . ."

And, with a sighing breath:

"C-c-come."

A grey-blue cloud hung motionless over the monastery, obliterating half the sky. The copper clamour of the bells could not disperse its oppressive atmosphere—damp, stuffy, viscous.

"It's too heavy for me," said the lay brother at the guest house, apologetically, after a vain effort to pull the box of gifts for Nikita out of the carriage; and he banged the cover of the box with his swarthy little fist.

Pyotr, dusty and tired, walked slowly towards the orchard, where his brother's white cell nestled snugly among apple and cherry trees. He was thinking that he had been foolish to come here; that it would have been better to go to the fair. The rough forest road, crisscrossed by knobby roots, had shaken up and confused all his grievous thoughts, leaving in their stead a bitter ache, a longing for rest and forgetfulness.

"What I need is a good spree."

He found his brother sitting on a bench in a semicircle of young lindens, with perhaps half a score of pilgrims disposed before him. It was like a scene from some familiar print. Pyotr noticed a black-bearded merchant in a duck coat, with one foot tied up in rags and shod in a rubber overshoe; a fat old man who looked like a eunuch money-changer, and a long-haired young fellow in a soldier's great-coat, with high cheekbones and fishy eyes. Also, Murzin—the Dryomov baker, a drunkard and rowdy. Standing up stiff as a post, like a thief before his judge, Murzin said hoarsely:

"That's true. It's a long way to God."

Nikita was not looking at the pilgrims. Tracing designs on the hard-trampled earth with the end of his white staff, he admonished them:

"And the lower a man falls, the higher above him is God, revolted by the stench of our corruption in sin."

"Consoling," thought Artamonov senior, and laughed to himself.

"God sees that our faith is idle. What is mere faith to him, without deeds? Do we help our brothers? Do we love one another? And what do we ask in our prayers? Trifles, petty nothings. We must pray, but still...."

The hunchback raised his eyes. For a moment he said nothing, looking up at his brother searchingly. Slowly, as though it were a heavy weight, he lifted his staff, as if to strike. Then he got up, and, his head drooping weakly on his chest, made the sign of the cross over his listeners; but instead of a prayer, he said only:

"There, now—my brother's come to see me."

The fat, hairless old man turned to look at Pyotr, his coppery eyes banefully rounded. He crossed himself sweepingly, with deliberate emphasis.

"Go in peace," Nikita added.

They moved away, scattering like a herd driven from pasture. The old man helped the merchant with the bad foot, taking his arm; baker Murzin took the merchant's other arm.

"Well, hullo. Your blessing."

With his long arm, winglike in the black cassock sleeve, Father Nikodim brushed aside his brother's folded hands. Quietly, with no sign of pleasure, he said:

"I wasn't expecting you."

He pointed with his staff in the direction of his cell, then led the way towards it. He walked jerkily, throwing his crooked legs far to the side. One hand was pressed to his heart.

"You've aged," said Pyotr diffidently.

"That's our lot. My legs ache. It's damp here."

Nikita seemed more hunchbacked than ever. His right shoulder and the angle of his hump had pushed upward, bowing his body closer to the earth, making him shorter and broader. He looked like a spider with its head torn off, crawling blindly, crookedly along the path, over the crunching gravel. In the cramped space of his neat

little cell, Father Nikodim looked somewhat bigger, but even more appalling. When he removed his cowl, his bald ivory crown gleamed dully, like a polished skull. Grey hair hung in ragged locks at his temples, behind his ears, and around the back of his head. His face, too, was wax-coloured ivory, with no flesh on the bones. The faded eyes gave no light, and their gaze seemed concentrated on the tip of his big, flaccid nose. Below, two dark bands, his shriveled lips, moved soundlessly. His mouth was bigger than before—a deep pit cutting his face in two. Particularly gruesome was the mouldy growth of grey hairs on his upper lip.

Very low, as though reluctant to interrupt some sound to which he hearkened, and slowly, as though recalling each word with difficulty, the monk said to the lay brother who attended him, a chubby-faced young fellow much like a steam bath attendant:

"The samovar. Bread. Honey."

"How low you speak."

"My teeth are gone."

The monk sat down at the table, in a white-painted wooden armchair.

"All well?"

"Well enough."

"Tikhon still alive?"

"He's all right. What harm could he take?"

"It's a long time since he's been to see me."

There was a silence. When Nikita moved, his cassock rustled, with a scuttling, cockroachy sound that still further intensified Pyotr's restless discomfort.

"I brought some stuff for you. Have them bring the box. There's some wine, too. Is wine allowed?"

With a sigh, his brother answered:

"It isn't strict here. It's hard. We even have drunkards now, since so many people started coming. They drink. What can you do? The world breathes, and its breath is poison. Even monks are human."

"I hear there's lots of people seek you out."

"That's because they don't understand," said the monk. "Yes, they come. They poke around. Righteousness, they're after—a righteous soul, to tell them how to live. They lived, somehow, and now they can't. It's more than they can endure."

Feeling a rising uneasiness at these words of the monk's, Artamonov senior grumbled:

"Tomfoolery. They endured serfdom, yet they can't endure freedom! What they need is a tighter rein."

Nikita did not answer.

"Under the gentry, people didn't waste their time gadding around."

The hunchback glanced at him, and dropped his eyes.

And so they talked, searching heavily for words, with long pauses between desultory remarks, until the towheaded lay brother brought the samovar, fragrant linden honey, and steaming, fresh-baked bread. Then they sat watching him with grave attention as he fussed clumsily on the floor, prying up the lid of the box. Pyotr set on the table a tin of fresh caviar and two bottles.

"Port," said Nikita, glancing at one of the labels. "The prior likes that wine. A clever man. He understands many things."

"Well, as for me, I understand very little," Pyotr admitted defiantly.

"You understand too, as much as need be; and what's the use of more? It isn't wholesome, understanding more than you ought."

The monk sighed faintly. Pyotr sensed a bitterness in his words. His cassock gleamed greasily in the gathering shadows; for the cell was but poorly lit by the tiny flame under the icons in the corner and the cheap lamp, made of yellow glass, that stood on the table. Noting the chary avidity with which his brother sucked up his Madeira, Pyotr reflected ironically:

"He knows his wines."

After every glass Nikita would pinch off a bit of soft bread between his fleshless, strangely white fingertips, dip it in honey, and chew it up unhurriedly, wagging his sparse, plucked-looking grey beard. He showed no sign of intoxication; but his muddy eyes grew lighter, though still fixed on the tip of his nose. Pyotr drank sparingly, reluctant to seem sottish to his brother. As he drank, he thought:

"He's not asking about Natalya. He didn't ask last time, either. He's ashamed. No questions about anyone. We're of the world, and he's a saint. People come to seek him out."

He jerked his head angrily, and his beard brushed noisily against his vest. Pulling at his ear, he said:

"You've hid yourself nicely here. A good job."

"It used to be good. Now it's going bad. Too many pilgrims. All these receptions. . . ."

"Receptions?" Pyotr laughed. "It sounds like a dentist's office."

"I want to get transferred further away, somewhere," said the monk, carefully pouring wine.

"Where you'll have more peace," Pyotr added, and laughed again. The monk sucked up his wine, passed his limp, dark tongue over his lips, and said, with a shake of his ivory crown:

"More and more people are losing their peace of mind. You can see the number growing. They try to hide, to get away from cares."

"I don't see that," Pyotr returned, knowing very well that he was lying. "You're the one that's hiding," was what he wanted to say.

"And worries follow on their heels like shadows."

Words of reproach were crowding to Pyotr's lips. He wanted to dispute his brother's words, to shout at him angrily. In a voice embittered by thoughts of his son, he said:

"They look for worries themselves. It's their own choice brings them troubles. Do your job, and don't try to be smart, and you'll live peacefully enough!"

But his brother, absorbed in thoughts of his own, did not seem to hear. He gave his angular frame a sudden shake, as though awakening from sleep; and his cassock slithered floorward in murky cascades. He began to speak, very distinctly, his lips twisted in what seemed a bitterness no less than Pyotr's:

"They come to me clamouring for edification. What do I know? What can I teach them? I have no wisdom. The prior made it all up. Myself, I don't know anything. Like a man wrongly condemned—sentenced to exhort and edify. For what crime?"

"He's hinting," thought Artamonov senior. "He means to complain."

He realized that Nikita had reason for complaining of his fate. He had expected such complaints, even in earlier visits. And, pulling at his ear, he forestalled his brother, declaring impressively:

"Many complain against fate, only there's no good comes of that."

"True; content is rare," said the hunchback. His eyes were turned to the corner, where the light burned under the icons.

"And for you, it was father's behest—peace to his soul—that you should console, be our consoler."

Nikita's lips stretched in an ironic smile. He gathered his grey beard into his fist, and with it rubbed the smile away. His voice went on, dripping words into the shadows, words that jolted Pyotr, that aroused his curiosity and at the same time evoked a wary anticipation of danger.

"They try their best, here, to make me believe I'm wise, and to make the world believe it. That's for the profit of the monastery, of course, to bring in pilgrims. But for me, the task is hard. It's a demanding calling! How can I console? Endure, I say. But I can see—they're all sick of enduring. Live in hope, I say. Only—in hope of what? God? They find no comfort in God. There's a baker comes around. . . ."

"Murzin, you mean. He's from our town. A drunkard," said Artamonov senior, anxious to avert, to ward off he knew not what.

"He's got to a point where he thinks he can set himself up to judge God. God isn't the master any more, to him. Bold, overweening—there's lots of that kind, nowadays. Then there's another man, with no beard. Did you notice him? A spiteful man, an enemy to the whole world. They come and question me. What can I tell them? All they come for is, to kill my peace of mind."

The monk was speaking with increasing animation. Recalling previous visits to the monastery, Pyotr noted that today Nikita did not blink so apologetically as before. During those visits, Pyotr had been soothed by the hunchback's evident sense of guilt; for the guilty have no right to complain. Yet now he was complaining, declaring himself wrongly condemned. And the elder Artamonov was afraid that his brother might say to him:

"It was you condemned me!"

Frowning, he toyed with his watch chain, seeking words in which to couch his self-defence.

"Yes," the hunchback continued; and he seemed to derive a secret pleasure from the very things of which he complained. "People are getting out of hand, more and more. Presumptuous thoughts come to their minds. Not long ago, there was a scholar stayed a couple of weeks with us. Still a young man, he was, only beside himself, somehow. Frightened. The prior kept instructing me. 'Give him strength,'

he said, 'through your simplicity. Tell him this,' he said, 'and tell him that.' But I've a bad memory for other people's thoughts. He badgered me for hours on end—the scholar, I mean. He talked and talked, and I couldn't even understand the words he used, let alone his ideas. 'It's wrong,' he said, 'to acknowledge the Devil as the master of our flesh. That would be worshipping two Gods, outraging the body of Christ, that we partake of in the Eucharist. "Partake, then, of the flesh of Christ, of the fount of immortality." ' He blasphemed. 'I don't care,' he said, 'even if we have a God with horns, so long as there's only one God, because otherwise it's impossible to go on living.' He wore me out, and I forgot all Father Feodor's counsel, and yelled at him, 'Your flesh is change, and your spirit is destruction.' The prior reproached me, afterwards. 'What's wrong with you?' he said. 'What kind of heretical mummery was that?' Yes, that's how it is."

To Pyotr, the story seemed absurd; but it relieved him to some extent, by presenting his brother in such a pitiable light.

"It's hard to talk about God," he mumbled.

"It's hard," Father Nikodim agreed, and asked, with oily bitterness: "Remember what father used to say? 'We're plain working people. It's too high-flown for us, that wisdom.' "

"I remember."

"Yes. Father Feodor says, 'Read books!' And I read, but I might just as well be listening to the wind in the trees, away off in the woods somewhere. The books don't fit our times. The ideas you meet up with nowadays—the books don't give you any answer to them. Sectarians everywhere. People argue as if they were telling dreams. Like drunkards the morning after. Take that Murzin. . . ."

The monk drank some port, and chewed some bread. He pressed a bit of soft bread into a little ball, and rolled it about on the table as he talked on:

"Father Feodor says, all the trouble comes from the mind. The devil sicks it on like a mean-tempered dog. He provokes, and the dog barks without reason. Maybe that's true. But it goes against the grain to believe it. There's a doctor here. A cheerful man, with no pretensions. He looks at it differently: the mind is a child, and it takes everything for a toy. Everything interests it. It wants to find out how things work, and how they're made, and what they have inside. And so, of course, it breaks things. . . ."

"I should say that sort of talk is dangerous," Pyotr remarked. Again his brother's words were sowing uneasiness, jostling and rocking him—startling, frightening in their unexpectedness and poignancy. Again he felt the desire to crush Nikita, to humiliate him.

"He's drunk," he told himself, trying to regain his calm.

The cell was stuffy. Sourish odours rose from the charcoal smouldering in the samovar, and from the oil in the flickering icon lamp. They dulled Pyotr's thoughts. Against the tiny black square of the window, the leaves of some plant were outlined, motionless, like iron tracery. And his spidery brother talked on, softly, persistently, spinning his web of words.

"All ideas are dangerous. Especially simple ones. Take Tikhon."

"He's a half-wit."

"Oh, no, he isn't! His wits are all there. A rigorous mind. I was afraid to talk to him, even, at first. I wanted to, but I didn't have the nerve. And then, when father died, Tikhon won me. You see, you didn't love father the way I did. You and Alexei—you didn't feel the injustice of his death, but Tikhon did. It wasn't the nun I was angry at that day, for her stupidity. It was God. And Tikhon saw that right away. 'Yes,' he said, 'mosquitoes live, and a man. . . .' "

"You're raving!" Pyotr put in sternly. "You've had too much to drink. What nun are you talking about?"

But Nikita went on persistently:

"Tikhon says, if God is master of the world, then the rains ought to come at the proper time, when they're good for the crops and the people. And if you take fires, they don't all come from man. It's the lightning sets the forests burning. And why did Cain have to sin, to bring us death? What does God need deformity for? Hunchbacks, for instance—what does he need them for?"

"Aha, so that's it," thought Pyotr, smiling into his beard. He was relieved to hear his brother complaining against God. It was well that the monk did not complain against his family.

"Cain—that I can't understand. With that, Tikhon chained me hand and foot. And so it began with me, from the day father died. I thought, when I took the vows, it would stop. But it didn't. The same thoughts keep on."

"You never talked about such things before."

"There are things you don't talk about from the first. And for that matter, I'd have kept still all my life, maybe; only the pilgrims give me no peace. They plague my conscience. And then, it's dangerous. Suppose Tikhon's ideas come popping out in the middle of my homilies? Say what you will, he's a clever man, though, maybe, I don't like him. He thinks about you, too. There, he says, a man worked all his life for his children, and his children are strangers to him."

"What sort of nonsense is that?" demanded Pyotr angrily. "What can he know about it?"

"He knows. Business, he says, is a mockery."

"I've heard him. He ought to be thrown out, the fool—only he knows too much about us, about our family affairs."

This was said to remind Nikita of that dismal night when Tikhon had prevented his suicide; but Pyotr himself was thinking of the Nikonov boy. The monk did not catch the hint. Raising his glass, he bathed his tongue in wine, then licked his lips. Dully, he spoke on:

"Someone hurt Tikhon once, too, and so he's broken away from everybody, like a bankrupt."

This was a subject from which the talk must be diverted.

"Well, and what's the upshot? Don't you believe in God any more?" Pyotr asked. Strange: he had meant his tone to be caustic, but, somehow, it was not.

"It's hard to tell who does believe, nowadays," replied the monk, after a pause. "Everybody's busy thinking, but there's not much sign of faith. You don't need to think, if you believe. That scholar who talked about a God with horns. . . ."

"Drop it," Pyotr advised, glancing over his shoulder. "It all comes from boredom, from nothing to do. What people need is good, strong iron yokes."

"No, you can't believe in two," said Father Nikodim insistently.

Again a bell was ringing, its measured strokes beating against the murky windowpane. Pyotr asked:

"Are you going to prayers?"

"I don't go. My legs hurt so, I can't stand."

"Do you pray for us here?"

The monk did not reply.

"Well, it's time I got to bed. The trip here tired me out."

Again Nikita made no reply. Bracing himself on the arms of his chair, he lifted his angular body carefully, and called:

"Mitya, Mitya."

Then, sinking down again, he said apologetically:

"I'm sorry—I forgot. My attendant's gone to sleep at the guest house. I sent him away because I wanted to talk freely, and they're all informers here, talebearers."

Wordily, unnecessarily, he explained the way to the guest house. Coming out into the darkness, where a fine, cold rain was falling, Pyotr reflected:

"He didn't want me to go. He felt like talking."

And suddenly, with the familiar panic fear, Artamonov senior felt once more that he was walking along the edge of a deep chasm, into which he might fall at any moment. He hastened his step, walking with outstretched hands, groping through the drizzle that made the night so dark, his eyes fixed on the spot of greasy yellow in the distance, where a lantern marked the guest house.

"No," he thought hastily, as he stumbled on. "It's not the thing for me. I'll leave tomorrow. It's not for me. After all, what's wrong? Ilya will come back! I've got to keep a firm hold on life. Look at Alexei, how he's pushing on. He's liable to push me out of things, some fine day."

The thought of Alexei was forced, to keep Nikita and Tikhon out of mind. But when Pyotr lay down on his hard cot in the monastery guest house, he was overtaken once more by oppressive thoughts about the monk and the yardman. What sort of a man was this Tikhon? His shadow fell on everything around him. His words were echoed in Ilya's childish talk, and his thoughts had thrown a spell over Nikita.

"Consoler!" he thought, of Nikita. "Take Serafim, a simple carpenter—he knows how to console."

Sleep would not come. Mosquitoes were biting. People were talking in the next room. There were three voices, and it occurred to Pyotr that they must be baker Murzin, the merchant with the bad leg, and the man who looked like a eunuch.

"Drinking, most likely."

At long intervals, the monastery watchman banged his iron rattle. Then, suddenly, hastily, as though overdue, the bells

began to ring for morning prayer. While they were ringing, Pyotr fell asleep.

Morning brought his brother, looking the same as in the orchard the day before, with the same alien, hostile glance—sidewise, and upwards. Artamonov senior hastily washed and dressed, and told the lay brother to order him a horse to the nearest post station.

"Why so soon?" asked the monk, with no great surprise. "I thought you'd stay awhile."

"Business presses."

They sat down to tea. It was a long time before Pyotr could think of anything to say to his brother. Finally, remembering, he asked:

"So you're thinking of leaving here?"

"I'd like to. They don't want to let me go."

"What's got into them?"

"It pays to have me here. I'm useful."

"I see. And where do you intend to go?"

"Perhaps I'll wander about."

"With your sick legs?"

"Even the legless get around somehow."

"That's so. They do," Pyotr agreed.

There was a silence. Then Nikita said:

"Give Tikhon my regards."

"And who else?"

"Everybody."

"I will. Why don't you ask me how Alexei's getting along?"

"What's there to ask? I know he knows how to live. I may be leaving pretty soon."

"You can't go in the wintertime."

"Why not? People get around in the winter too."

"That's so. They do," Pyotr agreed again. He offered his brother money.

"All right. It will go to repair the flour mill. Won't you look in to see the prior?"

"There's no time. The horse is waiting."

The brothers embraced in parting. It was inconvenient, embracing Nikita. He did not bless his brother. His right hand got entangled in his cassock sleeve, and it occurred to Pyotr that this was deliberate. His hump pressing against Pyotr's belly, Nikita requested tonelessly:

"If I said anything I shouldn't have, yesterday, forgive it."

"Forget it. We're brothers."

"You think, and think, through the nights...."

"Yes, yes. Well, good-bye."

As the monastery gates dropped behind, Pyotr looked back. His brother's figure was outlined like a rock against the white wall of the guest house.

"Good-bye," he muttered, and pulled off his cap. His bare head was soon soaked by the drizzling rain. The road lay through a pine forest. It was very quiet. Only the pine needles tinkled glassily as the raindrops struck them. On the driver's seat, a monk bobbed heavily up and down. The horse was chestnut coloured, with no hair on its ears.

"What people find to talk about!" Pyotr was thinking. "God sends the rain at the wrong time. It all comes from spite, from envy, from deformity. It's the fruit of laziness, of having nothing to worry about. A man without cares is like a dog without a master."

Pyotr glanced behind him, shivering. This particular rain, he felt, really was coming down at the wrong time. Again his gloomy thoughts enveloped him as in a heavy cloud. To rid himself of them, he drank vodka at every post station.

Towards evening, when the smoky city came into sight ahead, a puffing train cut across the road. The locomotive whistled, spat steam, and, plunging into a semicircular pit mouth, disappeared beneath the surface of the earth.

III

Looking back on his wild days at the fair, Pyotr Artamonov always experienced a spine-prickling bewilderment, closely bordering on fear. He could not believe that all these things revived by memory had really happened; that he, too, had seethed in this huge stone cauldron, brimming over with crashing clamour, with raucous music, songs, and cries, with drunken ecstasy and the soul-shattering, anguished shrieks of frantic men and women—all stirred and seasoned by a big, curlyheaded man in frock coat and top hat, with bulging owl eyes staring from a blue, clean-shaven face. The man smacked his thick lips. Embracing Artamonov, jostling him, he yelled:

"Fool, be still! The baptism of Russia, understand? The yearly baptism, on the Volga and the Oka!"

He looked like a cook, and he was dressed like one of those men with torches who are hired to accompany the wealthy to their graves. Pyotr had a dim memory of fighting with this man. And afterwards they drank cognac, mixing ice cream into it, and the man sobbed aloud and said:

"Hear the cry of the Russian soul! My father was a priest, and I'm a scoundrel!"

His voice was deep, blaring, yet mellow. He deluged them all with a murky torrent of fantastic speech, and his words moved the soul irresistibly.

"The corruption of the flesh!" he roared. "Battling the devil! Throw him his dirty tribute, the swine! Quell the revolt of your body, Petya! If you don't sin, you can't repent, and if you don't repent, you can't be saved. Bathe your soul! Don't we go to the steam bath, to wash our bodies? And what about the soul? The soul cries to be bathed. Make room for the Russian soul, the singing soul, sacred, magnificent!"

Pyotr, too, wept, deeply moved and mumbled:

"It's an orphan, our soul, a foundling, that's true! Forgotten. Neglected."

And all the people shouted:

"Right! True!"

A bald, red-bearded man, plump and nimble, with a flaming face and purple ears, twirled about like a top, squealing frenziedly, womanishly:

"Styopa—it's true! I adore you. I love you to death. Three things, I love to death—you, and pickles, and the truth. The truth about the soul!"

And he also wept, singing:

By death is death defied....

Pyotr chimed in, with the words of Anton the fool:

The wagon lost a wheel, lost a wheel.

He, too, thought he loved the swarthy Styopa, and drank in his cries with rapt attention. And though, at times, the strange words seemed to menace, there were more that moved him deep and sweetly,

as if throwing wide a doorway from the dark and noisy chaos into a realm of radiant peace. Best of all was the phrase, "singing soul." There was something very true in it, and very plaintive, fitting into a remembered scene: one of the dirty Dryomov streets, on a sultry weekday; a tall grey-bearded old man, gaunt as death itself, wearily turning the handle of a barrel organ, while a little girl of twelve or so, in a crumpled blue dress, her face uplifted, with tight-shut eyes, sang painfully, in a voice cracked with weariness:

And life holds nought in store of joy or wo-onder....
And what I seek is free-eedom and slu-umber....

The memory of the little girl made Artamonov mumble to the man with the purple ears:

"The singing soul! He's got it right!"

"Who, Styopa?" the red beard clamoured. "Styopa knows everything! He has the master keys to all our souls!"

Growing more and more excited, he squealed:

"Styopa, friend of humanity, let loose! Lawyer Paradisov, lead us on to the den of iniquity. Anything goes!"

The friend of humanity was the shepherd and leading spirit of a company of manufacturers on the spree. Wherever he appeared with his drunken flock, music crashed and songs resounded—now melancholy, wringing the soul until the tears came flowing; now boisterous, with furious dancing. But all that remained in Pyotr's aural memory was the dull booming of the big drum and the shrill tones of an irrepressible little pipe. When slow, sad songs were being sung, the brick walls of the taverns seemed to contract, closing in upon Pyotr until he gasped for breath. When the chorus swung into some spirited tune, and the dancers, in their gaudy costumes, leaped and whirled, it was as though a wind swayed the walls and pushed them outwards. Buffeted from mood to mood, flung violently from rejoicing to maudlin melancholy, Artamonov was seized, at moments, by such searing ecstasy that he longed to do something extraordinary, stupendous—to kill someone, perhaps—and then fall to his knees before the people, crying, for all to hear:

"Judge me! Condemn me to a dreadful retribution!"

They were at the "Wheel," an insane tavern with a revolving floor that carried tables, customers, waiters round and round in a slow, but

never-ending motion. The place was crammed with people as a taut pillow is with feathers, and brimming over with noise. Only the corners were stationary. As the floor turned, they flashed by in dizzying succession, revealing, in one, a mad pack of brass-horned music makers; in another, the chorus, a rainbow crowd of women with wreaths of flowers on their heads; in a third, the shelves of plates and bottles behind the counter, reflecting the glare of the hanging lamps. The fourth corner was cut off obliquely by the doorway, where more and more people kept pushing in. Stepping over the edge of the revolving circle, they would stagger and fall, tossing their arms and shouting with laughter as they were carried away.

The friend of humanity, swarthy Styopa, explained to Artamonov:

"Silly, yes, but it's smart! The floor's held up by timbers, like a saucer on your spread fingers. The timbers branch up from a post, and lower down on the post there's two shafts sticking out horizontally, with a team of horses harnessed to each of them. The horses go round, and the floor revolves. Simple? But it has its meaning. Remember, Petya—everything has a meaning of its own, alas!"

He pointed upwards, at the ceiling, and a greenish stone glittered, like a wolf's eye, on his finger. A broad-chested, dog-headed merchant pulled at Artamonov's sleeve, peering into his face with the glassy eyes of a corpse. In the loud tones of the deaf, he demanded:

"What will Dunya say, eh? Who are you?"

Without waiting for an answer, he turned to someone else, demanding:

"Who are you? What will I tell Dunya? Eh?"

He threw himself back in his chair and muttered:

"Ugh, the devil!"—

Then shouted furiously:

"Let's go some other place!"

Then he was the driver, sitting up in front in a carriage drawn by a pair of greys, announcing thunderously to all passers in the street:

"We're off to Paula's! Come along!"

It was raining. There were five of them in the carriage. One, sprawled at Artamonov's feet, kept mumbling:

"He fooled me. I'll fool him. He did me. I'll do him."

On a square, at the foot of a hill that looked like a big round loaf of bread, the carriage toppled over. Pyotr bruised his head and elbow

in the fall. Sitting up on the wet turf, he watched the red-bearded man with the purple ears, who was crawling up the hillside towards the mosque, roaring:

"Get away! I want to be baptized into a Tatar! I want to be a Mahomet! Let me go!"

Swarthy Styopa seized him by the legs, pulled him down the hill, and led him away somewhere. Persians, Tatars, Bukharans came thronging up from the shops and the Caravanserai. An old man in a yellow coat and a green turban shook his staff at Pyotr.

"Russ, shaitan!"

A copper-faced policeman lifted Pyotr to his feet, saying:

"No brawling, now."

Cabs drove up, and the drunken merchants were put in and driven off. The friend of humanity rode ahead, standing, shouting something through his fist as if it were a megaphone. The rain stopped, but the sky remained black and menacing as it never is in waking life. Lightning flashed over the huge building of the Caravanserai, driving fiery chinks through the wall of darkness. Fear gripped the heart when the horses' hoofs tattooed hollowly on the wooden bridge across the Betancour canal. Artamonov had no doubt that the bridge would collapse, and they would all be drowned in the still, pitch-black water.

In his fragmentary, nightmare memories of these scenes, Artamonov sought and found himself, among the drink-crazed people, as an almost entire stranger. He—this stranger—drank frantically, and lived in avid expectation that right away, in just another moment, something altogether extraordinary would begin, the most important, the most wonderful thing in life, and he would either sink to boundless depths of dejection, or soar to equally boundless heights of joy, forever and ever.

Most fantastic of all was the dazzling memory of the woman, Paula Menotti. He was in a big, bare room, with no hangings on the walls. A third of the room was occupied by a table, loaded with bottles, many-coloured wine glasses, vases of flowers and fruits, and silver pails of caviar and iced champagne. Ten or twelve men, redheaded, bald-headed, grey-headed, sat at the table, fidgeting impatiently. There were several empty chairs, one of them adorned with flowers.

Swarthy Styopa stood in the middle of the room, holding up his gold-headed stick like a candle, shouting:

"Hey, pigs, can't you wait to guzzle?"

Somebody said dully:

"Stop barking."

"Shut up!" yelled the friend of humanity. "I'm in charge here!"

And somehow, suddenly, the room grew darker. Dull drum beats sounded outside, and Styopa strode to the door and threw it open. A fat man came in, with a drum on his belly. He walked at a staggering goose step, banging away at his drum with all his might:

"Boom, boom, boom...."

Five other men appeared, equally grave and dignified. Bent almost double, straining like draught horses, they pulled a piano into the room, by towels tied around its legs. On the gleaming black of the piano lid lay a naked woman, dazzlingly white, fearful in the shamelessness of her nudity. She lay on her back, her head pillowed on her arms. Her dark hair hung loose, merging with the lacquered blackness of the lid, melting into it. The closer she came, the more clearly were the curves of her body outlined, and the more persistently was every eye attracted to the patches of hair in her armpits and on her belly.

The copper wheels whined. The floor creaked. The drum boomed loudly. The men harnessed to this ponderous chariot stopped and straightened up. Artamonov expected everyone to laugh. That would have made things easier to understand. But all the men at the table rose to their feet and stood silently watching as the woman lazily raised herself, detached herself from the piano lid. It was as though she had only just awakened from sleep, and beneath her lay a fragment of the night, condensed to the consistency of stone. It was like a fairy tale. Standing, the woman threw her long, thick hair back over her shoulders, and stamped her feet, disturbing the black gleam to its very depths. They could hear the strings hum as her feet struck the lid.

Two more came in: a grey-haired, spectacled old lady and a man in evening clothes. The old lady sat down, baring her own yellow teeth simultaneously with the black and ivory of the keyboard. The man in evening clothes raised a violin to his shoulder, screwed up one reddish eye as though taking aim, and cut across the strings with his bow, projecting the thin, piping voice of the violin into the bass drone of the piano. The naked woman straightened up sinuously. She

tossed her head, and her hair fell forward, over her bold breasts, and hid them. Swaying, she began to sing, slowly and nasally, her low voice aloof and dreamy.

They all sat in silence, with upturned faces, watching her. They all wore the same expression. Their eyes looked blind. The woman sang reluctantly, as though half asleep. Her vivid lips shaped words that no one understood; her eyes, covered with an oily film, stared fixedly over the heads of the company. Artamonov had never thought that a woman's body could be so finely shaped, so appallingly beautiful. She passed her palms over breast and hips, constantly tossing her head, until her hair seemed to be growing, until the whole of her seemed to be growing, expanding, obliterating everything from sight —until she alone was visible, as though nothing but she existed. Not for an instant, Artamonov remembered clearly, did she arouse in him the desire to possess her. She evoked only fear, an oppressive constriction in his chest. She emanated the horror of sorcery. But he realized that, if this woman called, he would follow her, would do for her anything she might desire. Glancing at the others, he was still more strongly convinced of this.

"Every one of them would do it."

His intoxication was subsiding, and he felt the desire to turn quietly and leave this place—a desire that grew into determination when someone whispered loudly:

"*Charusa.* Nature's trap. Do you get it? *Charusa.*"

Charusa. Artamonov knew what that meant: a luscious sward in the midst of a swampy forest; a sward where the grass was particularly beautiful, particularly green and silky; but all who set foot on it would be sucked down into the bottomless morass. And yet he remained, watching the woman, paralyzed by the irresistible, conquering power of her nakedness. And when her heavy, oily glance fell on him, he would shift his shoulders uneasily and twist his neck, turning his face away. Then he would see the others: hideous, half-drunk, goggling at her in a sort of stupid amazement. Just so had the Dryomov townspeople stared, one day, when a house painter fell from the roof of the church and was killed.

Swarthy, curlyheaded Styopa sat on the window sill, his thick lips parted, rubbing his forehead with a trembling hand. He looked as though in another moment he must fall, dashing his head against

the floor. One of his cuffs hung loose. For some reason or other, he suddenly tore it off and threw it into the corner.

The woman's movements became faster, more convulsive. She writhed and twisted as though trying to jump down from the piano, but somehow prevented. Her smothered cries became more nasal, their tone more shrewish. It was horrible to watch the sinuous movements of her legs, the sharp jerking of her head, the thick hair sweeping winglike over her shoulders and falling on breast and back like an animal skin.

Suddenly the music broke off, and the woman sprang to the floor. Swarthy Styopa wrapped her hastily in a golden-yellow robe, and pulled her out of the room. The company broke into shouts and squeals, clapping furiously, jostling one another. Waiters, white as shrouded corpses, hurried in and out. Glasses tinkled. Everyone began to drink, thirstily, as on a sultry day. They ate and drank coarsely, indecently. It was almost nauseating to see their bent heads over the table, like so many pig snouts over the feeding trough.

A crowd of gypsies appeared. Their songs and dancing annoyed the company, and cucumbers and napkins flew at them until they disappeared. In their place, Styopa herded in a noisy swarm of women. One of these, short and plump, in a red dress, perched on Pyotr's knees and raised a glass of champagne to his lips. Clinking her own glass loudly against his, she cried:

"Drink to Mitya, redhead!"

She was light as a moth, and her name was Pashuta. She played the guitar very nicely, singing touchingly:

I dreamt of bright morning, all crystal and azure;

and when her clear voice broke pathetically on the line:

I dreamt of my long-lost, my innocent girlhood—

Artamonov patted her head in friendly, fatherly fashion, trying to comfort her.

"Don't you cry. You're young yet. You've nothing to fear."

At night, embracing her, he closed his eyes tight, so that he might recall the other—Paula Menotti.

In his rare moments of sobriety he realized, with great amazement, that this dissipated Pashuta was costing him ridiculous sums of money; and he thought to himself:

"The little moth!"

It was astonishing, how skilfully these women at the fair got money out of people's pockets, and how senselessly they spent this money, earned at the cost of nights of drunken debauchery. He was told that the dog-faced man, a big fur dealer, spent tens of thousands on Paula Menotti; that he paid her three thousand for every nude appearance. The one with the purple ears thrust hundred-ruble bills into the candle flame to light his cigars, and pushed heavy rolls of money into women's bosoms.

"Here, Dutchy, I've got plenty."

He called all women, "Dutchy." As to Artamonov, he was beginning to see in every woman the brazen shamelessness of thick-haired Paula; to feel that every woman, sly or foolish, reticent or bold, regarded him inimically. Even in his wife, as he recalled her now, he noted traces of repressed hostility.

"Moths," he reflected, reviewing the colourful bevy of young and beautiful women that rose so vividly in memory.

He could not understand what it all meant. How could it be so? People worked, fettered to their business, dead to the world, with the sole aim of accumulating money, as much money as they possibly could—and then they burnt the money, threw it by the handful at the feet of dissolute women. And they were all men of weight, with positions in life, husbands and fathers, owners of great mills and factories.

"Father'd have played the same sort of tricks, most likely," he concluded. Yes, that was hardly to be doubted. Himself he regarded, not as a participant in this sort of life, in these revels and carousals, but as a chance, involuntary onlooker. Only—these thoughts were more intoxicating than wine, and nothing but wine could kill them. For three weeks he lived in a nightmare of drunkenness, which ended only with Alexei's arrival.

Artamonov senior lay on the floor, on a flimsy, stone-hard mattress. Beside him stood a pail of ice, some bottles of kvass, and a plate of sauerkraut, generously seasoned with grated horse-radish. On the couch, her mouth open, her eyebrows lifted like Natalya's, lay Pashuta. One white leg, blue-veined, with toenails like gleaming fish scales, dangled over the side of the couch. Outside the window, straining its thousands of insatiate gullets, roared the great all-Russian mart.

Through the drunken buzzing in his head and the throbbing ache of his poisoned body, Artamonov was looking morosely back over the events and amusements of the night just past, when suddenly, as though materializing out of the wall, Alexei made his appearance. His stick tapped loudly on the floor as he limped across the room. Looking down at Pyotr, he rattled off:

"Keeled over? On your back? I searched for you all day yesterday, and all last night, and by morning I got into it myself."

He summoned a waiter immediately, and ordered lemonade, cognac, and ice. Swooping down on the couch, he slapped Pashuta's shoulder.

"Get up, young lady!"

The young lady grumbled, without opening her eyes:

"Go to hell. Let me alone."

"Ah, but it's you that's going to hell," Alexei returned, quite amicably. He seized her by the shoulders and sat her up, then gave her a shake, and pointed to the door.

"Scat!"

"Let her alone," said Pyotr. His brother laughed and answered reassuringly:

"That's all right. She'll come when we send for her."

"You devils," said the woman; but she pulled on her clothes resignedly.

Alexei issued orders like a veritable doctor:

"Get up, Pyotr. Take off your shirt, and rub yourself with ice."

Pashuta picked her crumpled hat up from the floor, and put it on her tousled head. Glancing into the mirror over the couch, however, she said:

"What a beautiful queen!"

And, yawning sleepily, tossed the hat away.

"Well, good-bye, Mitya! Remember, I'm at Simansky's lodging house, room 13."

Pyotr felt sorry for her. Without moving from his mattress, he told his brother:

"Give her something."

"How much?"

"Well... fifty."

"That's too much."

Alexei thrust some money into the woman's hand, saw her out, and closed the door tight behind her.

"You're stingy," said Pyotr tartly. "She spent more than that on a hat, yesterday."

Alexei sat down in an armchair, his hands folded on the head of his stick, his chin on his hands. In a dry, authoritative tone, he asked:

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Drinking," replied the elder cheerfully. He got up and, snorting, began to rub himself with ice.

"Drink yourself dead, only don't lose your head! And what do you do?"

"Well, and what?"

Alexei came up close, staring at Pyotr as though he were a stranger, and demanded tensely:

"So you don't remember? There's a complaint against you. You punched a lawyer in the jaw, and threw a policeman in the canal, and. . . ."

He enumerated so many transgressions that Artamonov senior thought:

"He's lying. Trying to scare me."

And he asked:

"What lawyer? Don't talk rot."

"I'm not talking rot. That swarthy-looking fellow—I forget his name."

"We did have some fights," said Pyotr, sobering down. But his brother continued, still more severely:

"And why did you curse and swear at respectable people? And the family, too!"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! You cursed your wife, and Tikhon, and me, and you blubbered about some youngster, and yelled, 'Abraham, Isaac, the ram!' What does that mean?"

Fear seared Pyotr's brain. He dropped into a chair.

"I don't know. I was drunk."

"That's no explanation," returned Alexei, almost shouting now, and jerking up and down in his chair like a man astride a lame horse. "There's something else behind it. What a person thinks sober, he says drunk—that's what's behind it! A tavern's no place

to yell about family affairs. What do you mean—Abraham, sacrifice, all that filth? Can't you see you're compromising the business, spotting my name, too? Where do you think you are—in a steam bath, to lay yourself open that way? It was a good thing Loktev was there, a friend of mine, and he had the sense to fill you with cognac till you dropped, and telegraphed me to come. It was he told me about it. At first they all laughed, he says, but then they started listening: 'What's the man yelling about?' "

"They all yelled," Pyotr mumbled despondently. His brother's words were renewing his intoxication. But Alexei went on, his voice dropping almost to a whisper:

"They all yelled about one thing, and you yelled about everything! You can thank your stars Loktev had the sense to send the drinks around till everyone toppled over. Maybe they'll forget about it. But you know yourself, in our business, it's like politics. Today Loktev's a friend, and tomorrow he may be our worst enemy."

Pyotr sat with his head pressed hard against the wall behind him. He did not speak. Saturated with the furious din of the streets, the wall was quivering; and it seemed to him that this vibration must quell the drunken chaos in his mind, must drive away his fear. He remembered nothing of what his brother had enumerated. And it was very galling to hear his brother speak in the tone of a judge, of a senior. It was fearful to think what else he might have to say.

"What's wrong with you?" Alexei demanded, still jerking up and down. "You said you were going to see Nikita."

"I did go to see him."

"So did I. When we telegraphed, and they answered that you weren't there, of course, I went right away. Everyone was worried. After all, the world is no safe place. You might have been killed somewhere."

"Something was festering inside of me," Pyotr confessed, very low and apologetically.

"So you had to drag it out in public? Can't you understand you're compromising the business? What sort of sacrifice were you talking about? What are you—a Persian, playing around with boys? What boy?"

Lifting his hands to his face, as though to smooth his hair and beard, Pyotr replied through his fingers:

"Ilya.... It was all on account of him."

Slowly, hesitantly, as though groping in the darkness for his way, he began to tell Alexei about his quarrel with Ilya. He did not have to speak long. His brother exclaimed, in loud relief:

"Phew! Well, then, that's all right! And Loktev took it the ugly, Asiatic way. So it was Ilya? Well, brother, you'll have to excuse me, but you aren't wise. The merchantry needs to learn everything, to master every sphere of life, and instead of that, you...."

He spoke long and eloquently, maintaining that the sons of the merchantry should become engineers, officials, army officers. A deafening uproar poured in at the window, of carriages driving up to the theatre, ice-cream and cold-drink vendors shouting their wares, and, altogether intolerable, the music blaring in the glass and iron Brazilian pavilion built on piles over the water of the canal. The beating drum brought memories of Paula Menotti.

"There was something festering inside of me," Artamonov senior repeated, fingering his ear, and made to pour cognac into his glass of lemonade. His brother pulled the bottle out of his hand, with a warning glance.

"Look out. You'll be tight again. Now, take Miron—he wants to be an engineer. I'm only too pleased. He wants to travel abroad. I'm pleased again. That's pure profit, not loss. Can't you understand? Our estate is the main force...."

Pyotr had no desire to understand anything. Only half listening to his brother's lively talk, he was thinking to himself that here, this man had in some way attained the respect and friendship of people who were wealthier and, probably, wiser than he—people who pulled the strings of commerce on a nation-wide scale; that his other brother, hiding away in a monastery, was gaining renown as a man of wisdom and righteousness; yet he, Pyotr, was thrown to the cruel mercies of stupid chance. Why? For what sins?

"And you had no call to abuse respectable folk for debauchery," Alexei went on, and now his tone was mild, persuasive. "It isn't debauchery; it's excess energy. That lawyer's a rascal, but he sees things right. He's got a good head! Of course, they're elderly men—old, even, some of them—and they rowdy it like youngsters. Well, but youngsters too, when they go wild—it's all because they're growing, and they've too much energy. And then, you've got to

allow for the fact that our women are insipid. There's no spice in them. They make life dull. Not Olga—I don't mean her. She's different! There's a sort of foolishly wise women that seem to be blind in the eye that sees evil. Olga's one of those. You can't hurt her. She sees no evil, and believes no evil. You can't say that about Natalya. It's true, what you called her in front of everybody: domestic machine!"

"Did I really say that?" Pyotr inquired morosely.

"Well, I don't suppose Loktev invented it."

There were many things Pyotr would have liked to ask about; but that might remind Alexei of new points, of things, perhaps, which he had already forgotten. A feeling of hostility and envy towards his brother rose in Pyotr's mind.

"He's getting smarter and smarter, the devil."

There was a springiness about Alexei, a tense readiness to go, a foxy shiftiness. Pyotr was irritated by his hawk eyes, by the gold tooth glittering behind his twitching upper lip, by his grey moustache, twisted in martial fashion—his brisk little beard—his clutching, bird-claw fingers. Particularly unpleasant was the right index finger, incessantly tracing fanciful designs in the air. Alexei's short, iron-grey jacket made him look like a rascally solicitor.

Pyotr suddenly wanted him to leave.

"I need some sleep," he said, half closing his eyes.

"That's sensible," his brother agreed. "You'd best not go anywhere today."

"Preaching at me, as if I was a youngster," Pyotr thought resentfully, when Alexei was gone. He started for the washstand in the corner, but stopped short, catching sight of a man, much like himself, who moved soundlessly beside him: a miserably dishevelled man, with crumpled face and eyes that bulged with fear, a man with red hands, stroking his wet beard and hairy chest. At first Pyotr could not believe that this was his own reflection, in the mirror over the couch. Then, with a sickly smile, he began once more to rub his face, his neck and chest, with a lump of ice.

"I'll take a cab and go to town," he determined, and reached for his clothes; but his jacket was only half on before he threw it off again and brought his finger down heavily on the bone bell button.

"Tea, and make it strong," he told the waiter. "And something salty, and some cognac."

He looked out at the window. The broad doors of the shops were already locked. People crept slowly up and down the street, squat against the cobbles in the sultry darkness. A hissing lamp glowed opal at the theatre entrance. Women's voices were singing somewhere close by.

"Moths."

"Can I clear up?" said a voice behind him; and, swinging sharply around, he saw in the doorway a one-eyed old woman, loaded with a scrubbing brush and an armful of rags. Without a word, he went out into the corridor. There he bumped into a man in dark eyeglasses and a black hat, who was saying, through a half-open door:

"Yes, yes, that's all!"

Everything was out of joint. Everything compelled mental effort, a quest for hidden meanings in words. And then Artamonov senior was at the table, a round table, with a little samovar humming away before him, and, overhead, the lamp chimney tinkling faintly, as though at the light touch of some invisible hand. Through his memory flashed strange human figures, frantically drunk; words out of songs, and fragments of his brother's dictatorial speech; somebody's sparkling eyes, noticed somewhere in passing. Yet, for all that, his head was a dark vacuum; a vacuum pierced by one thin, quivering ray of light, in which, like motes of dust, these figures danced and whirled. And because of them he could not concentrate his thoughts upon a something else, a something of tremendous importance.

He drank hot, strong tea and guzzled cognac, scalding his palate; but he felt no intoxication—only a growing uneasiness, a desire to be off. He rang. Someone appeared, mistily flowing, with no face, no hair—like an ivory-headed cane.

"Bring me some green liqueur, Vanka. You know—the green kind."

"Yes, sir. Chartreuse."

"Are you Vanka, then?"

"No, sir. Konstantin."

"All right. Get going."

When the waiter brought the liqueur, Artamonov asked:

"Out of the army?"

"No, sir."

"You talk like a soldier."

"It's the same sort of job—you have to do what you're bid."

Artamonov thought awhile, then gave him a ruble, and added some advice:

"Don't you do it. Send them all to . . . and go out and sell ice cream. And that's all!"

The liqueur was sticky as molasses, and acrid as ammonia. It made things lighter, clearer, in Pyotr's head. Things seemed to condense; and while this mental condensation was in process, the sounds in the street also grew softer, merged into one whole, took shape in a low murmur that floated away into the distance and left stillness behind it.

"You have to do what you're bid, eh?" Artamonov mused. "Who —me? I'm the master. I'm no waiter. Am I the master, or not?"

But these meditations suddenly broke short and disappeared, yielding place to terror. For all at once Artamonov saw, right there in front of him, the one who was to blame, the one who hindered him from marching through life with easy confidence, like Alexei, or other clever, pushing folk. The one who hindered was a broad-faced, bearded man, sitting just opposite, behind the samovar—sitting silently, his beard clutched in his left hand, his cheek on his palm. He stared mournfully at Pyotr Artamonov, as though parting with him forever, and at the same time as though pitying, reproaching him. Staring, he wept, and venomed tears dripped from beneath his reddish eyelids. A huge fly was fussing about near his left eye, along the edge of his beard. Now it began to crawl over his face, as though he were a corpse. It moved to the temple, then to the forehead, and paused over an eyebrow, looking down into his eye.

"Well, rotter," said Artamonov to his enemy; but his enemy neither stirred nor answered. Only his lips moved briefly.

"Blubbering?" yelled Pyotr Artamonov exultantly. "Got me in a mess, you filthy hound, and now you're blubbering! Sorry yourself, are you? U-u-ugh! . . ."

Seizing a bottle from the table, he swung it with all his might against the bald place that was beginning to show on his enemy's skull.

The crash of the shattered mirror, the din of dishes and samovar

tumbling from the upset table, brought people hurrying in. They were not many, but each of them split in two and seemed to swell and grow. The one-eyed old woman bent to lift the samovar, and at the same time she was standing up straight.

Sitting on the floor, Artamonov heard complaining voices:

"... the middle of the night. The whole house sleeping."

"You broke the mirror."

"That's no way to act."

Artamonov worked his arms to and fro, swimming, and moaned: "The fly...."

Towards evening, next day, Alexei came briskly in, and looked his brother over as solicitously as a doctor his patient, or a coachman his horse. Running a queer little brush over his moustache, he declared:

"You're bloated past all decency. You can't go home looking like that. And besides, you can help me here. You'll have to have your beard trimmed, Pyotr. And buy yourself some other boots. Yours look like a cabdriver's."

Clenching his teeth, Artamonov senior followed his brother submissively to a barber's, where Alexei issued strict and precise instructions as to how much should be trimmed from hair and beard; and then to a shoe store, where Alexei himself chose him a pair of boots. This done, Pyotr decided, on glancing into a mirror, that he looked rather like a clerk. The new boots, too, were tight around the arch. But he held his tongue, admitting to himself that his brother was right. The haircut, the change of boots—all this was necessary. In general, it was time he pulled himself together, rid himself of all the turbid, oppressive dregs of drunkenness, that weighed him down, a tangible and ponderable burden.

But through the mist that clogged his mind, through the weariness of his spent and poisoned body, he experienced, as he watched his brother, an ever more intricate commingling of envy and respect, of secret amusement and hostility. Lean, springy, sharp-eyed, swinging his cane, the man was all ablaze, showering sparks and smoke, in the fever of his insatiable urge for the business gamble. Lunching and dining with him in private rooms at the fair's best taverns, in the company of prominent merchants, Pyotr noticed amazedly that Alexei conducted himself almost like a professional

jester, doing his best to amuse and entertain the wealthy company. But they did not seem to notice this buffoonery. They clearly liked and respected Alexei, and listened attentively to his noisy chatter.

Komolov, a huge, thick-bearded textile manufacturer, shook a carrot-coloured finger at Alexei, but he spoke affectionately, rolling his bullock eyes and smacking his lips loudly after every word or two.

"You're smart, Alyosha! You're sly, old fox! Got the better of me!"

"Yermolai Ivanovich!" Alexei cried rapturously. "Competition—am I right?"

"Right you are. Keep your eyes open, and use your ace of trumps!"

"Yermolai Ivanovich, I'm learning!"

Komolov nodded.

"You have to learn."

"Gentlemen," declared Alexei, his tone still rapturous, but at the same time insinuating. "My boy, Miron—a clever boy, going to be an engineer—he tells me there was a learned man once, terribly famous, in the city of Syracuse; and he told his king: 'Give me something to stand on, and I'll turn the whole earth upside down for you.' "

"You don't mean it!"

" 'Upside down,' he said! Gentlemen! Our estate has something to stand on—the ruble! We don't need any wise men to turn things over for us. We're wise enough ourselves. There's just one thing we need: different officials! Gentlemen! The gentry are on the decline. They can't stand in our way. But we've got to have our own people in all the offices, our own people in all the key positions, people who come from the merchantry, who understand our business—that's what!"

Grey-headed, bald-headed, well-fed, they merrily agreed:

"Right you are!"

And one of them, discount broker Losev—a sharp-nosed, raw-boned little old man, blind in one eye—said, tittering politely:

"Alexei Ilyich has a mind like pitch—everything sticks to it! And what he knows, he uses! Here's to him!"

Glasses were raised, and Alexei clinked his happily against them

all. Stretching out a tiny hand to clap Komolov on his massive shoulder, Losev exclaimed:

"Clever heads are appearing among us."

"They've always been among us," returned Komolov proudly. "My father began as a stevedore, and look how high he rose."

"They say your father got his start by sticking a knife into a rich Armenian," said Losev, chuckling. The heavy-bearded manufacturer roared with laughter, and replied:

"They lie! People are fools, and so they say—if you're lucky, that means you've sinned. There's some ugly talk going round about you, too, Kuzma."

"So there is," said Losev, sighing. "Eh, the talk, it walks!"

Artamonov senior sat and listened, grunting now and then; eating much, and drinking as little as possible. Dejectedly, he felt himself a beast of another breed than these people around him. All of them, he knew, were former peasants; and in them all he discerned an epic, buccaneering strain that commanded his respect, a something reminiscent of his father. Father, of course, would have been their companion, both in business and in dissipation. He would probably have plunged as they did into drink and debauchery, have burnt money like shavings. Yes, money was shavings to these men, whose energies were so tirelessly devoted to shaving, whittling whatever they might from the face of the earth, from one another, from the peasantry.

Alexei, however, differed in some way from these big people; and there were moments when Pyotr felt, for all his dislike, that his brother was sharper, cleverer, more dangerous, even, than they.

"Gentlemen!" Alexei yelled frenziedly, like one possessed. "Look at our inexhaustible labour power, all the millions of the peasantry! They do the work, and they buy the goods. Where else can you find them in such plenty? Nowhere! And we've no need for any foreigners. We can manage ourselves!"

"Right you are," agreed the loud-mouthed, half-tipsy company.

He spoke of the need for higher tariffs on imported goods; of buying up property from the landed proprietors; of the harm caused by the special banks run for the nobility. He seemed to know everything; and, to the astonishment of the elder Artamonov, these people agreed rapturously with everything he said.

"Nikita was right. Alexei knows how to live," reflected the elder enviously.

Despite his bad health, Alexei, too, indulged in debauchery. He had a mistress, evidently permanent and long established: a woman from Moscow, who kept a chorus at the fair. She was massive, but well built, with a honey-sweet voice and radiant eyes. Said to be forty, she looked under thirty, what with her creamy skin and the warm blood that flushed her cheeks.

"Alyosha, my falcon," she would say, baring her sharp fox teeth. Alexei would be hidden by her bulk, like a child beside its mother.

She must have known that Alexei did not scorn affairs with the girls of her chorus. She could not but have seen it. Yet her attitude was always friendly. Pyotr repeatedly heard his brother asking her advice about people and affairs—a surprising thing, and one that revived memories of his father and Ulyana Baimakova.

"You devil," he thought, observing his brother's life.

Even the mischief Alexei thought up was somehow different, more ingenious. One Meyer, a fat German clown, showed a trained pig in the circus. It paraded about on its hind legs, dressed up in a long-skirted frock coat, a top hat, and patent leather boots, the very figure of a merchant. The audience was tremendously amused, and even the merchants laughed. But not Alexei. He took offence, and persuaded a group of friends that the creature must be made away with. They bribed the stableman, and stole the pig; and the merchantry solemnly devoured its meat, served up in a variety of dishes by the splendid chef at the Barbatenko hotel. Pyotr Artamonov later heard vague rumours that the clown had hung himself of grief.* All these traits, newly noted in Alexei at the fair, aroused very anxious thoughts in Pyotr's mind.

"A sharp hand. No conscience. He's liable to ruin me without even noticing it. Not out of greed—simply in the rush of affairs."

The realization of this danger sobered him, brought him back to normal. He returned home alone, as Alexei went on to Moscow. It was September, wet and windy. With a tinkling of bells, a loud

* An incident described by P. D. Boborykin in the newspaper *Russki Kuryer* [*Russian Courier*]. It took place in the 1880's.

squelching of hoofs in the rain-soaked earth, the post horses trotted willingly along the last lap towards Dryomov: through a wood of low spruces, stretching in even rows, like motionless sentinels guarding the narrow, swampy road. The sky was plastered with a grey dough of autumn clouds; and the same grey tedium filled Artamonov's tired brain. He had the feeling of one just returned from the burial of an associate who, though close indeed, had been somewhat wearisome. It was a pity about the deceased; but, nonetheless, it was pleasant to know that one would never meet him again, that he would no longer disturb one's peace by the very vagueness of his demands, of his dumb reproaches—by all those things in him that poisoned life for the real, living man.

"My job is the business, and that's all," he told himself. "It's work keeps everybody going. Yes."

He set about his work with all the energy of which he was capable. The days passed tranquilly, clear days of Indian summer, fading into the mournful glamour of moonlit nights.

Awakening in the pearly gloom of an autumn dawn, Artamonov senior would hear the summoning blast of the mill whistle. Half an hour later would commence the indefatigable murmur and rustle, the accustomed, dull, but powerful din of labour. From dawn until late evening, peasant men and women shouted at the doors of the warehouses, turning in their flax. Drunken singing, to the strains of a screeching accordion, would sound from the tavern on the bank of the Vataraksha, founded by one of the innumerable Morozovs. In the yard, there was always Tikhon Vyalov, with a broom, or a spade, or an axe, moving heavily about his work, with the precision of a machine, and turning demanding eyes upon his fellow humans—Tikhon Vyalov, unhurriedly sweeping, digging, chopping, shouting gruffly at the peasants and the workers. Serafim would often pass, always in blue, always neat and clean. Indoors, there was Natalya. She, too, did her work like a machine. Natalya was very pleased with the fine gifts her husband brought her from the fair, and still more pleased by his silent, even calm. Everything ran smoothly; everything seemed durably adjusted. The mill, the people, even the horses—all worked as though wound up to go for eternity. And the months rolled by, rapid as windblown clouds. The years piled up.

With bent head, bull fashion, Artamonov senior paced through the

shops, across the yard, or up the settlement street, to the terror of the mill children. And everywhere he sensed a new and strange development: in this great business, he had become almost superfluous, hardly more than an onlooker. With some satisfaction, he noted that Yakov understood the business, and seemed to take a serious interest in it. Yakov's behaviour diverted the father's thoughts from the elder son—more, appeased his anger against Ilya.

"I'll get along without you, scholar. You can study."

Plump, rosy-cheeked, with prepossessing eyes that became iridescent as soap bubbles when he smiled, Yakov carried his well-rounded body with a dignified gravity. Though strangely reminiscent of a pigeon when seen close at hand, from a distance he had the look of an energetic and efficient man of affairs. The mill girls smiled at him; and a sensual look would come into his screwed-up eyes when he stopped to whisper with them, or strutted sidewise past them, like a spring rooster, his eager interest not to be masked by any show of dignity. The father would chuckle and reflect, pulling at his ear:

"You young fool! What would you say to Paula?"

It pleased him to see that Yakov, when visiting at Alexei's, never took any part in the interminable arguments between Miron and his crony, shabby, restless Goritsvetov. Miron had nothing of the merchant left in his outward appearance. Lean, big-nosed, bespectacled, in a short, gilt-buttoned jacket with some sort of insignia on the shoulders, he had the look of a justice of the peace. He bore himself erectly as a soldier, and spoke in overbearing, supercilious tones. Pyotr realized that his nephew's talk was always clever; but he did not like Miron.

"I tell you, brother, that's feeblosophy," Miron liked to say, in the tone of a mentor, standing with his hands thrust into his jacket pockets, his elbows protruding at a sharp angle. "It's the sort of thinking that comes from feebleness, from not knowing how."

To Artamonov senior, Goritsvetov also seemed to speak well, not foolishly. Goritsvetov was rather small. His student's coat, and the black shirt under it, were always sloppily unbuttoned, his hair tousled, his eyes puffy as though he had not slept for days, his keen, swarthy face disfigured by pimples. Attacking Miron, he would shout, gesticulating furiously, deaf to all interruption:

"You'll achieve your aim. The sun will rise in the heavens at the

bidding of your factory whistles; the smoky day will come crawling out of the swamps and the forests at the call of your machines. But what will you do with humanity?"

Miron would raise his eyebrows, then draw them together in a frown. Adjusting his spectacles, he would repeat for the twentieth time, coldly, unhurriedly:

"That's feeblosophy, sonnets! It's wandering of the tongue, my boy, and empty imaginings. Life is struggle. Lyrics, hysterics—they're out of place, ridiculous."

Their words stood out in the general talk like white doves among grey, and Artamonov senior mused:

"That's how life goes: new birds, new songs."

He had but a vague understanding of the essence of their dispute. Glancing at Yakov, he noticed with pleasure that his son was studiously smoothing the light down on his upper lip, to hide a mocking smile.

"So," thought Pyotr. "And what would Ilya have said?"

Goritsvetov shouted:

"When you chain the earth and its people in iron fetters, when you make man a slave to the machine. . . ."

But Miron replied, with a jerk of his big nose:

"This man you're so worried about is an idle good-for-nothing. He'll be lost beyond hope unless he realizes, and soon, that his salvation lies in the development of industry."

"Which is right? Which is the better?" Pyotr Artamonov wondered.

He liked Goritsvetov even less than his nephew. There was something wishy-washy, unreliable, about him; he was clearly afraid of something, and that was why he shouted. Unceremonious as a man drunk, he would sit down at table before his hosts, fidget with the forks and knives, and eat his food rapidly, mannerlessly, burning his lips, choking over unchewed morsels. As in Alexei, there was a jerky quality about him, a something quite unwanted and, it seemed to Pyotr, malign. The dark centres of his bloodshot eyes stared blindly. He never spoke a word to Pyotr Artamonov, even in greeting, when he would rudely thrust forward a hot, rough hand, and jerk it swiftly back again. All in all, he was a useless sort, and it was hard to understand what Miron could see in him.

"Stop talking and eat, Styopa," Olga would tell him, and he would return bombastically:

"I can't, when baneful heresy is being preached!"

Alexei, Pyotr noticed with some amazement, listened in silent attention to the debates between the two students, only rarely putting in a word of support for his son:

"That's right! Where the strength is, there the power lies; and the strength is in the industrialists, so. . . ."

Olga, after dinner and tea, would sit at her embroidery frame by the window, working silently, attentively at her interminable beaded flowers, in colours of remarkable brilliancy. There were wrinkles on her temples, now, radiating from the corners of her eyes; and the tip of her nose was red with the weight of her thick, rimless spectacles. Pyotr was happier at his brother's than at home. Time passed more interestingly there, and you could always get a glass of good wine.

Returning home with Yakov, the father would ask:

"Do you understand what they're arguing about?"

"Yes," the son would reply briefly.

Sternly, lest the son divine his own failure to understand, the elder Artamonov would demand:

"Well, what, then?"

Yakov's replies were always brief and reluctant, but comprehensible. According to him, Miron affirmed that Russia must live as all of Europe lived; while Goritsvetov believed that Russia must follow a path of her own. At this point, to show his son that he, the father, had his own ideas on the subject, Artamonov senior declared impressively:

"If the foreigners were better off than us, they wouldn't keep pushing in here."

But that thought was borrowed from Alexei. Thoughts of his own did not offer. Artamonov frowned with vexation. And, somehow, this vexation was still further aggravated when his son said:

"We could get along without boasting how smart we are, without all that talk."

Artamonov senior mumbled:

"I suppose we could."

Ever more frequently, he experienced the jolt of petty injuries and tiny amazements. They seemed to elbow him away, aside, thrust-

ing upon him the role of an onlooker, of one obliged to notice everything, to ponder over everything. And everything around him was undergoing imperceptible, but rapid change; everywhere, in words, in actions, there was a new and restless something, importunately asserting itself. One day, at tea, Olga remarked:

"Truth is when your soul is full, and you want nothing more."

"That's so," Pyotr agreed.

But Miron's very spectacles flashed as he corrected his mother:

"That's not truth, it's death. Truth is in doing things, in activity."

When he left, with a thick sheet of paper rolled up under his arm, Pyotr said to Olga:

"Your son is rude to you."

"Not at all."

"I see he is!"

"He's cleverer than me," said Olga. "After all, I'm uneducated, and I often say foolish things. And anyway, our children are cleverer than we are."

That was a thing Artamonov could not believe. With a short laugh, he replied:

"It's true—you do say foolish things. Well, our elders knew better than us. They used to say: 'Sons bring sorrow, and daughters double sorrow.' See?"

He had been touched on the raw by her remark about children being wiser than their parents. She was hinting, of course, at Ilya. Pyotr knew that Alexei sent Ilya money, and that Miron corresponded with him; but pride forbade any inquiry as to where Ilya was, or how he was getting on. True, Olga herself, understanding his pride, evinced no little skill in imparting this information to him unasked. And so he knew that, for some reason or other, Ilya had gone to Archangel to live, and then abroad.

"Well, let him live where he pleases. When he's wiser, he'll realize he was foolish."

Sometimes, thinking about Ilya, he would wonder at his son's obstinacy. Everyone was growing so wise. Why, then, did Ilya tarry?

Not infrequently, at his brother's, Pyotr encountered Vera Popova and her daughter. As ever, he found Popova beautiful, pensively

serene, and altogether alien. She spoke to him but seldom, and always in the tone he himself had often used towards Ilya, when he felt he had punished the boy unjustly. She made him uncomfortable. In moments of peaceful thought, her image would rise in his memory; but it evoked no feeling stronger than wonder. Strange! A person pleased you, occupied your thoughts; yet there was no understanding what it was that made you think of her, and she could be no harder to talk to, were she deaf and dumb.

Yes, everything was changing. Even the mill workers were becoming ever crankier, ever more bitter, more consumptive, and their women—ever louder-tongued. The din at the settlement grew more and more uneasy, sounding, in the evenings, as though the people had all begun to howl like wolves—as though the very sand in the littered street were grumbling angrily.

The workers evinced a new restlessness, a growing wanderlust. Young fellows, with no cause for complaint of anyone or anything, would suddenly march into the office and demand to be paid off.

"Where are you going?" Pyotr would ask.

"To have a look at other parts."

"What's eating them?" Artamonov senior asked his brother. Alexei only shrugged and, chuckling foxily, declared that there was unrest among the workers everywhere.

"We've got it nice and quiet, comparatively. If you take St. Petersburg.... What we need is different officials, different ministers."

And the things he went on to say were so audacious, so ridiculous, that the elder sullenly admonished him:

"That's all rot. It's the gentry stand to gain by taking the power away from the tsar, because the gentry are losing their riches. We don't need power. We get rich without it. Father wore tarred boots on holidays, and you wear imported shoes and silk neckties. Good workers—that's what we should be to the tsar, not pigs. The tsar is the oak that drops our golden acorns."

Alexei chuckled as he listened, still further increasing Pyotr's irritation. In general, the elder Artamonov felt that people were becoming far too risible. This new chuckling habit they had formed was cheerless, somehow, and silly. Not a one of them could poke

fun so amusingly, so consolingly, as that immortal old man, carpenter Serafim.

Artamonov had become great friends with the Consoler. Fits of tedium had once more begun to seize on him from time to time, evoking an insuperable desire for drink. He was ashamed to drink too much at Alexei's, because there were always strangers there; and, above all, he did not want Popova to see him drunk. At home, when these fits began, Natalya's shoulders would droop despondently, and she would maintain an injured silence. He would have preferred to have her shout, so that he could shout back at her. Instead, she acted like a person robbed, arousing, not anger, but a feeling akin to pity. And Artamonov would make off to Serafim's.

"I want a drink, old man!"

The merry carpenter would grin approvingly.

"That's only natural—like sunshine in the summertime! Tired, you are, and weary. Well, and take a bracer! It's no small job, this business of yours, no wart on the world's cheek!"

He kept the most extraordinary liquors for his employer. Pulling the varicoloured bottles from their hiding places, he would boast:

"My own invention, and there's a hot widow deaconess makes the stuff for me. Here, try this. It's flavoured with birch buds, full of the spring sap. Good?"

He would draw up a chair for himself and chatter on, sipping his invariable "turnip wine."

"Yes, a deaconess, she is. The most unlucky woman! Every lover she takes turns out to be a thief. And she just can't live without lovers, her blood is so hot!"

"Ha! There was one I saw at the fair," said Artamonov.

"Of course!" Serafim rejoined, in swift agreement. "They've got the pick of all the land there. Don't I know!"

Serafim knew everything and everybody. He talked entertainingly of the private lives of the mill employees, using one and the same caressing tone for all. He spoke in the same way of his own daughter, as though of a stranger.

"She's settled down, the baggage. She lives with Sedov, the fitter, and they get on fine. What do you think of that? Yes, every living thing finds its den."

It was pleasant at Serafim's—in his tidy little room, full of the tarry odour of pine shavings, and sunk in a warm semi-darkness that was not marred by the modest glow of the tin lamp on the wall.

After a few drinks, Artamonov would begin to complain about people, humanity; and the carpenter would console.

"Don't you worry. It's all to the good! Humanity's on the go—that's the whole point! It lay around, and lay around, thinking, and pondering—and now it's up, and off! And why not? Don't you lose heart. Put your trust in man. You trust yourself, don't you?"

Pyotr Artamonov silently considered the question: did he trust himself, or did he not? But Serafim rattled on, and the glib words, tinkling from his lips, made a consoling chant:

"Don't you worry your head over who's bad, and who's good. That don't last. What was good yesterday, is bad today. I've had my taste of it all, Pyotr Ilyich, both good and bad. Eh, what haven't I seen! Sometimes I'd say: 'Here, this is good!' And it would be gone. I'd be right where I was, and it would be gone. Like dust in the wind. And I'd be right there! Well, and what am I? A gnat! Too small to be seen in a crowd. But you. . . ."

Raising a significant forefinger, Serafim would lapse into silence.

His talk afforded Artamonov double pleasure. On the one hand, it was really entertaining, and therefore consoling; on the other, Artamonov realized that the old man was lying, play acting—speaking, not from the heart, but after the rules of the consoler's trade. Understanding all this, he would muse:

"He's smart, the old rascal! Nikita can't work it that way."

And memory would bring back in review the different consolers he had seen in life: the brazen women at the fair, circus clowns, acrobats, conjurers, animal tamers, singers, musicians, and swarthy Styopa, the "friend of humanity." Alexei, too, had something in common with all these people. But there was nothing of the kind about Tikhon Vyalov. Nor about Paula Menotti, either.

Half drunk, he would say to Serafim:

"You're lying, old devil!"

But the carpenter, clapping his hands down on his bony knees, would return, with the utmost gravity:

"No, I'm not. Just think a minute: how can I lie, if I don't know the truth? I tell you frankly, I don't know the truth; so how can I lie?"

"Don't talk, then."

"Am I a deaf mute?" Serafim would ask caressingly, his rosy little face bright with a smile. "I'm an old man," he would say. "I've only a short time left, and I can manage without the truth. It's the young folk have to search for truth. That's what their spectacles are for. Miron Alexeyevich, in his spectacles—why, he sees everything inside out. He knows what's what, and who's who."

It pleased Artamonov senior to see that the carpenter disliked Miron; and he roared with laughter when Serafim sang perkily, strumming on his cithara:

Woodpecker hopping through the loom shops,
Spectacles on his horny bill.
Thinks the whole place is full of boobies,
And he's the only smart one at the mill.

"Right!" Artamonov would cry approvingly.

And the carpenter, also drunk by now, would sing, stamping his neat little foot to mark the time:

That's no buzzard, that's no kite,
Plucking all the birdlets.
That's the good Lord's favourite,
Alexei Ilyich—yes!

This, too, pleased the elder Artamonov; and Serafim sang brazenly of Yakov:

Yasha hugs the girls so close,
He can't see beyond his nose.

And so it went, sometimes until the dawn. Then Tikhon Vyalov would knock at the door, wake his employer if he were already asleep, and say indifferently:

"It's time to go home. The whistle will blow right away, and the workers might see you. That's no way."

Artamonov would shout:

"What's no way? I'm the master here!"

But he would get up obediently and, swaying heavily, go home to bed. Sometimes he would sleep the whole day through; and night would find him once more at Serafim's.

The merry carpenter died at work. He was making a coffin for a drowned boy, the son of the doctor's one-eyed assistant, when suddenly he dropped to the floor, dead. Artamonov decided to see the old man to his grave. When he reached the church, it was packed with mill workers. Redheaded priest Alexander, successor to the meek Gleb, who had suddenly abandoned the priesthood and disappeared from the town, conducted the services with great severity. The choir, organized by Grekov, the teacher at the mill school—a sleek tomcat of a man—sang beautifully. There were many young people among the crowd.

"It's Sunday," Artamonov told himself, to explain the large attendance at the funeral.

It was the younger weavers, too, that came forward to carry the small, light coffin. The more staid and respectable workers held themselves aloof. Zinaida, in a bright blouse ill-suited to the occasion, followed the coffin, her face overcast, but without tears. Beside her walked the broad-shoulderd, neatly-dressed fitter, Sedov. Off at the side of the road, Tikhon Vyalov trampled the sand with heavy step. The sun was shining brightly; the choirboys sang in swelling harmony; and, all in all, there was a strange absence of melancholy about this funeral.

"They've turned out well," said Artamonov, mopping the perspiration from his forehead. Tikhon stopped short, staring at his toes, and, after some thought, replied:

"He tickled them all. Turn the handle, and he'd play you songs, like that thing. . . ."

He turned an imaginary handle in the air.

"There was an old man used to tramp around with it, and a little girl sang while he played. Consolers."

Glancing at his employer with a disrespectful, provoking severity, he added:

"He turned people's heads. He never hurt anyone, but—he didn't live right."

"Wrong, right!" his employer jeered. "You're chained to those

thoughts like Tulun to his post. See you don't go mad the same as he did."

And, turning sharply away from the yardman, Artamonov went home.

It was early, not past noon, but the heat was intense. The sandy road, the blue of air and sky, grew steadily hotter. Towards evening, the sun drew up white mountains of cloud, and they floated slowly eastward over the horizon, making the air still heavier. Artamonov strolled in the orchard for a while, then went out at the gate. Tikhon was tarring the gate hinges. Rusted by the spring rains, they had begun to squeak offensively.

"Why work today? It's Sunday," said Artamonov lazily, sitting down on the bench. Tikhon glanced at him sidewise, with only the whites of his eyes, and said, in a low voice.

"Serafim was bad."

"What was bad about him?"

And in answer Artamonov heard strange words, black beetles crawling:

"He was too mindful, remembered too much. He remembered everything he saw. And what's there to see? Evil, vanity, sloth. And so that was what he talked about to everybody. Unrest, he started. and discontent. I see it all."

Still working his brush over the hinges, Tikhon continued, more and more sourly:

"Memory ought to be knocked out of people's heads. It's the root of evil. Things should be this way: one generation lives and dies, and all its evil, all its foolishness, dies with it. A new generation is born, and it don't remember any evil. It only remembers the good. Take me—I suffer from my memory, too. I'm old. I want peace. And where can I find peace, then? Peace lies in forgetfulness."

Never before had Tikhon spoken so much at a time, and so exasperatingly. Stupid, as always, his talk today was somehow particularly antagonizing. Regarding the yardman's matted beard, his pale, watery eyes, his stony, furrowed forehead, Artamonov was struck once more by the man's increasing ugliness. Tikhon's wrinkles were deep as the folds around the ankle of a boot; his high cheeks, hairless with age, had become a pumice grey; his nose was porous as a sponge.

"He's in his dotage," Artamonov thought; and the idea pleased him. "Drivelling. He's not fit to work any more. I'll have to get rid of him. I'll give him a nice sum."

His brush in one hand, his pail of tar in the other, Tikhon came up close to his employer. Pointing with the brush at the mill buildings, the dark red of raw beef, he grumbled:

"You ought to hear them talking—dandy Sedov, and one-eyed Morozov, and his brother Zakhar, and Zinaida, too. They say straight out: a business other people build for you is a bad business, and it ought to be destroyed."

"Looks like they borrowed your ideas," said the employer mockingly.

"My ideas?"—Tikhon shook his head in denial. "No, they're not mine. I've nothing to do with such fancies. Let everyone work for himself, and then there won't be any trouble, any evil. But they say: 'Everything is our doing. We're the masters!' And look, Pyotr Ilyich: it's true! It's all their doing. They harnessed you to the business, and you pulled it out of the rut, onto the highroad. And now. . . ."

Artamonov hemmed importantly and got up. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking up, over Tikhon's head, at the clouds, he began to speak, his tone resolute, if his words were somewhat muddled:

"Look here: of course, I understand. You've been with me all these years. That's true. Well, but you're old now. It's hard on you. . . ."

"And Serafim encouraged that kind of talk," said Tikhon, evidently not listening to his employer.

"Hold on! It's time for you to rest. . . ."

"It's time for everyone. Of course."

"Wait. You're a hard man to get along with. . . ."

Tikhon Vyalov did not seem surprised at his discharge. Calmly, he mumbled:

"Well, then. . . ."

"You'll get a nice sum, of course," Artamonov promised, somewhat taken aback by his composure. Tikhon, tarring his dusty boots, made no reply. Then Artamonov said firmly:

"So it's good-bye."

"All right," replied the yardman.

Artamonov went to the river bank, hoping it might be cooler there. Under the pine tree, where he had quarrelled with Ilya, he had a sort of throne of white birch boughs, that Serafim had made him. From this seat he could look out over all the mill buildings, his house and yard, the mill workers' settlement, the church, the cemetery. An icy glitter marked the big windows of the mill hospital and the school. Tiny human figures darted to and fro like shuttles, weaving the endless fabric of the business. Figures still more tiny ran about in the sandy settlement street. Among the grey alders near the church fence grazed a toylike herd of goats, bred by the doctor's one-eyed assistant—grandson of that ancient weaver, Boris Morozov—because many of the mill women bought goat's milk for their children. And by the hospital, on a square, grassless, fenced-in plot, another herd was grazing—little human figures, looking like lunatics in their yellow hospital wrappers and white nightcaps. A multitude of birds had come to live around the mill: crows, jackdaws, sparrows; noisy magpies, flitting hurriedly from place to place, their white sides flashing satin in the sun; blue-grey pigeons, strutting on the ground. The birds were particularly numerous around the tavern on the bank of the Vataraksha, where the peasants stopped off when they brought their flax to the mill.

Of late, however, all these domains had ceased to afford Artamonov either pleasure or pride—had become, for him, only a source of mortification. It was mortifying to see his brother and nephew, and all their train of helpers, arguing, shouting, gesticulating like gypsies at a fair, without so much as a thought for him, the senior in the business. Even when the talk turned on the mill, they would seem to forget his very existence. When he demanded attention, they would hear him out in silence, appearing to agree; but in every matter, big or small, they would do as they themselves saw fit. This sort of thing had begun quite a long time back, with the electric power plant they had built for the mill over his opposition. Afterwards, Artamonov senior had quickly realized that electric power was both safer and cheaper; but the sense of injury had remained. Petty injuries were frequent, and, mounting in number, they became ever more acute.

Most insolent and disagreeable of all was Pyotr's nephew, Miron.

His student days over, Miron had replaced his uniform by some foreign sort of leather jacket; and the whole of his long frame glittered, from his gold-rimmed spectacles to his yellow shoes. Scowling and screwing up his eyes, he would say:

"That's old, uncle. Uncle, the times have changed."

He seemed to fear time, as a servant fears a stern master. But that was the only thing he feared. In everything else, he was insolent beyond all bearing. On one occasion, he actually said:

"Listen here, uncle! Russia can't go on any longer with such men as you and your like in charge."

Artamonov was too taken aback even to put the question: why? He went home in high dudgeon, and for several weeks did not visit at his brother's or speak to Miron when he met him at the mill.

Miron was planning to marry Vera Popova's daughter, who had grown up as tall and slender as her grey-haired, icy mother. Like everyone else, this girl had the unpleasant chuckling habit. She kept jerking her head, staring at things intently with her big eyes brazenly wide—eyes that seemed void of faith in anything. Humming through her teeth, like a buzzing fly, she would sit from morning to night at her easel, spoiling good canvas with vivid daubs. Her straw hat, tied by a ribbon under her chin, was always hanging down her back, exposing her straw-coloured hair to the sun. She dressed sloppily, and her short skirt revealed her legs almost to the knees.

That ne'er-do-well, Goritsvetov, was also irritating. He came and went like a flitting swift, suddenly appearing, as suddenly disappearing, then arriving again, jumping at people like a vicious little dog and shouting always the same:

"You're trying to transform Russia's wealth of soul into American soullessness. You're building a mousetrap for men. . . ."

At times, in these cries, Artamonov would catch some thought that rang true. More often, however, he felt that they had something in common with Tikhon Vyalov's foolishness—though he knew no two people more dissimilar than this convulsive jack-in-the-box and ponderous, indifferent Tikhon. Darting at Elizaveta Popova, Goritsvetov would shout:

"You, with your soul, why do you hold your tongue?"

She would smile at this, but only with her grey autumnal eyes, her features retaining their haughty immobility. New words appeared, words that Artamonov senior had never heard before, and could not understand.

"The death rattle of romanticism," Miron would say, studiously rubbing his spectacles with a bit of chamois.

Alexei was constantly dashing off to Moscow. Yakov, ever plumper, held himself staidly aloof, and spoke very little; but he must have spoken well, for what he said galled both Miron and Goritsvetov, in equal measure. Yakov had grown himself a thick, square, reddish beard, Tatar fashion; and, with his beard had developed an increasing inclination to scoff. Artamonov liked to hear his son say lazily to all these restless people:

"You'll break your necks, some day, if you climb so fast. Why can't you live more simply?"

Artamonov senior was very much amused, and so—he saw—was Yakov, when Elizaveta Popova suddenly left for Moscow and got married there to Goritsvetov. Miron was furious, and could not hide it. Twisting his pointed beard, which made him still less like a merchant—drawing from it the thread of his dry speech, he said, with manifest hypocrisy:

"People like Stepan Goritsvetov belong to a tribe that's becoming extinct. Nowhere in the world can you find human beings so useless as he and his like."

Yakov said, heaping coals on the flame:

"And yet, one of that tribe has stolen your titbit, right from under your nose!"

Hunching his shoulders, Miron replied:

"I'm no romanticist."

"What's that? No what?" demanded Artamonov senior; and Miron said, bringing out every word distinctly, like a judge pronouncing sentence:

"Nobody understands what romanticists are, and you won't understand it either, uncle. They're for beauty, like a wig on a bald head. Or precaution, like a swindler's false beard."

"Aha! You've got your big nose pinched," gloated Artamonov senior.

Such petty satisfactions made up, in some measure, for the many

injuries he suffered from those restless people who were taking ever firmer hold of the business, thrusting him ever further aside, into solitude. In this very solitude, again, he discovered, invented, an element of melancholy pleasure. Solitude introduced him to a new, though vaguely familiar character—a Pyotr Artamonov of somewhat different makeup.

A fine, upstanding man, and brutally dealt with. Life had treated him unjustly, like a stepmother. It had started him off as a mute, obedient servant to his father, who in place of happiness had given him a stupid, tedious wife, and dumped upon his shoulders the responsibility for a large and difficult business. True, his wife loved him, and their first year together had not been bad; but now he knew that even a dissolute bobbin girl like Zinaida put more fire and spice into her love. And as for the skilled furies at the fair. it was best not to recall them. His wife spent her whole life in fear. First she had been afraid of Alexei, and kerosene lamps; later—of electric bulbs. When the light flashed up in them, she would start nervously and cross herself. She had embarrassed him, once, in a phonograph store at the fair.

"Oh, oh, don't buy it," she had begged. "Maybe it's the accursed one. Maybe his soul is hid inside the box!"

Nowadays, she was afraid of Miron, and doctor Yakovlev, and her own daughter Tatyana. Monstrously fat, she did nothing but eat from morning to night. His brother had almost killed himself, all on account of her. The children did not respect her. When she urged Yakov to marry, he would advise her scoffingly:

"Better get yourself a bite to eat, mother."

She would answer submissively, uncertainly:

"Why, I don't think I want any more"—

And eat again.

The father said:

"Why do you mock at your mother? It's high time you were married!"

"These are no times to tie yourself down with a family," Yakov answered briskly.

"What makes you all so afraid of the times?" demanded the father angrily; but the son only shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

He, too, would often say:

"You don't understand things, father."

He said it mildly. But after all, it could not be that a father should understand less than his son. It was not to the future people looked, but to the past. That was how everybody lived.

Ilya, the elder son, the best-beloved, was vanished, gone. For love of him, the father had done a thing he did not like to recall.

The elder daughter, Elena, a broad-faced, broad-hipped woman, pampered by wealth and by her drunken husband, was a complete stranger. Only rarely did she come to visit her parents—richly dressed, her fingers loaded with rings. With a jingle of gold chains and trinkets, she would raise a gold-rimmed lorgnette to her sated eyes and look about her, saying languidly:

"How bad the air is here! The whole house is putrid and rotting. Why don't you build a new one? And anyway, it's not the thing to live right next to the mill."

By chance, one day, Artamonov overheard her saying to her mother:

"I see father hasn't changed. It must be dull for you with him! My tyrant drinks and plays around, but he's got some life in him, at least."

She had a passion for cleanliness that was most exasperating. Before sitting down, she would whisk her handkerchief over her chair; and she used so much perfume it made one want to sneeze. Her insulting, unceremonious disgust for everything in the house provoked in Artamonov the desire to get back at her for all these vexing qualities. When she was there, he walked about the house, and even the yard, with his dressing gown unbelted to reveal his underwear, and his bare feet thrust into a pair of rubbers. At table, he would munch his food loudly, and belch like a Bashkir. The daughter would cry indignantly:

"Father, what's wrong with you?"

Her indignation was just what he was after.

"Excuse me, my fine lady," he would say. "I'm a plain peasant, you know."

And he would go on champing and belching, more furiously than ever.

Elena had been abroad. Of an evening, in languid, oily tones, she

would tell her mother all sorts of nonsense: in some city she had visited, the women scrubbed the outsides of their houses with brushes and soap; in some other city, there was such a fog, summer and winter, that the street lamps were lit all day, and just the same you couldn't see a thing; in Paris, all the shops sold ready-made clothes, and there was a tower so high that from its top you could see the cities that lay across the sea.

With her younger sister, Elena was always arguing, even quarrelling violently. Tatyana had grown up thin and swarthy, embittered because she was not good to look at. There was something about her that brought to mind a sexton: her short pigtail, perhaps, or her flat chest and bluish nose. She lived in the city, with her sister. For some reason or other, she had failed to graduate from school. She was afraid of mice. Agreeing with Miron that the tsar's power should be limited, she had recently taken to smoking cigarettes. When she came home for the summer, she would shout at her mother as at a servant, and barely deign her father an indifferent word. She read all day, and of an evening would drive off to town, to her uncle's, whence she would be escorted home by gold-toothed doctor Yakovlev. At night she would lie awake, thinking her callow girl's thoughts, and killing mosquitoes on the wall with her slipper, with a noise like pistol shots.

Everything in Artamonov's world was becoming noisy, alien, exasperatingly stupid, from Miron's insolent remarks to the idiotic ditties of Vaska, the stoker—a lame fellow with a twisted thigh and a dishevelled mop of hair, who was courting the cook. Vaska would hang about outside the kitchen window every Sunday and holiday, vamping on his accordion and roaring, with closed eyes:

Just a wre-e-etched ha-abit
You are of mi-ine!
I need to see your pretty mu-u-ug
Like I need wine!

And it was a long time, now, since Olga had given him any news of Ilya; while the new Pyotr Artamonov, the injured one, thought more and more frequently of his elder son. Most likely, Ilya had received due recompense for his obstinacy. This was to be felt

in the changed attitude towards him at Alexei's. Taking off his coat and hat in the hall, one evening, Artamonov senior heard Miron, just returned from Moscow, say:

"Ilya is one of those people who see life through the pages of their books, and can't tell a cow from a horse."

"That's a lie," reflected Artamonov, deriving a sort of comfort from his nephew's hostility.

Alexei asked:

"Is he of the same party as Goritsvetov?"

"Worse," Miron replied.

Entering the parlour at this point, the elder Artamonov threatened them mentally:

"You just wait. When he comes back, he'll show you."

Miron immediately began to talk about affairs in Moscow, complaining angrily of the government's stupidity. Then Natalya and Yakov arrived, and Miron turned the conversation to the paper mill he wanted to build. He had been worrying them about it for some time past.

"Look at all our money, uncle, lying around to no purpose," he said. Natalya, flushing to the very ears, demanded shrilly:

"Where's money lying around? Whose money's lying around?"

Artamonov suddenly felt a crushing tedium, as though someone had opened wide before him the door to a room where everything was so familiar, so tiresomely the same, that the place seemed empty. This abrupt, physical tedium always came upon him from without, in a heavy fog that clogged his ears and veiled his eyes, bringing bodily weariness and frightening thoughts of illness and death.

"You make me sick," he said. "Will you never let me rest?"

Yakov grumbled:

"What we have is trouble enough."

And Natalya clamoured:

"As it is, you can't go out of the house for the workers all around. Drunkenness, profanity. . . ."

Artamonov went to the window. Out in the orchard, Tikhon Vyalov, his face uplifted, was pointing out an apple tree to some little girl.

"New-found Adam," thought Pyotr Artamonov, and his tedium

lifted. Such extraneous thoughts would often dart, like swift mice, through his mind. He was always glad of their sudden visitations. He liked them because they did not worry him, just flashed and vanished—and that was all.

There was that matter of Tikhon, too. Pyotr Artamonov had been cruelly affronted when his brother took in the yardman on his sudden reappearance, after an absence of over a year, with the unpleasant tidings that Nikita had disappeared from the monastery, nobody knew where to. Pyotr was sure that the old man knew where Nikita was, and only kept it a secret because of his passion for mortifying people. The elder Artamonov had quarrelled with his brother in all earnest over this man, though Alexei's defence was strong enough:

"Use your brains. The man worked for us all his life, and now you take and throw him out. Is that the right thing to do?"

Pyotr knew it was not right; but he could not bear Tikhon about the house. His wife, too, for the first time, perhaps, in all their life together, had sided with Alexei. With a firmness quite unusual in her, she had declared:

"It's not right, Pyotr Ilyich. I don't care what you say, but it's not right!"

With Olga's help, they had talked him into acquiescence. But the injured man within him had triumphed.

"There! Your will is no law to anyone. You see!"

The injured man was coming more and more to the fore, growing more and more tangible. Dragging his heavy bulk up the hillside, Artamonov senior would settle down in his armchair under the pine and think of this injured creature—pity him with all his heart. There was sweetness as well as bitterness in the conjuring up of this unhappy man, so misunderstood, so unappreciated, yet with such good qualities. He materialized easily, out of nothing, just as the white clouds came into being in the blue void over the swamps, on a sunny day.

Looking out over the mill and all that had grown up around it, he would urge:

"Life could be lived differently, without such toys."

Manufacturer Artamonov would object:

"That's Tikhon's talk."

"Priest Gleb said the same, and Goritsvetov, and many others, too. Yes, men are struggling like flies in a spider's web."

"You can't get anything for nothing," the manufacturer would make himself reply.

At times, this mute debate of two men within one would flare up hotly, and the injured one, growing merciless, would all but shout:

"Remember, when you were drunk at the fair, you cried about sacrificing your son, the way Abraham sacrificed Isaac, and the Nikonov boy was thrust on you instead of the ram. Remember? True, it was. True! And for that truth you swung a bottle at me. Ah, you crushed me then. You killed me! Me, too, you sacrificed. And who was the sacrifice for, say? The horned god Nikita talked about? Was it for him? Ah, you fool!"

When the debate grew so fierce, the manufacturer, Artamonov senior, would screw his eyes up tight to keep back the bitter tears of shame and anger; but the tears flowed uncontrollably. He would brush them from his cheeks and beard with his palms, and then rub his palms together until they were dry, staring dully at his swollen, crimson hands. And he would drink Madeira, in long swallows, straight from the bottle.

Yet, despite these piteous tears that he evoked, the injured man was welcome, indispensable to Artamonov senior—like the attendant in the steam bath, when he brings the soft, well-soaped bast, pleasantly hot, to bear on just that part of a man's back that he cannot reach himself.

...Suddenly, far off somewhere beyond Siberia, a heavy fist struck out at Russia.

Alexei jerked up and down in his chair, brandishing his newspaper, shouting:

"Piracy! Highway robbery!" Raising a bird-claw hand, with fiercely clutching fingers, he spluttered:

"We'll smash them! We'll show them!"

The gold-toothed doctor, leaning, hands in pockets, against the warm tiles of the stove, murmured:

"There's also the possibility that they'll show us."

He was sneering, of course, this big, coppery-red man. He always sneered, no matter what the talk touched on. Even of disease and death he spoke with the same mocking smile that twisted his

lips when he described an unlucky session at the card table. To Artamonov senior, he recalled a foreigner who smiles because he is embarrassed, because he is incapable of understanding the alien people surrounding him. Artamonov did not like the doctor, and had no faith in him, preferring the services of the town physician, doctor Kron, a taciturn German.

Miron paced up and down the room like a crane, absently twisting his beard and frowning as though his head ached, preaching at everyone:

"This business should have been started in league with the British."

"What business?" Artamonov senior asked, more than once. But neither his brisk brother nor his clever nephew could explain to him intelligibly what this sudden war had flared up about. It was a satisfying thing to see the consternation of these self-confident, omniscient people. Alexei was particularly amusing. He acted so queerly, one might have thought that he, Alexei Artamonov, was the one person most injured by this unexpected war—that it was preventing him from achieving some highly important objective.

A religious procession was organized. The bearded merchantry, pompous and devout, marched in a close herd behind the portly, gold-vestmented clergy, heavily trampling the thick, new-fallen snow. Icons and holy banners floated overhead, and the united choirs of all the town churches sang resoundingly, urgently:

"Save thy people, oh Lo-o-ord!"

The words of the prayer, more like a demand, popped out of the round mouths in white jets of steam, that froze on the eyebrows and moustaches of the choristers, and settled in the beards of the tunelessly responding merchantry. The mayor, Voroponov, son of the wagonmaker, sang with particularly shrill insistence, more out of tune and time with the choir than any of the others. Tall, ruddy-cheeked, with eyes the colour of mother-of-pearl buttons, Voroponov had inherited from his father, together with his property, an inveterate enmity for the Artamonovs.

These, seven of them, kept all together. Alexei limped at their head, with his wife on his arm, then Yakov with his mother and Tatyana, then Miron, with the doctor, and, behind them all, shod in soft boots, Artamonov senior.

"A nation," Miron said quietly.

"A parade of strength," rejoined the doctor.

Miron took off his spectacles and began to rub them with his handkerchief. The doctor added:

"They'll be licked. You wait and see."

"Mmm. Raw material. It won't catch fast."

"Be still," Artamonov senior told his nephew. Miron gave him a sidewise glance. Then, running his fingers along the ridge of his long nose, he hooked his spectacles back in place.

"S-save thy people, oh Lord!" Voroponov demanded with loud emphasis, bringing out the word "people" in a piercing squeal. Turning, stiff-necked, he looked back at the townspeople, and for some reason brandished his beaver hat at them.

Pomyalov's daughter sang loud and well. Forty, but fresh, well-rounded, high-bosomed, she was three times a widow, and first in the town in brazen, shameless living. Pyotr Artamonov heard her murmur to Natalya:

"Why don't you send your husband to the wars, kinswoman? He's such a fright to look at, the enemy woud be sure to run."

Of Yakov, she demanded:

"Why don't you marry, godson—you young rooster?"

Artamonov senior shook his head. All these words buzzed in his ears like flies, hindering thoughts of greater consequence. He dropped out of line and walked slowly on along the sidewalk, letting the human stream flow past. Strikingly black, that day, against the fresh, pure snow, the people marched and marched; and their breath rose white. like steam from boiling samovars.

There was Vera Popova, stony-faced, with uncovered head, leading the girls from her school. Snowflakes sparkled in her soft grey hair. Her frosted lashes quivered when she nodded to him. Artamonov pitied her.

"The fool. Hired herself out to herd geese."

A long wave of close-cropped heads rolled by: the boys from the two town schools. Then, a drab and leaden machine, half a company of soldiers, under command of that imperturbable lieutenant, Mavrin, whom the whole town talked about because he bathed in the Oka every day. from the spring thaws to the winter frosts, and, as everybody knew, lived with, and on, Pomyalova.

Pompous as a fattened goose came Nesterenko, the gendarme officer, with his Chinese moustache. His sickly wife walked arm in arm with her brother, Zhiteikin—son of the late mayor, and successor to his tannery. Of Zhiteikin it was said that, though he caroused with the nuns, he had read seven hundred books, and had mastered the drummer's art to high perfection—indeed, that he was secretly teaching this art to the soldiery.

Stepan Barsky, rolling in fat, rode past in his sleigh, with his sottish son-in-law and his cross-eyed daughter. Then the minor folk dragged by, in a dark, endless stream: the lower middle class; tannery workers, weavers, wagonwrights; and finally the beggars, and a few unwanted old women, reminiscent of rats. The snow drifted lazily down on the uncovered heads. And from the distance came Voroponov's unrelenting demand:

"Save thy people, oh Lord!"

"What use can the Lord have for these people? None that I can see," reflected Artamonov. He disliked the townspeople, and had almost no connections among them, except for business ties. The townspeople, he knew, reciprocated his dislike, thinking him arrogant and evil-tempered; but they had the greatest respect for Alexei, because of his urge to adorn the town—expressed concretely in the paving of the main street, the planting of lindens around the square, and the laying out of a park on the bank of the Oka. As to Miron, and even Yakov, the townspeople feared them, thought them greedy beyond all measure—out to lay their hands on everything in reach.

Watching the slow, sober procession, Artamonov began to frown. There were so many unfamiliar faces; and too many eyes, of every hue, were turned on him, all with the same hostility.

At Alexei's gate, Tikhon bowed to him. Artamonov asked:

"Well, old fellow, so we're fighting, eh?"

Silently, in the old, familiar gesture, Tikhon raised his heavy hand and rubbed his cheek. And, for the first time in all their years together, Artamonov asked this man with a feeling of trust in him:

"What do you think of it?"

"Child's play," Vyalov replied, as promptly as though he had been expecting the question.

"Everything's child's play to you." said Artamonov vaguely.

"Of course. What are we—dogs? We're no brute beasts."

Artamonov walked on, through the light, dry snow. It came down thicker and thicker, until the dark throng, now far ahead, was almost hidden from view among the mounds of white piling up on trees and roofs.

Now that Serafim, the Consoler, was dead, Artamonov senior had begun to seek relaxation with Taisia Paraclitova, the widowed deaconess, a skinny little woman of indeterminate age, who looked like an adolescent, and in some ways, too, like a black nanny goat. She was a quiet soul, and always agreed with everything he said.

"That's right, dear heart," she would say. "Yes, dear heart, yes indeed!"

Artamonov drank without stint, but the effect was slow, and he chafed because it took so long before his dreary, importunate thoughts would melt in the vapours of Taisia's delicious, breath-taking concoctions. The first moments of intoxication were unpleasant, making Pyotr's thoughts of himself and others still more caustic and bitter—staining life in evil, swamp green hues, making of it a seething current that whirled and dizzied him, and in another moment, it seemed, must cast him over some indefinite precipice. Gritting his teeth, he would sit staring into the murky unrest within him, straining his ears to catch its sounds. Then he would roar at the deaconess:

"Why don't you say anything? What's new?"

Nimble as a goat, the woman would spring onto his knees. She was amazingly light, and warm. Turning the pages of an invisible book, she would read to him:

"Pomyalova's given Lieutenant Mavrin the boot. He lost three hundred and twenty at cards again. She's going to call his notes—she has notes from him. And the gendarme don't keep his wife in town because she's sick, at all. It's because he's got a mistress here."

"That's a lot of filthy rubbish," Artamonov would say.

"Filthy, dear heart, and how!"

Her chatter about the trashy news of the town muddled Artamonov's thoughts, switched them to different tracks; it justified and strengthened his dislike for those tedious sinners, the townspeople. In place of his old thoughts, scenes of the wild revelry at the fair would rise and circle in his memory. Frantic humans hurtled madly to and fro, their drunken, yet never sated eyes bulging with greed—

burning money, sparing nothing, breaking down all barriers in the bitter fury of the flesh; yearning, aspiring, to her, the woman, dazzling white against black, shamelessly nude....

Silently, Pyotr Artamonov would drink the varicoloured liquors and chew the slippery pickled mushrooms, feeling in every fibre of his drunken frame that the world's greatest gift, fearful in its power and reality, lay in this wanton woman of the fair, who for money displayed her body, and for whose sake men of weight and position threw to the winds their money, their shame, their health. Yet for him, nothing remained in life but this black nanny goat on his knees.

"Take your clothes off," he would roar. "Dance!"

"How can I dance without music?" the deaconess would return, fumbling with the buttons of her dress. "We ought to get Noskov here, the hunter. He's a good hand on the accordion."

In such pastimes, the days rolled by unnoticed; only now and then, in their muddy flow, some strange event would challenge understanding. Thus, in the winter, came reports that the workers in St. Petersburg had tried to wreck the palace and kill the tsar.

Tikhon Vyalov grumbled:

"They'll be smashing the churches yet. Of course. There's a limit to what people can stand."

In the summer, there was talk of a Russian ship, in Russian waters, firing its cannon at the cities on the coast. And Tikhon said:

"Of course. They've got the habit of war."

Again the icons were carried in procession; and Voroponov, in a rusty brown frock coat, holding high a portrait of the tsar, demanded:

"Save thy people, oh, Lo-o-ord!"

This time he shouted still more loudly, more angrily, even, than last; yet the long-drawn vowels of his call for aid had an anxious ring.

Zhiteikin, drunk and hatless, his bald crown crimson, strode at the head of his tannery workers, a double-barrelled shot gun in his hands, roaring scandalously:

"Fellows! Don't give Russia to the sheenies! Who owns Russia? We do!"

"We do!" yelled the tanners, also drunk. Encountering the weav-

ers, old enemies, they lunged into battle. Doctor Yakovlev had his jacket dusted, and the old druggist was thrown into the Oka. Zhiteikin chased the druggist's son all through the town, and fired his gun at him twice. He missed his aim, however, and some of the shot hit Bruskov, the tailor, in the back.

Work stopped at the mill. The younger weavers rolled up their sleeves and dashed off to town, deaf to the persuasions of Miron and other sensible folk, and to the cries and tears of the women.

The mill stood empty, unpeopled. It seemed to shrink before the wind, which, also in revolt, had begun to whine and scream, splattering the walls with an icy rain, then plastering the smokestack with clinging snow that, a moment later, it washed away.

Artamonov senior sat at his window, staring woodenly at the dark figures of men and women scurrying, ant-like, up and down the road to the town. Shouts reached his ears through the glass, and the people seemed to be merry. At the gate, in a crowd of workers, an accordion was squealing, and Vaska Krotov, the lame stoker, sang:

Russia's got so cramped for space,
We're fighting with the Jappies!
Every time they punch our face,
We swing our icons at 'em!

The wind brought from the town a grumbling murmur, as though a whole lake of water were seething and bubbling in some enormous samovar. Alexei's carriage turned in at the gate, with Morozov, the doctor's one-eyed assistant, on the driver's seat. Olga jumped out, huddled up in a shawl. Alarmed, Artamonov sprang to his feet, forgetting his aching legs, and hurried out to meet her.

"What's up?"

Shaking herself to rights, like a ruffled hen, she said:

"The tanners. They smashed our windows."

Artamonov moved aside to let her pass. With a short laugh, he mumbled:

"There! That's what comes of all their talk. Shouting at me, and—that's how things turn out! The tsar. . . ."

But suddenly Olga broke in loudly, wrathfully, as he had seldom heard her speak before:

"Drop it! He's no honest man, that tsar of yours!"

"A lot you know about tsars," he returned awkwardly, and his hand rose to his ear.

He was amazed by the wrath of this little, spectacled old woman, who was always so quiet, so unwilling to condemn. There was a startling sincerity in her exclamation, though, of course, it was insignificant and useless as the squeaking protest of a mouse when a bull has trodden on its tail, neither seeing the mouse nor desiring to hurt it. Artamonov sat down again in his armchair, absorbed in thought.

He had not seen Olga for quite some time, having quarrelled with her son several weeks before and avoided all encounters with him since. That had been towards the end of the summer, when Pyotr Artamonov was confined to bed with swollen legs. Voroponov had arrived, very official and perspiring, and, smacking his thick blue lips, asked for Artamonov's signature to a telegram to the tsar—a request that the tsar stand firm, and yield his power to none. Artamonov was very much surprised by the mayor's presumptuous undertaking; but he signed, confident that his action would nettle Alexei and Miron—confident, too, that Voroponov would earn sharp reprimand from St. Petersburg. What business had he thrusting himself in where he was not asked, the thick-lipped fool, poking his nose into spheres so high above him!

Voroponov tucked the document away, and buttoned his frock coat up to the chin. He began complaining about Alexei, Miron, the doctor, and all those others who, incited by the Jews, were working against the tsar—some through ignorance, others in pursuit of selfish interests. Artamonov senior heard out these complaints with a feeling approaching pleasure, and nodded his agreement. But when the blue lips spoke venomously of Vera Popova, he declared sternly:

"Vera Nikolayevna has nothing to do with it!"

"What do you mean—nothing to do with it? We know for a fact. . . ."

"You don't know anything."

"You'll land in trouble yet," the mayor threatened, and left.

And that same evening, Artamonov's nephew and daughter attacked him, barked at him like dogs, with no consideration for his age.

"What are you doing, father?" shouted Tatyana, her eyes rolling insanely in her homely face. Yakov stood at the window, drumming on the glass, and Artamonov felt that his son, too, was against him. Miron demanded caustically:

"Did you read what it says in that telegram?"

"No, I didn't," said Artamonov. "I didn't read it, but I know what it says: that puppies shouldn't be unleashed!"

He liked to see Miron and Tatyana seethe; but Yakov's silence was disturbing. He had faith in his son's business sense, and it occurred to him that, perhaps, he had acted against his interests. But pride would not allow him to draw Yakov into the argument by any direct question as to his attitude. He lay back in bed, growling sullenly, while Miron nagged and nagged, his big nose swaying:

"Can't you understand? The tsar is surrounded by a regular band of swindlers. They've got to be replaced by honest men."

As Artamonov knew, Miron himself was out to be one of these honest men, and Alexei had been to Moscow trying to get someone there to appoint Miron a candidate to the imperial duma. It was comical, and at the same time fearful, to imagine this long-legged crane of a nephew approaching the tsar. Suddenly Alexei came rushing in, his collar loose, his hair dishevelled, and his tongue began to clatter:

"What do you think you're doing, you crazy idiot?"

He shouted as one might at a clerk.

"To hell with you!" roared Artamonov senior. "Who wants your preaching? You can all go to hell! Get out!"

He himself was startled by this sudden wrathful outburst.

And now, sitting in his corner, while Olga placidly described the disorders in the town, he looked back at this quarrel and made an effort to understand who had been right—he, or those others?

Olga's exclamation, with its childish passion, had disturbed him deeply. Yet now she was talking tranquilly enough, with even a hint of tenderness in her voice as she declared:

"How nice our weavers are! They drove away Voroponov's workers and the tanners in no time, and now they're staying to protect the house."

Natalya, very much frightened, whimpered angrily:

"It's your house all the trouble started from. Serves you right! It all comes from you."

Miron came in, without so much as a "good day." Pacing up and down the room with springy steps, he began to shower threats:

"Those Voroponovs and Zhiteikins will pay dearly for teaching the mob to riot. They won't get away with it so easy. The recoil will come. There's enough teaching of rebellion by the friends of Ilya Petrovich Artamonov, and if this kind starts it too. . . ."

Artamonov senior did not speak.

Since the quarrel over Voroponov's petition, his repulsion for Miron had become altogether irreconcilable. Yet the mill, as he saw, was entirely in this man's hands. Miron ran the business skilfully, confidently. The workers respected or feared him, and behaved more meekly than the workmen in the town.

The wind died, buried in heavy snow. Huge flakes were coming down, straight and fast, shrouding the window in white, hiding the yard from view. Nobody spoke to Artamonov senior, and he could feel that all of them, except his wife, blamed everything on him: the disorders, and the bad weather, and the tsar's strange bungling.

"Where's Yasha?" asked the mother anxiously. "Where's Yasha, I say?"

Miron grimaced disgustedly and said, avoiding his aunt's eyes:

"He must be hiding in that hencoop of his, in town."

"What? Where?" Natalya mumbled fearfully.

Artamonov reflected:

"The fool! She don't seem to know about Yakov's mistress."

All at once, he said firmly:

"Listen here! Live as you please. Do as you see fit. Yes. I don't understand. That's true. I'm old. And. . . . And the devil's at work. All these years, and I don't understand a thing."

IV

Until he was twenty-six, Yakov Artamonov lived a comfortable, peaceful life, marred by no particularly unpleasant experiences. But the day came when time, foe to all lovers of tranquillity, launched an intricate and dishonest game, with Yakov as cat's-paw. It began one April night, some three years after the rebellions that had convulsed the long-patient population.

Yakov lay on the sofa, smoking, revelling in a sensation of satiety that excluded all desires, a sensation which he prized above all else in life—which, to his mind, was life's only aim and value. It was equally pleasant, this satiety, after a good meal and after possession of a woman.

The woman, plump and shapely, stood at the table in the middle of the room, looking down thoughtfully at the fierce violet flame of the spirit burner under the coffeepot. The lamplight, falling through a crimson shade, stained her bare arms and childish face the colour of a crisp pie crust. Her dark, tousled hair hung loose over neck and shoulders. She had slipped, nude, into a golden-yellow Bukhara wrapper and a pair of green morocco slippers. There was something very light and airy about Polina, a non-Russian quality. She had a pleasing little face, like an adolescent boy, with full lips and lively eyes, round as a pair of cherries. Even now, when Yakov had had his fill of her, he found her attractive. Unquestionably, she far excelled all the women and girls he had yet known. Indeed, she would be perfection, were it not for her silly notions.

"I don't want any coffee, honeybunch," said Yakov, through a thick mist of tobacco smoke. Without glancing at him, Polina asked:

"And what about me?"

"I don't know what you want," said Yakov, with a tired yawn.

"Oh, yes, you do," she cried, tossing her head, and burst into brittle speech. After listening to her abrasive, prickly words for a moment or two, Yakov sat up, threw his cigarette on the floor, and pulled on his shoes, remarking, with a sigh:

"I can't understand your habit of spoiling a pleasant mood. You know perfectly well I can't marry you till my father dies."

At this point, as always, Polina showered him with abusive words:

"Of course, that's all you want, you spider—a pleasant mood! I know. For a pleasant mood, you'd be willing to sell me to the Tatar old-clothes man, you would! You haven't got a drop of honour in you!"

Above all else, Yakov hated her to call him "spider." At tender moments, she had another, most amusing name for him: "Savoury Bit." And today, at any rate, he felt, she might have refrained from quarrelling. He had given her a hundred rubles, only two hours ago.

"Screaming won't get you anywhere," he warned her calmly, putting on his hat, and, holding out his hand, added, "Good-bye!"

"Pig! And cigarette butts all over the floor again!"

A damp wind was sweeping down the street. Cloud shadows crept over the ground, as though in an effort to wipe up the puddles. When the moon peeped out for an instant, the puddles, coated with thin ice, glittered like bronze. Winter, that year, was stubbornly resisting the advance of spring. Only the day before, a heavy snow had fallen.

Yakov Artamonov walked along unhurriedly, his hands in his pockets, his heavy stick under his arm. He was thinking how strangely, inexplicably stupid people could be. That sweet little fool, Polina—what did she lack? She lived in security, with no cares or worries, receiving liberal gifts, well dressed, and with a good hundred rubles every month to spend. She liked Yakov, that he could feel. Well, then, what more? What did she need marriage for?

"Silly as a mouse in a jar of jam," he concluded—a favourite saying of his, and his own invention. Life, to him, seemed a simple thing, demanding nothing more of man than he already possessed. After all, when you got down to it, it was perfectly clear: all men strove for one and the same object—complete repose. The bustling day was but a none-too-pleasant prelude to the calm of night, to the hours in which one remained alone with a woman, and then, pleasantly wearied by her caresses, slept deeply, without dreams. Only this was really important, really genuine. People were fools, if only because nearly all of them, openly or secretly, thought themselves wiser than he. They invented so much that was superfluous—as the result, perhaps, of a sort of blindness that affected them, each being anxious to distinguish himself from all the others, lest he be lost in the throng, lest he lose sight of self.

Ilya—a dolt, letting himself be led away by books while he was still at school, and now hanging around among the Socialists. He had often humiliated Yakov. And now, Ilya was in Siberia. Yakov had only recently sent him money there. Their mother—intolerably, if ludicrously, foolish; their grim father, still more intolerably, incurably, a fool: an old bear, incapable of getting on with anyone, sottish and uncleanly. Ridiculous Uncle Alexei—a

bustling jack-in-the-box, eager to get himself into the State Duma, and, for that end, feeding avidly on newspapers, evincing a false sweetness to everyone in town, and flirting with the mill workers like a libidinous old woman. And, worst of all, oppressively, fearfully stupid was that big-nosed woodpecker, Miron. Counting himself Russia's most lucid brain, he was evidently looking forward to a Cabinet post in future; and for the present, he made no effort to conceal his conviction that he alone saw clearly what should be done and what be thought by all. He, too, was trying to gain the sympathies of the workers, providing them various amusements, organizing football teams, starting a library—trying to tame wolves by feeding them carrots.

The workers, weaving beautiful fabrics, were clothed in rags and lived in filth and drunkenness. They, too, en masse, were bedevilled by a singular stupidity, a stupidity insolently undisguised, lacking even such simple proprietor's craftiness as every peasant has. The workers occupied a larger place than others in Yakov Artamonov's thoughts; for he was in daily contact with them, and cherished against them a long-standing hostility, conceived in early youth. There had been many sharp clashes with young weavers, in those days, on account of girls; and some of his erstwhile rivals still seemed unable to forget old grudges. Even before his beard began to sprout, he had twice been stoned by night. More than once, his mother, besieged by screaming women, had had to pay hard cash to hush up scandalous affairs. On these occasions, she had attempted comically to show him the error of his ways, exclaiming:

"How you behave, just like a rooster! Why can't you wait till you're married? Or at any rate, pick yourself one, and stick to her. Some day they'll complain to your father, and he'll throw you out, just like Ilya."

In the two or three years of turmoil, Yakov had not noticed anything particularly alarming at the mill. Still, there had been Miron's talk, and Uncle Alexei's uneasy sighs, and the newspapers, which Artamonov junior did not like to read, but which—importunately obliging, maliciously and openly menacing—informed him of the labour movement and brought him the speeches of the workers' representatives in the Duma. And all these things had aroused in Yakov a further hostility towards the mill people, an injurious feeling of de-

pendence on them. This, he thought, he had learned to mask skilfully behind jokes and smiles and petty concessions. On the whole, however, things did not go badly, though, at times, he would be suddenly seized and constrained by a strange diffidence, as if he, Yakov Artamonov, the master, were the guest of these people who worked for him, a guest overstayed, of whom his hosts were weary; as if, watching him in dreary silence, they were thinking:

"Why don't you get out? It's high time!"

At such moments, he would have vague premonitions of something smouldering at the mill, something hidden, invisible, portending mortal danger to him, personally to him.

Man, Yakov was convinced, is simple, and simplicity is his dearest wish. Man, of himself, invents no disturbing thoughts, carries no seed of them within him. Such poisoned thoughts dwell somewhere in space, outside of man; and when they invade his mind he becomes disturbingly incomprehensible. It is best not to know these noxious thoughts, not to let them develop. Yet, for all his hostility to these thoughts, Yakov sensed their existence in others; and he saw that they could not undo the hard knots of stupidity all around him, that they succeeded only in confusing all the clear and simple things he loved in life.

Of all the people he knew, Tikhon Vyalov seemed to him the wisest. Observing Tikhon's condescending labour, his composure in relations with other people, Yakov envied the old yardman. Even in sleep, Tikhon looked wise, his ear pressed close to the pillow or the ground, as though he were listening for something.

Yakov asked him:

"Do you ever have dreams?"

"Why should I? I'm no woman," Tikhon replied; and behind these words Yakov sensed a firm and matured strength, a power not to be shaken.

"Women's dreams," Artamonov junior would reflect when he heard the speeches and debates at his uncle Alexei's; and he would laugh to himself at the thought.

Thinking, in general, was a thing he did not do easily. When he began to think, his movements grew slow, as though he were carrying some great weight; his head drooped, and his eyes turned to the ground. So it was that night, when he left Polina's; and because of

this he did not notice the stocky grey figure rising out of the darkness until it was directly before him, swinging an arm high over his head. Yakov dropped quickly to one knee, pulled his revolver from his coat pocket, thrust its muzzle against his assailant's leg, and fired. The sound of the shot was faint and muffled, but the man jumped back. His shoulder struck a fence, and, moaning, he slipped down along the fence to the ground.

Only then did Yakov realize that he was mortally frightened, so frightened that he wanted to shout, but could not. His hands shook, and his legs would not obey when he tried to get up from his kneeling position. Two paces away, this man was wriggling and twisting, also attempting to rise. His hat had fallen off, revealing a shock of curly hair.

"Devil! I'll shoot your head off," said Yakov hoarsely, raising his revolver. The man turned so that his broad face came into view, and mumbled:

"You've shot me already."

Recognizing him, Yakov, too, could only mumble, so great was his surprise:

"Noskov! You dog! Is that you?"

Yakov's fright was rapidly evaporating, yielding place to a feeling approaching joy—a feeling evoked not only by his fortunate repulsion of attack, but also by the fact that his assailant was an outsider, and not a worker from the mill, as Yakov had thought at first. Noskov got his living by hunting, and by playing the accordion at local weddings. He had no family, and boarded with Taisia Paraclitova, the deaconess. Until this nocturnal attack, no one in the town had ever spoken ill of him.

"So that's what you go in for!" Yakov continued, getting up. He glanced over his shoulder. Quiet everywhere, except for the wind in the branches of the trees behind the fence.

"What do I go in for?" Noskov demanded, his voice suddenly rising. "I was only joking, trying to scare you, that's all. And right away you had to shoot. You won't be patted on the back for that, I can tell you. I was scared myself."

"Oh, you were. were you?" said Artamonov, in mocking triumph. "Well, get up. We'll go see the police."

"I can't get up. You've crippled me."

Noskov picked up his hat, and, looking down into it, added:

"And I'm not afraid of the police."

"We'll see about that when we get there. Come on!"

"I'm not afraid," Noskov repeated. "In the first place, how can you prove I jumped on you, and not you on me, out of fright?"

"I see. And in the second?" asked Yakov, smiling scornfully, yet at the same time somewhat taken aback by Noskov's composure.

"There's a second, too. You need me."

"Fairy tales. Nursery rhymes!"

And, in sudden passion, Yakov directed his revolver straight at the hunter's face, crying:

"I'll blow your brains out!"

Noskov looked up at him, then down into his hat again, and said impressively:

"Don't try to start any trouble. You may be rich, but you can't prove anything. I tell you, I was joking. I know your father. I've played for him, many's the time."

He flung his hat up onto his head and, bending forward, mumbling something through clenched teeth, started rolling up his trouser leg. That done, he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and began to bandage the wound, which was a little above the knee. He kept muttering inarticulately all the while, but Yakov, his courage dampened again by the strange conduct of this unsuccessful robber, did not listen.

With a rapidity of thought extraordinary for him, Yakov Artamonov was considering the situation. Of course, he ought to leave Noskov lying here by the fence, get the night watchman to guard him, and go to police headquarters to report the attempted attack. An investigation would begin, and Noskov would talk about father's drinking bouts at the deaconess'. And he might have friends here, cutthroats like himself, who would attempt revenge. Still, the man could not be allowed to go unpunished....

The night was growing steadily chillier. Yakov's fingers, grasping the revolver, ached with cold. It was a long way to police headquarters, and of course everyone there would be asleep. He stood there, breathing heavily, unable to decide on a course of action, and regretting angrily that he had not done for this stocky rascal at once. Bowlegged, the fellow was, as if he had spent all his life

astride a barrel. But suddenly Yakov's thoughts were interrupted by a declaration of the most unexpected character.

"I'll tell you straight, though it's a secret," Noskov said, still busy with his leg. "It's for your good I live out here, to keep an eye on your workers. That was just talk, maybe, when I said I was trying to scare you, and the real truth is, there's a fellow I had to grab, and I took you for him."

"The devil!" said Yakov. "What do you mean?"

"What I say. You don't know it, but there's Socialists getting together, all the time, out in the deaconess' bathhouse. They talk rebellion again, and they read all sorts of books."

"You're lying," Yakov murmured, though he believed every word. "Who, then? Who gets together?"

"I can't tell you that. When they're pulled in, you'll see."

Clinging to the fence boards, Noskov pulled himself up to his feet, and said:

"Give me your stick. I can't walk without."

Yakov bent to lift the stick, and handed it to the hunter. Glancing uneasily over his shoulder, he asked, in a low voice:

"Well, but then why did you ... what made you jump on me?"

"I didn't jump on you. I mistook you. I was after somebody else. You'd better drop this business. It was just a mistake. You'll find out pretty soon I'm telling you the truth. You'll have to give me some money, to take care of my leg, that's what."

And, leaning on the stick and clutching at the fence for support, Noskov moved slowly away, on his crooked legs, in the direction of the unlit little houses on the outer edge of the town. Advancing, he seemed to scatter the cold cloud shadows before him. Some ten paces away, he paused to call guardedly:

"Yakov Petrovich!"

Yakov went quickly up to him, and the hunter said:

"Not a word to anyone, about this business. Because.... Well, you know yourself."

He swung his stick and moved on, leaving Yakov dumb and stupefied. The thing had so many aspects, all demanding thought, and all at once. He must decide, and immediately: had he acted right? Of course, if Noskov kept watch on the Socialists, he was useful—indispensable, even. But what if it was all a fraud, if Nos-

kov had lied to gain time, hoping later to take revenge for his failure and his wounded leg? It was a lie about his mistaking Yakov for somebody else, and about trying to scare him, too. Clearly, a lie. Suppose the workers had bribed him to murder Yakov? There were many rowdies and hoodlums among the weavers, but Socialists —that was hard to believe. The most respectable of the workers, men like Sedov, Krikunov, Maslov, and a number of others, had themselves only recently demanded the discharge of one of the most incorrigible of the rowdies. Yes, Noskov must have been lying. Should Miron be told of this?

Yakov could not picture what would follow, were he to tell his cousin about Noskov. But one thing was certain: that Miron would question him about every little detail, like a veritable judge, and find something or other to blame him for. And, whatever else he did, he would be sure to jeer. If Noskov was a spy, Miron probably knew it. And besides, there was still the question: who had been mistaken—Noskov, or Yakov? Noskov had said:

"You'll soon find out I'm telling you the truth."

Yakov stood looking after the hunter until he disappeared into the night. Everything had begun quite simply and comprehensibly. Noskov had attacked with the obvious intent of robbery, and Yakov had fired at him. But what had followed was so eerily involved, like a bad dream. There was something out of the ordinary about the way Noskov walked along the fence; something out of the ordinary in the density of the ragged shadows creeping after him. Never before had Yakov seen shadows drag so heavily after anyone.

Wearied and nerve-racked by all these thoughts, Artamonov junior resolved to hold his tongue and wait. Unable to keep Noskov out of mind, however, he felt ill and dejected. At the dinner hour, when the workers thronged out of the mill buildings, he would stand at the office window, watching, and try to guess which of them could be Socialists. Surely not grimy-faced Vaska, the lame stoker, who had learned so well from Serafim to improvise facetious couplets?

Riding along the forest road, a few days later, to exercise a restive horse, Artamonov junior caught sight of the gendarme officer, Nesterenko. In a Swedish jacket and high boots, with a gun over his shoulder and a well-stuffed game bag at his side, Nesterenko

stood at the edge of the woods, his back to the road, lighting a cigarette between cupped hands. The red-brown leather of his jacket, glistening in the sun, made his back seem clad in iron. Yakov knew at once what he must do. Riding up to the gendarme, he greeted him hastily, exclaiming:

"Why, I didn't know you were in town."

"Since the day before yesterday. My wife's feeling worse again."

Having announced this sad news, in quite a lively tone, Nesterenko added, slapping his game bag:

"I've been trying my luck. Not a bad haul, eh?"

"Do you know Noskov? The hunter, I mean," Yakov asked him, lowering his voice. The gendarme's reddish eyebrows lifted in surprise, and his Chinese moustache bristled. He screwed up his eyes, staring skyward and tugging at one end of his moustache. Yakov reflected, watching him:

"He'll lie. But how?"

"Noskov? Who's that?"

"A hunter. Curlyheaded, bowlegged. . . ."

"Yes? I believe I've seen the fellow about, here in the woods. A trashy gun he carries. Well, what about him?"

Now the gendarme's grey eyes, with a tiny speck of light at the heart of the pupil, were turned on Yakov's face in a steady, inquiring gaze. Yakov quickly described his encounter with Noskov. Nesterenko heard him out, his eyes on the ground, crushing a pine cone into the earth with the butt of his gun. When Yakov had finished, he asked, without raising his eyes:

"Why didn't you go to the police? Such things are their affair, my dear fellow, and it was your duty to inform them."

"But I've just been telling you. He said he's here to spy on the workers. And that's your affair, nobody else's."

"Hm." The gendarme snuffed out his cigarette against the barrel of his gun. Once more turning his screwed-up eyes straight on Yakov's face, he began to speak, impressively, but not too comprehensively. Yakov, it appeared, had transgressed against the law in concealing the attempted robbery from the police; but it was too late to mend that now.

"If you'd dragged him to police headquarters right away, it would have been a clear case. And not entirely, even so. But now

—how can you prove he jumped on you? His leg? Humph! You might have shot him out of fright. Accidentally. By pure carelessness."

Yakov felt that Nesterenko was dodging, twisting—trying, even, to frighten him, to divorce Yakov, or perhaps himself, from this affair. And when the gendarme spoke of the possibility of a shot being fired in fright, this suspicion was strengthened. Yakov concluded:

"He's lying."

"Yes, my dear fellow, that's how it is. That fool will pay, of course, for making himself out to be some sort of secret agent. We'll make him talk."

Then, laying a hand on Yakov's shoulder, the gendarme continued:

"Look here: give me your word of honour that none of this will go any further. It's in your own interest, you see. Well, have I got your word?"

"Certainly. Of course."

"Don't talk to your uncle, even, or Miron Alexeyevich. Are you sure you haven't said anything to them so far? Very well, then. Let's leave this business to its own inherent logic—and not a word to anyone! Right? The hunter put that bullet in his own leg, and it's got nothing to do with you."

Yakov smiled. The man addressing him had suddenly become an entirely different person: genial, good-humoured.

"Good-bye," he said. "And remember: your word of honour!"

Artamonov junior turned homewards, somewhat easier in his mind. That evening, his uncle suggested that he make a trip to the gubernia centre, and he readily agreed. On his return, however, eight days later, his alarms were reawakened by new tidings, heard at his uncle's dinner table. Miron declared:

"Nesterenko turns out to be less of a loafer than I thought. He's caught three in town, too. A schoolteacher, Modestov, and two more."

"Any at the mill?" asked Yakov.

"At the mill? Sedov, Krikunov, Abramov, and five others, younger fellows. The arrests were made by gendarmes from the city, but it's all Nesterenko's work, of course. So we're the gainers by his

wife's illness. Yes, he's no fool. He's careful. Don't want to get himself killed."

"They've stopped killing nowadays," remarked Alexei.

"Hmph," Miron returned. "Oh, yes, I forgot. Another one in town. That fellow—what's his name? The hunter...."

"Noskov?" Yakov asked faintly.

"I don't know his name. He lived at the deaconess', and it was out in her bathhouse those revolutionaries staged their congresses. And at the same time, as you know, your father was amusing himself with the deaconess, in her parlour. Not a pleasant coincidence."

"Oh, well," said Alexei, shaking his bald head. "What can a person do with him?"

Yakov's head was in a whirl, and he did not hear his cousin's next remark. So Noskov was arrested. Clearly, then, he was a Socialist, not a robber, and it was the workers had ordered him to kill or beat up the master. The very workers Yakov had considered the most settled, the most respectable! Sedov, always neat and clean, and no longer young; Krikunov, the jolly, well-mannered fitter; pleasant Abramov, a good singer and an excellent worker. Who could have thought that these, too, were his enemies?

It seemed to him, also, that in the few days he had been away the company at his uncle's had become even noisier, more fidgety than ever. Gold-toothed doctor Yakovlev, who never spoke well of anyone or anything, observing life from a distance, mockingly, with the eyes of an outsider—doctor Yakovlev was more in the forefront than ever. There was something menacing about the very manner in which he rustled his newspaper.

"Yes," he declared, and his gold teeth flashed. "We're beginning to stir. We're waking up. People are beginning to resemble a bunch of lazy servants who have discovered that their master is suddenly, unexpectedly on his way home. They begin to rush and hurry, driven by fear of losing their places—sweeping, dusting, trying to bring the neglected house to rights."

"That's ambiguous talk, doctor," remarked Miron, grimacing. "All this anarchism and scepticism of yours...."

But the doctor's voice grew ever louder, his speeches ever longer, and his words sowed anxiety in Yakov's mind. Everyone seemed to be afraid of something. They all kept predicting misfortunes, fanning

one another's fears. Indeed, they seemed to fear precisely what they themselves were doing—their own thoughts and words. This, to Yakov, signified an intensification of the universal stupidity around him; whereas his own fear was not of imaginary terrors, but of terrors all too real, so real that his skin contracted at the touch of the noose around his neck. It was invisible, this noose, but it grew ever tighter, dragging him on to some great and unavertible calamity.

His fear increased still further when, some two months later, Noskov reappeared in the town, and Abramov—thin, sallow, shaven polled—at the mill.

"Will you take the old man back?" Abramov asked, smiling; and Yakov dared not refuse.

"Well, is it bad in prison?" he asked. Abramov replied, still smiling:

"It's terribly crowded. If the typhus didn't help out, I don't know where they'd put all the folks they pull in!"

"You smile," thought Yakov, when the weaver had left. "But I know what you're thinking."

That same evening, Miron raised a humiliating row over Abramov, all but shouting at Yakov, and stamping his foot as though he were talking to a servant.

"Are you crazy?" he cried, and his nose flushed red with fury. "Turn him out tomorrow!"

And then, a few days later, out for his morning bathe in the Oka, Yakov had an encounter with Lieutenant Mavrin and Nesterenko, who came rowing up to the bank in a boat bristling with fishing rods. The imperturbable lieutenant nodded carelessly to Yakov, without speaking, and rowed off again to midstream; but Nesterenko climbed out and began to undress. In a low voice, he said:

"You shouldn't have turned Abramov off. I was very sorry I couldn't warn you about it."

"That was Miron," mumbled Artamonov junior. The gendarme's breath, he noticed, was heavy with alcohol.

"Was it?" asked Nesterenko. "So it didn't depend on you?"

"No, not on me."

"It's a pity. The fellow would have been useful as bait. A decoy."

The gendarme straightened up, naked, golden yellow in the sun-

light. His skin glistened like the scales of a leaping fish. Glancing at Yakov with the air of a fellow conspirator, he asked:

"Have you seen your friend yet? The hunter?"

He chuckled quietly, well satisfied with himself.

"Do you know what made him lay for you? He wanted to buy himself a gun—a double-barrelled one. It's all passions, my dear fellow, passions for this or for that, that govern people's actions. Yes, that's so. The hunter will be very useful, now that I've got a tight grip on him because of his mistake with you."

"Mistake? But you just said...."

"Mistake, sir, mistake," the gendarme repeated forcefully; and, crossing himself, he strode into the water, throwing out his legs and splashing like a horse.

"The devil take you all," thought Yakov drearily.

Suddenly—like a door slammed shut—death came where noisy life had been.

Yakov was awakened at night by his mother, who told him tearfully:

"Get up. Tikhon's come. Uncle Alexei is dead!"

Yakov sprang out of bed, muttering:

"It can't be! Why, he hasn't been sick!"

The father pushed in at the doorway, swaying, his breath coming heavily.

"Tikhon," he grumbled. "No good comes with Tikhon. Just like that, Yakov, eh! So suddenly...."

He was barefoot and in his nightclothes, with a dressing gown flung over his shoulders. He kept pulling at his ear, looking about him as though the room were unfamiliar, grunting over and over:

"Ugh."

"How can it be?" Yakov demanded perplexedly.

"With his sins upon him," said the mother. She looked like a huge sack of flour.

They set out in an open carriage, with Yakov driving. From his high seat, he watched Tikhon, on horseback, bobbing up and down ahead, while his swaying shadow on the road flattened itself to the earth, as though it were trying to burrow underground.

Olga met them in the yard, where she had been pacing back and forth between the woodshed and the gate. She had slipped a white

skirt over her nightdress, and in the moonlight seemed but a transparent wisp of blue, so that it was strange to see the heavy shadow stretching from her feet over the bare cobblestones with which the yard was paved.

"And so life is done for me," she said softly. Their black dog, Kuchum, was close behind her, following her every step.

On the bench outside the kitchen window sat Miron, with hunched shoulders, holding a glowing cigarette in one hand and with the other swinging his spectacles so that the lenses flashed and the fine gold chain described a glittering arc. His nose, with the spectacles removed, seemed bigger than ever. Yakov sat down silently beside Miron, while Artamonov senior stopped in the middle of the yard, staring in at the open window like a beggar in hope of alms. Olga, her eyes turned to the sky, told Natalya, in the exalted tone that is used for sacred things:

"I don't know just when.... All at once, his dear shoulder was deathly cold, and his mouth fell open. He didn't have a moment, my poor love, to say one last word to me. He complained, yesterday, that his heart was paining him."

She spoke very low; and her words, too, seemed to cast shadows.

Miron threw his cigarette away. Butting his head against Yakov's shoulder, he moaned softly:

"You've no idea how f-fine he was!"

"What's to be done?" returned Yakov, at a loss what else to say. Something ought to be said to his aunt as well—but what? He fell silent, his eyes on the ground, shuffling his feet under the bench.

Pyotr grunted and moved warily indoors. Yakov followed, on tiptoe. His uncle was covered with a sheet. A kerchief was tied around his head to support the jaw. Knotted at the crown, its ends protruded like a pair of horns. The sheet was pulled so taut over the big toes that, sharply outlined, they seemed trying to tear through it. The moon, a little thawed at one edge, peeped brightly in at the window. The curtain fluttered. Out in the yard, Kuchum began to howl; and, as though in response, Artamonov senior said, too loud, with a sweeping sign of the cross:

"A light life, and an easy death!"

Looking out at the window, Yakov saw Vera Popova, all in black,

like a nun, pacing up and down beside his aunt. Once more Olga was telling her tale, in the same exalted tone:

"In his sleep, he passed away...."

"Stand still!" Vyalov cried softly. He was rubbing down his horse with bunches of hay, jerking his head because the animal tried to catch his ear between its lips. Joining his son at the window, Artamonov senior muttered:

"The fool, shouting like that. He hasn't got a grain of sense."

"There's no need to say anything," Yakov decided. Coming out to the porch, he stood watching the shadows of the two women, the white and the black, sweeping the dust from the cobblestones. The stones grew steadily brighter. Natalya was whispering with Tikhon, who nodded agreement. The horse agreed, too. A coppery spot gleamed in its eye. Pyotr came out, and Natalya said to him:

"We ought to telegraph Nikita Ilyich. Tikhon knows where he is."

"Tikhon knows!" Pyotr repeated crossly. "Have it sent, Miron."

Miron got up and moved towards the door. His shoulder brushed the jamb, and he paused to stroke the wood.

"Let Ilya know, too," said Artamonov senior, as his nephew disappeared; but Miron answered, through the black hole that was the doorway:

"Ilya can't come."

"I lived thirty years with him," Olga was saying, as though herself amazed by every word. "And four years before we were married, too. What will I do now?"

Pyotr came up close to Yakov.

"Where's Ilya?"

"I don't know."

"Is that a lie?"

"This is no time to talk about Ilya, father."

Doctor Yakovlev came hurrying into the yard, and asked:

"In the bedroom?"

"Fool!" Yakov reflected. "You can't bring back the dead!"

He was oppressed by the impossibility of avoiding these dreary hours. Everything was so dismal, so needless: the people; their talk; the bay horse, glistening like bronze in the moonlight; the black dog, with its silent grief. His aunt Olga seemed to be boasting of how happy she had been with her husband. His mother, in a corner of

the yard, was whimpering laxly, falsely. His father's eyes stared fixedly, and his face was wooden. Everything, generally, was more dismal, more miserable than it need have been.

On the day of the funeral, when the coffin had already been lowered and the first handfuls of yellow sand cast down, Nikita appeared at the cemetery.

"Umph," thought Yakov, regarding the angular figure of the monk, who was leaning against a birch tree he himself had planted.

"You're late," said Artamonov senior, brushing away his tears, as he approached his brother. Like a turtle, the monk drew his head down to the shelter of his hump. His appearance was beggarly: the cassock faded by long exposure to the sun, the cowl a dirty grey, like an old tin pail, the boots battered and down at heel. His puffy cheeks were grimy with dust. Staring with muddy eyes at the backs of the people around the grave, he said something inaudible to Pyotr, and his little grey beard wagged. Yakov looked stealthily around. Dozens of eyes were fixed on the monk, taking the measure of this deformed brother and uncle of a wealthy family, evidently hoping for some sort of row. The townsfolk, Yakov knew, were firmly convinced that the Artamonovs had forced the hunchback to take vows, in order to gain control of his portion of their father's business.

The fat, placid priest, Father Nikolai, in his high tenor, exhorted Olga:

"Let us not insult our God by weeping and bewailing, for His will...."

And Olga replied, in her exalted tone:

"But I'm not crying. I'm not complaining."

Her hands were trembling. With strange, jerky movements, she fumbled for the pocket of her skirt, trying to hide away her crumpled tear-soaked handkerchief.

Tikhon Vyalov, skilfully wielding his spade, helped the sexton to fill in the grave. Miron stood by the graveside, stiff and straight, as though stupefied. The hunchbacked monk said to Natalya, softly, plaintively:

"Ah, how you've changed! Past recognition!"

And, jabbing a finger at his front hump, he added needlessly:

"Me—I can always be recognized. Who's that one—your Yakov?

And the tall one over there—Alyosha's boy, Miron? So! Well, let's be going."

Yakov lingered at the cemetery. A moment before, he had caught sight of Noskov among the crowd of workers, side by side with Vaska, the lame stoker; and, passing by, the hunter had given Yakov an inquiring glance that sent the shivers down his spine. What was he thinking, what contemplating? He could certainly have no harmless thoughts about the man who had put a bullet through his leg—who might have killed him.

Tikhon came up, brushing the sand from his coat, and said:

"Just to think, how hard he tried—Alexei Ilyich. And just the same.... And Nikita Ilyich is ailing."

"There's a ..." said Yakov suddenly, and as suddenly broke off.

"What's that?"

"The workers are sorry for uncle."

"Of course."

"There's a hunter here, Noskov," Yakov began again. "I could tell you things about him...."

"Even a horse, if it dies—people are sorry," said Tikhon thoughtfully. "Alexei Ilyich lived on the run, and he died on the run—as if he bumped into something. Just the day before he died, he said to me...."

Yakov gave over, realizing that Tikhon could not, at the moment, grasp what he wanted to say. He had made up his mind to tell Tikhon about Noskov, simply because he had to tell somebody. The thought of Noskov oppressed him even more than the sombre funeral atmosphere. Only the day before, in town, this bowlegged creature with the wooden face of a soldier had come up to Yakov suddenly, from around a corner, pulled off his cap, and, staring into it, said:

"There's a little debt coming to me. You promised me some money to take care of my leg. And besides, your uncle's died, so—something to pray for him. I've got a chance to buy a fine accordion, to play for your father on."

Yakov had stared at him, thunderstruck, without a word. Then Noskov had added insistently, admonishingly:

"And seeing as I'm working for your good, against Russia's enemies...."

"How much?" Yakov had asked.

After a pause, Noskov had replied:

"Thirty-five rubles."

Yakov had given him the money and made rapidly off, indignant and frightened, thinking, "He takes me for a fool, thinks I'm afraid of him, the scoundrel! I'll show him yet!"

And now, walking slowly homewards from the cemetery, Yakov was absorbed by the one thought: how to rid himself of this man, who was unquestionably trying to lead him, like an ox, to the slaughter.

The noisy memorial feast dragged out interminably. Growing merry, the guests made deacon Kartsev and the choir singers chant eternal memory to the deceased; and Zhiteikin got so drunk that he forgot all propriety, and, brandishing his fork, roared out:

The fighters recall days of glory now past,
And battlefields gory fought out to the last....

Stepan Barsky, when his huge bulk—soft as a down pillow—was being stuffed into his carriage, declared in loud praise:

"Well, Pyotr Ilyich, you certainly loved your brother! A feast like that won't be soon forgotten!"

Yakov heard his father, who had been drinking heavily, reply with sullen irony:

"You'll forget everything, soon enough. It won't be long before you bust."

Pyotr had invited Zhiteikin, Barsky, Voroponov, and a few more of the leading townspeople against his nephew's will, and Miron made no effort to hide his indignation. He sat no more than half an hour at the memorial board, and then, rising, strode away stiffly as a crane. Olga slipped away quietly a short while after; and the monk, too, soon disappeared, evidently annoyed by the inquiries of the half-tipsy guests concerning his life in the monastery. Pyotr acted as though he were determined to offend everyone present, and Yakov sat at table in constant expectation of a quarrel between his father and the townspeople.

Natalya began to sulk and went home, offended because Olga accepted Popova's attentions; but Pyotr, for some reason or other, decided to spend the night in his brother's study. All this seemed to Yakov a manifestation of absurd and needless caprice: and it still

further increased his depression. He lay down on a couch, and for an hour or two tried vainly to sleep. Finally, however, he got up and went out into the yard. There, beside Tikhon, on the bench outside the kitchen window, he saw the black figure of the monk, strangely reminiscent of some broken fragment of machinery. His cowl removed, the monk looked shorter and broader, and his mouldy face seemed that of a child. He had a glass in his hand, and a bottle of kvass stood on the bench beside him.

"Who's that?" he asked softly, and immediately answered his own question. "It's Yasha. Come and sit a while with the old folks, Yasha!"

Holding his glass up to the moonlight, he examined the cloudy liquid in it. The moon hid behind the belfry, bathing it in a misty, silvery glow that made it stand out strangely against the warm darkness of the night. High over the belfry hung dark clouds, like dirty patches clumsily sewed onto dark-blue velvet. The heavy-headed dog, Kuchum, Alexei's favourite, wandered mournfully about the yard, its nose to the ground. It wandered about, sniffing the cobblestones, and suddenly, raising its muzzle to the sky, whined low and questioningly.

"Hush, Kuchum," said Tikhon quietly.

The dog came up to him and thrust its thick head against his knees, whining some complaint.

"He feels it," Yakov remarked. The others did not reply. But Yakov wanted badly to talk, in order not to think.

"He understands, I say," he repeated insistently. The yardman responded softly:

"Of course."

"Out in Suzdal, the monastery dog could tell thieves by their smell," the monk recalled.

"What have you been talking about?" asked Yakov. The monk drank some kvass, wiped his lips on his cassock sleeve, and mumbled toothlessly, jerkily, as though he were coming down a flight of stairs:

"Tikhon, here, was saying, folks are inclining to rebellion again. And it does look like it! Everybody seems so full of thought...."

"Worn out by all this business," put in Tikhon, toying with the dog's ears.

"Drive the dog away," Yakov demanded. "It's full of fleas."

The yardman removed Kuchum's paws from his knees and pushed the dog away with his foot. It sat down, its tail between its legs, and barked drearily, once and again. The three men looked at it, and one of them had the thought that, possibly, Tikhon and the monk were far sorrier for the grieving dog than for its master, buried in the graveyard.

"Rebellion will come," said Yakov, peering warily into the dark corners of the yard. "Remember, Tikhon, Sedov and his friends, that got arrested?"

"Of course."

The monk pulled a little tin box out of a pocket somewhere in his cassock, took a pinch of snuff from the box, and raised it to his nose, explaining to his nephew:

"Snuff, you see. It helps my eyes. I don't see so well any more."

When he had sneezed, he went on:

"There's arrests in the villages, even."

"Spies all over," said Yakov, trying to speak naturally. "They keep an eye on everybody."

Tikhon grumbled:

"If you don't keep watch, you won't see anything."

Stumbling irresolutely, shivering with the coolness of the night, or perhaps with fear, Yakov continued, almost in a whisper:

"We've got them here, too. There's ugly talk about that hunter, Noskov. They say he informed on Sedov and those fellows in town."

"There's a fool for you," responded Tikhon, after a moment's silence. He stretched out a hand to the dog, but immediately pulled it back and let it drop on his knee. Yakov felt that he had spoken in vain, that his words had fallen into a void. Something made him warn the yardman:

"Only don't you go around talking about Noskov."

"Why should I talk? He's nothing to do with me. And there's no one to talk to, anyway. Nobody puts any faith in anybody."

"Yes," said the monk. "There's little faith. After the war, I talked with some soldiers, wounded they were. And I could see, even the soldiers have no faith in war! It's iron, Yasha, iron everywhere. Machines! Machines work, machines sing, machines talk. And this iron mechanism of life calls for a new sort of people, iron peo-

ple. There's very many understand that. I've met some of them. 'We'll show you softies,' they say. And there's others that resent it. When a man orders them around, well, they're used to that. But metal—that goes against them! Axes, hammers, all that sort of thing that you can lift and handle, that they're used to; but here you get a thing that weighs a ton, and yet it's like a living creature."

Tikhon grunted and, a thing that Yakov had never heard him do before, began to laugh, saying:

"The cart before the horse. Ah, the devils!"

"And many are angry," the monk continued, very low. "For three years I tramped around, everywhere, and I could see. Dreadfully angry! Only their anger is turned the wrong way—one against the other. Yet they're all to blame, for their wisdom and their foolishness alike. Priest Gleb, it was, told me that. Well said!"

"Is the priest alive?" asked Tikhon.

"There's no more priest," Nikita replied. "He's given up the priesthood. He goes around to village fairs, now, selling books."

"He was a good priest," said Tikhon. "I used to confess to him. A good priest. Only he let on to be a priest because he was poor, that's what I think. He didn't really believe in God."

"He believed in Christ. Everyone believes as he can."

"And that's where all the trouble comes from," said Tikhon firmly. Again he gave an unpleasant laugh. "That's where thinking brings you."

Artamonov senior, barefoot and in his nightclothes, appeared noiselessly on the porch, glanced up at the pale sky, and said to the three on the bench:

"I can't get to sleep. The dog bothers me. And you, too, mumbling and grumbling out here."

The dog sat in the middle of the yard, whining every now and then. Its ears were cocked, its eyes fixed on the dark hole that marked the open window, as though it were awaiting its master's call.

"You, Tikhon—you're still grinding out the same old tune," continued the elder Artamonov. "Look at him, Yakov: the man got an idea into his head, one day, and he's caught like a wolf in a trap. That's how it was with your brother, too. I suppose you know about Ilya, Nikita."

"I've heard."

"Yes. I threw him out. He jumped on the wrong horse and galloped away—where to? Of course, it's not many would be willing to give up wealth, the way he did, and live from hand to mouth."

"St. Alexei, the man of God—he did the same," Nikita reminded him quietly.

Artamonov senior raised a hand to his temple and stood in silence for some time. Then he moved towards the orchard, telling Yakov:

"Bring a blanket and some pillows to the summerhouse for me. I'll try to get some sleep out there."

Massive, all in white, his hair dishevelled, his face swollen and discoloured, he was almost a fearsome figure.

"You're all wrong, Nikita, about machinery," he said, stopping short halfway across the yard. "What do you know about machines? You talk about your own business—God. Machinery don't hurt...."

Tikhon put in stubbornly, rudely interrupting:

"Machinery makes life dearer, and noisier."

Artamonov senior shrugged contemptuously and walked on slowly towards the orchard. Yakov, preceding him with an armful of pillows, reflected with dreary malice:

"Blood kin. My father, and my uncle. And what good are they to me? They can't help me."

Pyotr did not invite his brother to stay with him. The monk settled down at Olga's, in the garret, promising:

"I won't stay long. I'll soon be leaving you."

He was hardly to be noticed about the house, never entering the rooms downstairs unless he was called for. He liked to work in the orchard, pruning the trees, or, crawling turtle fashion, clearing the ground of weeds. With each day his face grew more shrivelled, his body more wasted; and his voice, when he spoke, was always low, as though he were imparting some grave secret. He attended church seldom and unwillingly, pleading ill health, and spent little time in prayer at home; nor did he like to speak about God, persistently evading conversation on this subject.

Olga, as Yakov could see, made a friend of the monk, and quiet Vera Popova showed him every respect. Even Miron did not frown when his uncle talked of the places he had seen, and the people met, in the course of his wanderings. Yet Miron, since his father's death,

had become more arrogant and overbearing than ever, directing affairs at the mill as though he were the sole owner, and shouting at Yakov as he might at a clerk.

When Natalya was present, the monk would turn upon her rotund, crimson face the same kindly look he had for all; but he spoke less to Natalya than to others. Indeed, she herself was gradually forgetting the art of speech. She only breathed. Her torpid eyes were blank and glassy, their muddy depths but rarely lit by some gleam of feeling—anxiety for her husband's health, fear of Miron, or loving joy at the sight of her fat, imposing Yakov. With Tikhon, the monk seemed to have had some disagreement. They grumbled at one another, and, although they did not quarrel, looked each past the other with unseeing eyes.

To Yakov, the angular black figure of his uncle burdened life with one more shadow. The monk's very appearance aroused dismal premonitions. His dark, wasting features compelled thoughts of death. Yakov Artamonov regarded all that went on at home only from one point of view: that of his cares for his own well-being; yet, while these cares were constantly multiplying, ever new worries seemed to arise at home as well. With the shrewd insight of a man experienced in the ways of love, Yakov noted that Polina had begun to cool towards him; and his suspicions were confirmed by the conduct of the imperturbable lieutenant, Mavrin. Encountering Yakov, nowadays, the lieutenant would merely touch a careless finger to his cap, screwing up his eyes as though peering at something very small and distant. Formerly, he had been more civil, more agreeable; and at the town club, when borrowing money from Yakov for a session at cards, or requesting more time for the payment of some debt, he had often declared approvingly:

"You've got just the figure for the artillery, Artamonov."

Or had made some other remark, equally pleasant, with a rough familiarity that Yakov found very flattering. This officer, resilient as indiarubber, kept the whole town agape by his contempt of cold, his strength and agility, and his—latent, but not to be doubted—reckless courage. Staring people straight in the face, with round, stony eyes, he would declare hoarsely, in the tone of one accustomed to command:

"I'm a coolheaded man, and I detest exaggeration."

One day, quarrelling at cards with the sickly old postmaster, Dronov, whom the whole town feared for his caustic wit, Mavrin had said to him:

"I refuse to exaggerate, but you're just an old fool!"

Suspecting a rival in Mavrin, Yakov Artamonov began to fear a clash; but it never entered his mind to yield Polina to the lieutenant. The woman pleased him more and more. Still, he had already warned her repeatedly:

"Remember: if I notice any goings-on between you and Mavrin, that's the last you see of me!"

Besides this, there was the growing alarm aroused by the hunter, Noskov. He would lie in wait for Yakov on the outskirts of the town, near the bridge across the Vataraksha, and, appearing suddenly in the road, make his demand for money—insistently, as though it were his due, never lifting his eyes from the cap he held in his hands.

There was something strange and creepy about the hunter's appearances, always at one and the same spot, where nettles and burdock grew thick around a pair of twisted willows. There had been a house here, only two years ago, the home of market gardener Panfil; but someone had killed the gardener and set the house afire. The two willows were still charred where the flame had licked them. Lovers of skittles, coming here to play, had churned the ashes into the clayey soil, and trampled it firm. Only the stove remained intact, its chimney looming over the ruins of the brick foundation; and when the nights were clear a greenish star hung, trembling, low in the sky above it. Noskov would come out from behind this chimney, rustling unhurriedly through the nettles, and, slowly pulling off his cap, begin to mumble:

"I'll make it worth your while. There's a new bunch getting together again at the mill."

"That's no affair of mine," Yakov would tell him angrily, only to hear the open insolence of Noskov's reply:

"Of course, it's not your doing; but it has to do with you."

"Wish I'd finished him, that night," Yakov would think regretfully, for the twentieth time. And, giving the spy money, he would say:

"You be careful!"

"I am."

"Don't mix me up in this business."

"Why should I? Never fear."

"Yes, he certainly takes me for a fool."

Realizing Noskov's usefulness, Yakov Artamonov was at the same time firmly persuaded that this flat-faced, bowlegged fellow could not but seek vengeance for the bullet in his thigh. He wanted to be revenged. He would intimidate one or another of the workers, or bribe them with the money Yakov himself kept giving him, and order them to kill. Already, it seemed to Yakov, the workers were beginning to watch him more closely, more inimically.

According to Miron—and he spoke more and more often in this vein—the workers revolted, not for the sake of better conditions, but because of a ridiculous, insane idea, preached at them from without: that they must take into their own hands the banks, the shops and factories, the country's entire economy. When he talked of these things, Miron would stride about the room on his long legs, very stiff and straight, twisting his neck and thrusting a finger under his collar, as though to loosen it, though his neck was thin and his collar was not tight.

"It leaves even Socialism way behind. It's—the devil knows what to call it! And one of the people who propagate such notions is a brother of yours! Those old fools in our Cabinet. . . ."

All this, Yakov knew, was said with the idea of convincing Miron's listeners—and Miron himself—of his right to a seat in the State Duma. Still, these wrathful tirades left an aftertaste of fear, intensifying Yakov's feeling of defenceless isolation among the hundreds of the workers. On one occasion, he experienced what was almost a paroxysm of horror. Awakened at daybreak by shouts and screams in the mill yard, he lifted his head from the pillow and saw, on the smooth white warehouse wall, a wild, rushing crowd of shadows. Leaping, gesticulating, they seemed to be dragging the whole warehouse with them through the yard. Yakov broke out in a cold sweat, thinking—soundlessly shouting:

"Rebellion!"

The rushing shadows, more fearful, somehow, than flesh and blood, soon disappeared. All that had happened, Yakov realized, was the usual Monday morning brawl. There were almost always fights after holidays. But he could not forget the fearful haste of those

dark, yelling figures. All in all, life was becoming so full of alarms that the very sight of a newspaper was repugnant, and the reading of it still worse. Simplicity, clarity were disappearing. Unpleasantness arose on every hand. New people appeared on the scene.

Yakov's sister Tatyana suddenly brought a husband home from Vorgorod: a small, spare, redheaded fellow in an engineer's uniform cap, light and swift on his feet, and very jolly. He was two years younger than Tatyana, and, following her example, everyone soon called him simply "Mitya." Strumming on his guitar, he would sing all sorts of ditties, one of which, repeated with particular frequency, struck Yakov as rather insulting to Tatyana, and made Natalya very indignant.

My wife lies in her grave.
Lord, save
A place in Heaven's conclave
For thy poor slave.

But Tatyana did not take offence. The man amused her, as he did everybody. Even Natalya would often say meltingly:

"Ah, you young jackanapes! Have something to eat, you rogue!"

Where eating was concerned, Mitya was not to be outdone, voracious as a pigeon. Artamonov senior watched him as though he were a dream, and asked, blinking amazedly:

"By all the signs, you must be a tippler. Do you drink?"

"I can," the son-in-law replied; and at supper demonstrated quite respectable drinking abilities. He had been everywhere: on the Volga, in the Urals, in the Crimea and the Caucasus. There was no end to his stories, drolleries, and comic exclamations. He was like a guest from some jolly land where people had no cares.

"Life is a pampered beauty!" he affirmed. From the very outset, he was caught up in the ceaseless whirl of the business. The workers liked him, the young folk laughing at his jokes and the old weavers greeting him with friendly nods. Even Miron had to lick a smile from his thin lips when Mitya launched into his laughter-studded speeches. There they were now, crossing the mill yard together to the fifth block. Only newly built, the fifth digit of the red brick fist that was the mill, this block was still swathed in scaffolding. Carpenters were at work on the different levels, their axes flashing

silver, and the flash was returned by the glass and gold of Miron's spectacles. Miron swung up his arm, just like the doughty generals in cheap old prints. Mitya nodded, and waved his arms as though he were scattering something over the ground.

Yakov watched them through the office window. He, too, liked this new brother-in-law. Time passed lightly in his company, and oppressive thoughts could be forgotten. Indeed, Yakov envied the man's character; yet at the same time he felt a strange mistrust—a premonition that this was but a bird of passage, that tomorrow he might declare himself an actor, or a barber, or simply disappear, as unexpectedly as he had come. Another good quality in Mitya was his evident lack of cupidity. He had not even asked the amount of Tatyana's dowry. But that, of course, might be some sly trick of Tatyana's. The father grumbled, when he was sober:

"All my work—for such a little redhead!"

Miron also married.

"Allow me to introduce my wife," he said, returning from a trip to Moscow, and presented a plump, blue-eyed, curlyheaded little doll with a twisted neck. Everything about her was miniature, yet fashioned with unusual clarity of line, which to Yakov's eye made her look more like the porcelain statuette on his uncle Alexei's favourite clock than a flesh-and-blood woman. The head of this statuette had broken off, and been glued on again a little askew, so that its eyes were turned, not to the people in the room, but to the mirror by which it stood. Miron informed them that his wife's name was Anna, and that she was eighteen years old. He did not mention the fact that she was a paper manufacturer's only daughter, and had brought him a quarter of a million.

"That's the sort of wives some people find," Pyotr grumbled, turning his bloodshot eyes on Yakov. "While you mess around with the devil knows who. And Ilya swept out of account, like so much rubbish."

Pyotr walked with difficulty, weighed down by the inert, flabby bulk of his body. It seemed to Yakov that his father was angered by this bulk, and tried deliberately to flaunt before them all the oppressive ugliness of his senile flesh. He walked about in his nightclothes, in bedroom slippers on bare feet, his dressing gown unbelted and his nightshirt open, revealing his fatty chest—just as he

had done during his elder daughter's visits, to mortify her. Sometimes he would come to the office and sit there endlessly, interrupting Yakov's work with complaints of how he had sacrificed all his energies to the mill and his children—had spent all his life in harness between the stone cart shafts of the business, harassed by interminable cares, with never an hour's enjoyment.

Yakov would listen in silence. These complaints, affording the father some consolation, bloated him in the eyes of the son to the dimensions of the bell tower over the church, which the sun saw at dawn long before it noticed the houses of the town, and bade farewell to last before departing into the night. But Yakov drew one useful conclusion from such complaints: that it would be absurd for him to spend his life in the same way as his father.

And always, Yakov saw, having sated himself with complaint, the father would be gripped by a feverish restlessness, an urge to torment people, to hurt their feelings. He would go to his wife, who liked to sit by the window that looked out into the orchard, her useless hands lying limp on her knees, her blank eyes staring into space. Sitting down beside her, he would begin to nag:

"What are you thinking about? You're fat, but you don't show. Your children don't even notice you. Tatyana's more civil with the cook than she is with you. Elena neglects you. Why don't she come to see you, eh? She must have found herself a new lover. And Ilya—where's he?"

But there was no amusement to be gotten out of badgering his wife. Her crimson face would soon be wet with tears, that seemed to flow not only from her eyes, but from every pore of the taut skin on her cheeks—to drip from her soft double chin—to ooze from some place near her ears.

"Like a leaky barrel," the old man would mutter disgustedly, and leave her to herself, waving away the sight of her tears. It was too tedious.

He made no attempt to badger Yakov; but the son often sensed a mortifying pity in his father's glance. Sometimes Pyotr would sigh to himself:

"Ekh, empty-eyes!"

Miron was invulnerable to mockery. Pyotr patently feared and avoided him. This Yakov could well understand. Everyone feared

Miron, both at the mill and at home—from his mother and his porcelain wife down to little Grishka, the boy who answered the bell. When Miron walked through the yard, it was as though his long shadow hushed every living sound.

Nor could Pyotr get any pleasure out of teasing his redheaded son-in-law. Mitya poked fun at himself better than anyone else could do it, clearly determined to lash himself rather than be lashed by others. Tatyana, bloated by pregnancy, her lips set in a supercilious grimace, would lie down after dinner to read—three books at once. Then she would go out for a walk, with her husband trotting along at her side like a poodle.

Artamonov senior would order the carriage out, and drive to town to badger his brother and Tikhon. Yakov often heard him at it.

"Well, student in a cowl—lost your god, have you?" he would ask his brother.

Nikita would seem to shrink into his hump. Pressing his palms against his bony knees, he would say softly and plaintively:

"Ah, you shouldn't. . . ."

"Why shouldn't I? You've got the wrong hat on. It's a fake hat you're wearing. All your clothes are fake. What sort of a monk are you?"

"That's my own soul's worry."

"Snuff, you take. I tell you, you lost out. You made a mistake. If you'd married some girl without money, some poor orphan, when you were young, she'd have borne you children out of gratitude, and you'd be a grandfather now, like me. But you had the presumption . . . remember?"

Like a huge, slow turtle, the monk would creep away; and Pyotr Artamonov would go to Olga, to tell her about Alexei's dissipations at the fair. But this, too, failed to divert him. Since her husband's death, the little old woman had been affected by a fidgety restlessness. She was always on her feet, shifting the furniture, moving knickknacks from one place to another, glancing frequently out at the windows. She rarely turned her head, for, despite the thick spectacles on her nose, she was guided chiefly by her sense of touch, and walked with a stick, her right arm stretched out gropingly. To Pyotr's malicious tales she would reply amusedly:

"You can say what you please. No evil can stick to my Alyosha, and no good can be added."

"He was right about you—that you look at life with one eye shut."

"They're both almost blind," said Olga. "I've gotten to see so badly, I broke his favourite cup, only yesterday."

Artamonov senior tried his hand on Tikhon Vyalov; but this was no easier. Tikhon never got angry. He only grunted, and, with a sidewise glance at his assailant, replied briefly and composedly to every sally.

"You stick to life long," said Artamonov.

Tikhon replied, reasonably enough:

"Some live longer."

"Well, but what for, eh? Tell me that!"

"Every one lives."

"That's so. But they don't all spend their lives sweeping up yards and clearing away rubbish."

Tikhon's thoughts followed their own line.

"You're born, well, and you live until you die." he went on. But Artamonov did not listen.

"You've spent all your life with a broom in your hands. No wife, no children, no cares of your own. Why? My father offered you a better place, but you wouldn't have it. What made you so stubborn?"

"It's sort of late to be asking about that, Pyotr Ilyich," said Tikhon, turning his eyes away.

Growing angry, Artamonov nagged on persistently:

"Just look—how many people have made their fortunes in your lifetime. Everyone seeks a better life, tries to hoard up money...."

"Hoard, and hoard, and pay the Devil board," Tikhon returned, drawing out his o's even more than usual.

Yakov thought his father would flare up and shout; but, after a short silence, the old man only mumbled something inarticulately, turned his back, and stalked away from the yardman. Tikhon had faded with the years, and lost his hair, and his skin had turned the colour of loamy soil; but he was still hale and strong, withstanding all the wily attacks of age. He had even acquired a certain venerable

comeliness, and his tone in speaking was ever more weighty and mentorial. To Yakov it seemed that Tikhon spoke and conducted himself more like the "master" than Pyotr.

Yakov himself, as he realized with increasing clarity, was an alien among his family, whose only agreeable member was the outsider, Mitya Longinov. Mitya did not seem to Yakov either wise or foolish. He could not be fixed within such categories. He was unlike anybody else. And his weight was confirmed by Miron's attitude towards him. Cold and domineering, ordering everyone about as he saw fit, Miron was quite friendly with Mitya. Though they often argued, they never quarrelled; and even in argument, Miron kept his tongue well in hand. From morning to night, the house resounded to urgent calls:

"Mitya!" Tatyana would cry.

"Where's Mitya?" Natalya would ask; and even Pyotr would rumble, putting his head out at the window:

"Mitya! It's time for dinner!"

Mitya trotted about the mill, light as a fox, trailing behind him a bushy tail of quips and jests that swept away the stiffness caused by Miron's cold and humiliating acerbity towards the mill employees. He addressed the workers as friends.

"Look, friend, that's all wrong," he would say to the carpenters' dignified, bearded foreman, pulling out a memorandum book bound in red leather, or sketching rapidly on the nearest board.

"See? Like that. And that. And then like that. Right?"

"Right," the foreman would agree. "We were doing it the old way, like we always used."

"No, my dear fellow, that's no good. You've got to get used to the new way. It pays better!"

Again the foreman would agree:

"That's so."

Mitya's brisk business play was reminiscent of Alexei; but he lacked Alexei's proprietorial greed. In his jolly clowning, he strongly recalled the little carpenter, Serafim. This was duly noted by Pyotr. At supper one day, when Mitya had dispersed and swept away the heavy atmosphere at table, Artamonov senior mumbled, grinning:

"We used to have another consoler, once. Serafim."

After one of the clashes which were constantly occurring between Miron and Pyotr, Yakov heard his brother-in-law saying to Miron:

"A combination of the pettily fearful and repulsive with the pitiful—pure Russian chemistry!"

To which he added consolingly:

"But it's all right. That sort of thing will soon be outlived. We're cleansing ourselves."

On a holiday evening, at tea in the orchard, Pyotr said querulously:

"I've lived my life without holiday."

Mitya burst out, at this, in a veritable firework of spirited protest:

"That's your own mistake, nobody else's! A man makes his own holidays. Life is a pampered beauty. It demands gifts, amusements, play. Living should be enjoyed. Every day offers something to be happy about."

He talked on and on, never hesitating for words, like a tireless piper. The others fell silent. It was always so: people, listening to his talk, would fall into a sort of dream. Yakov, too, was drawn by these words, feeling that a real truth lay behind them; yet at the same time he felt an urge to ask Mitya:

"In that case, why did you marry such a stupid, unattractive girl?"

In Mitya's relations with his wife, Yakov detected a false ring. His solicitude was too polite, too stressed. Tatyana, Yakov thought, also sensed this falsity. She was dreary, untalkative, irritable, and discussed politics with Miron far more often and more animatedly than with her lively husband. Politics was the only thing she knew how to talk about.

Sometimes it would occur to Yakov that Mitya Longinov had come to them, not from a jolly land where people had no cares, but from some dark pit where deadly tedium reigned—that, leaping from this pit, he had at last found new and unfamiliar people, and, in his joy at finding them, could not help but jig and clown, admire and stand amazed. In this amazement, Yakov noted an element of foolishness. Mitya was like a boy, gaping with wonder in a store full of toys—but a boy who distinguished quickly and cleverly which of the toys were most worth-while.

Of all the family and all the employees, there were two who definitely disliked Tatyana's husband: Nikita, and Tikhon Vyalov. When Yakov asked the yardman what he thought of Mitya, he answered calmly:

"No good."

"What makes you think so?"

"He's like a fly. Settles on any rubbish."

Yakov questioned the old man long and persistently, but could elicit nothing more lucid than:

"You can see yourself, Yakov Petrovich. Don't you see? The man makes up all sorts of tricks."

The monk, Yakov's uncle, said almost the same.

"Raising dust," he said, with a sigh. "I've seen lots of that kind. Blathering. They mix the people up. And they're all mixed up themselves, too, all tangled up in words. Tell a fellow like that, 'Alas, no ease,' and he'll come back at you with, 'A glass of peas.' Yes, that's the kind."

The meek cripple spoke in a vexed, almost choleric tone, entirely unlike his usual manner. This Yakov thought strange; and stranger still was the agreement between Tikhon and Nikita in their appraisal of Tatyana's husband. The two old men lived at variance, in open, if unspoken, hostility, avoiding encounters and only rarely exchanging a word or two. In this Yakov found one more manifestation of the human stupidity of which he was so weary. What differences could there be between two people, each of whom had one foot in the grave?

Uncle Nikita was dying. And Pyotr, Yakov felt, was assiduously helping the monk to his grave. At almost every encounter, he would torment his brother, crush him with reproaches:

"I've lived all my life like a beast of burden, and you live like a cat. Everyone tries to make things softer for you, and warmer. They don't even seem to notice that you're hunchbacked. And me—everyone calls me mean. What's mean about me? All my life...."

The monk would draw his head down to the shelter of his hump and plead, between coughs:

"Don't be angry."

Another thing that made life hard on Yakov was the repulsion he felt for his father, the disgust aroused by the sight of Pyotr's bare

chest, like a mass of soft soap, covered with mouldy, greyish hair. This feeling was not easy to conceal, to keep within bounds. Now and again, Yakov would have to remind himself:

"He's my father. He begot me."

But this thought could not improve his father's appearance, could not drown the repugnance he inspired. On the contrary, the thought in itself was offensive, humiliating. Pyotr drove to town almost every day, as though to watch his brother die. He would climb the stairs to the garret, puffing with exertion, and, seating himself at the monk's bedside, look down at him with inflamed and bloodshot eyes. Nikita would lie silent, coughing frequently, his eyes fixed on the ceiling in a leaden stare. His hands, grown restless, would wander up and down his cassock, brushing away something that others did not see. Sometimes, coughing until he gasped for breath, he would try to get up.

"Failing, are you?" the elder brother would ask.

Nikita would creep to the window, clutching for support at his brother's shoulders, the bedstead, the backs of the chairs. His cassock hung on his thin frame like a sail on a broken mast. Sitting down at the window, he would look out, panting, into the orchard below, or at the dark, bristling forest in the distance.

"Well, rest, then," the elder brother would say, pulling at the flabby lobe of his ear. Coming downstairs, he would announce to Olga:

"He's failing. It won't be much longer."

A fat monk arrived: Father Mardari. He demanded that Nikita be sent to the monastery, some statute ordaining that he must die only there, and be buried there as well. But the hunchback persuaded Olga to refuse.

"You can send me there afterwards, when I'm dead."

And three times over, plaintively, he begged:

"Make the coffin lid high, so it won't cramp me. Please don't forget!"

He died four days before the war broke out. The day before his death, he asked them to notify the monastery.

"Let them come. By the time they get here, I'll be dead."

On the last morning, Yakov helped his father up the stairs to the garret. Pyotr crossed himself, and stood looking down at his

brother's ashy-grey features, his sunken mouth and half-closed eyes. Nikita said, unnaturally loud:

"Forgive me."

"What are you saying? What's there to forgive you for?" Pyotr Artamonov mumbled.

"For my presumption...."

"You forgive me," said the elder. "I poked fun at you here, sometimes."

"God won't condemn a jest," the monk assured him, in a faint whisper. After a pause, Pyotr asked:

"How do you feel about things now? Which way...."

"Yes, I forgot," the monk said hurriedly, interrupting his brother. "Tell Tikhon, Yasha. He ought to cut down that little maple by the summerhouse. It won't grow."

Yakov could not bear the sound of his voice, unearthly clear, could not bear the sight of his gaunt, misshapen chest, protruding grotesquely, like a box turned corner up. There was nothing human left about this immobile, black-clad heap of bones—about the folded hands, holding an old-style copper cross. Yakov was sorry for his uncle, but at the same time reflected that it was a foolish custom to have old people, and relatives generally, die where everyone could see them.

Pyotr stood there for a while, waiting for his brother to speak again. Then, taking Yakov's arm, he silently bowed his head and left the garret. Downstairs, he said:

"Nikita's dying."

"Is he?" asked Miron, who sat at the table, half concealed behind a huge newssheet. He put the question mechanically, without lifting his eyes from what he was reading. A moment later, dropping the paper onto the table, he called to his wife, at the other end of the room:

"I was right! Come and read this!"

His roly-poly wife hurried across the room to the table, and Olga, at the window, cried anxiously:

"Not really, Miron? Not really war?"

"That makes the second Artamonov," Pyotr reminded them loudly.

"It's all lies, of course," Miron said to his wife, or perhaps to

Yakov, who had also bent over the paper, reading the alarming reports and trying to figure out just what he, personally, had to fear in all this. Artamonov senior shrugged angrily and went out into the yard. The sun had made the cobblestones so hot that the warmth reached his skin through the soft soles of his velvet boots. Through the window came Miron's dry, admonitory voice. Yakov, coming to the window with the newspaper, saw his father shake a crimson fist, as though threatening someone.

The monks came three days later, at daybreak. There were seven of them, and no two were of the same height or breadth; but to Yakov they seemed alike as new-born babes, except for one. This was the tallest and thinnest of them all, the one who strode at their head, holding up a big black cross. He had a thick beard and a loud, jolly voice, ill-fitted both to his calling and to the occasion, and he seemed to have no face at all; for his flat, fleshy nose merged with his cheeks, leaving nothing where the face should be but two dark pits between his bald crown and his beard. He lifted his feet so slowly that he looked like a blind man; and he sang in three voices:

"God most holy"—very deep, almost bass;

"Holy, mighty"—somewhat higher, approaching the tenor; and

"Holy, immortal, have mercy upon us!"—so piercingly that the little boys in the street ran to stare at the beard that hid this amazing triple tongue.

When the funeral procession reached the square, they found it crammed with townsfolk and reservists. In the midst of the throng were Lieutenant Mavrin and his men, a few of the town's authorities, and a group of clergy. The imperturbable lieutenant stood like a monument at the head of his men, with the sun flashing on his uniform. Priests and deacons, conical in their vestments, stood stiff and motionless as graven images, their chasubles glittering, molten gold in the sunlight, throwing a yellow glow on the lieutenant. A fat officer was jumping about before the lectern, waving his cap in the air above his tinny head.

The triple-voiced monk halted before the human wall, his black cross swaying, and said in his deepest bass:

"Make way!"

The people made way, not for the monk, but for the lanky bay

horse of Ekke, the assistant ispravnik. Pressing up against the monk, Ekke turned his horse sidewise across the street, to block the way into the square, and shouted reproachfully, with a wave of his white-gloved hand:

"Where to? Can't you see? Turn back!"

The monk raised his cross and began to intone:

"God most ho-o-o. . . ."

"Hurrah!" yelled the officer at the lectern; and all the people in the square yelled furiously:

"Hurra-a-ah!"

Ekke rose in his stirrups, shouting through the clamour:

"Pyotr Ilyich, if-f-f you please, take a side street! Detour! Miron Alexeyevich, have the goodness! Such enthusiasm, and you come here with. . . . Can't you see?"

Artamonov senior, standing at the head of the coffin, supported by his wife and Yakov, glanced up at Ekke's wooden features and said sombrely to the monks who carried the coffin:

"Turn back, fathers."

And, suppressing a sob, added:

"It looks like the last time I'll be giving orders."

The whole incident seemed to Yakov unseemly, and at the same time somewhat ridiculous. But then they turned down the little street in which Polina lived, and Polina herself appeared, dressed in white and carrying a pink parasol. Tripping up the street in the direction of the square, she crossed her rounded bosom hurriedly as she passed the funeral procession.

"Going to gape at Mavrin," Yakov concluded, stifling with dust and resentment. The monks hastened their step. The black beard sang lower, more pensively, and the choristers lapsed into silence. Outside the town, just opposite the slaughterhouse, stood a strangely-shaped cart, draped with black cloth, behind a pair of piebald horses. The coffin was laid on the cart, and the funeral services began. Down the street, from the town, came the martial roar of a brass band playing *God Save the Tsar*. The bells of three churches pealed, and over all, like smoke, rose a bellowing:

"R-r-rah!"

Yakov even thought he heard Lieutenant Mavrin commanding:

"Ten-shun!"

After the services, he had to drive back with the rest to his aunt's and sit interminably at the memorial table, listening to his father's angry grumbling.

"What idiot had the horses put opposite the slaughterhouse?"

"The police it was, the police," Mitya explained soothingly. "It's sort of awkward, don't you see? Such national enthusiasm, and—a hearse! They don't go together!"

Miron was talking to doctor Yakovlev, who always came particularly to the fore on gloomy and unpleasant occasions. Licking a smile from his lips, Miron said:

"Well, but if we put our shoulder to it, all together, like Mitka in *The Silver Prince*.... In the final account, it's numbers that decide everything."

"Not numbers. Technical equipment," the doctor returned.

"Technical equipment? Well, that's true, but...."

It was past nine o'clock in the evening before Yakov could get away from all this tedious business and hurry to Polina's. All the way, he felt an anxiety such as had never visited him before, a premonition of extraordinary happenings. And, of course, he was right.

"Oh, my," said Polina's cook, plumping heavily onto the bench by the kitchen stove, when Yakov came in through the back door.

"Dirty pander," Yakov threw at her in passing. He stood a moment outside the door to Polina's room, listening to the brisk, soldierly footsteps and the familiar martial voice that sounded within. The voice said:

"Well, then, you've got to use your head. Is it so, or isn't it? Use your head!"

"*Vee,* he says," Yakov noted. "Maybe nothing's happened yet."

But when he opened the door he saw at once that everything had already happened. The imperturbable lieutenant stood in the middle of the room, his hands in his pockets, his brows contracted sternly. His uniform jacket was unbuttoned, revealing his suspenders, one of which was not fastened to his trousers. Polina sat on the couch, with crossed legs, and one of her stockings hung loose, twisted around her ankle and calf. Her saucy eyes were strangely round, and her cheeks were heavily flushed.

"Well?" asked the imperturbable lieutenant; and his question at once confirmed Yakov's worst suspicions. Stepping into the room, he

threw his hat onto a chair and said in a strangely altered, falsetto voice:

"I've come from the funeral.... From the memorial."

"Yes?" said the lieutenant inquiringly, in the tone of one who was the master here. Polina drew at her cigarette until the tobacco began to crackle, and, exhaling the smoke, said carelessly, not guiltily:

"Ippolit Sergeyevich says I ought to join the Red Cross sisters."

"Sisters? Hmm," said Yakov, with a mocking laugh. The imperturbable lieutenant took a step in his direction, demanding crisply:

"What are you laughing at? Get this straight: I don't-t like exaggeration. I won't stand for it!"

In these short moments, Yakov had been pierced by hot currents of anger and resentment, which left behind a crushing, almost grievous realization that this small woman was as necessary to him as any limb or organ of his own body; that he could not allow her to be rent away from him. With this realization, his wrath returned. A cold chill ran up his spine. He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"Don't come near me," he warned the lieutenant. His eyes were bulging painfully.

"Why not-t?" the lieutenant demanded, taking another step towards him. Yakov had never liked the lieutenant's offensive way of doubling his consonants; and now it made him frantic. Trying to pull his hand out of his pocket, he cried:

"I'll kill you!"

Lieutenant Mavrin seized his wrist and compressed it painfully. The revolver went off dully in Yakov's pocket. Then, with a twist that seemed almost to snap his arm at the elbow, his hand was jerked out. The lieutenant took the revolver from his nerveless fingers and, throwing it into an armchair, said:

"It didn't work."

"Yasha, Yasha!" Polina was whispering loudly. "Ippolit Sergeyevich! Gentlemen! Are you mad? What are you fighting about? You'll disgrace me! What for?"

"Well, then," said the imperturbable lieutenant thunderously. Seizing Yakov's beard, he jerked it downwards, making Yakov bow, as it were, to him. "Ask—my pardon—fool!"

At every word he jerked Yakov's beard downward, and then, by a light blow on the chin, forced him to pull it up.

"Oh, for shame! Oh, oh!" whispered Polina, clutching at the lieutenant's elbow.

Yakov's right arm hung limp, but, gritting his teeth, he tried to push the lieutenant off with his left. He grunted inarticulately, and tears of humiliation ran down his cheeks.

"Keep your hands off!" the lieutenant bellowed, and thrust Yakov down into the armchair where the revolver lay. Burying his face in his hands to hide his tears, Yakov sat motionless, almost fainting. Through the ringing in his ears, he heard Polina screaming at the lieutenant:

"Oh, my God, how infamous! And you, of all people! Such a disgrace! What for?"

"Go to hell, lady," said the lieutenant metallically. "Here's a ruble for the pleasure—that's enough and plenty! I detest exaggeration, but you're just a plain, ordinary...."

The lieutenant stamped across the room and disappeared, slamming the door upon Polina's startled squeal and the light tinkle of the hanging lamp. Yakov stood up. His legs were limp and cottony, and his whole body trembled as though with cold. Polina was under the lamp, in the middle of the room, her mouth agape, gasping for breath, her eyes fixed on the filthy bill she held in her hand.

"Hussy!" said Yakov. "What did you do it for? And you always said.... I ought to kill you."

The woman glanced at him, and, throwing the money to the floor, said hoarsely, amazedly:

"Wha-at a scoundrel!"

She dropped into the armchair, clutching her head with both hands. Yakov struck her on the shoulder with his clenched fist, shouting:

"Get off! Let me get that gun!"

She did not move. In the same amazed tone, she asked:

"So you love me?"

"I hate you!"

"It's a lie! You do love me, now!"

She sprang on him so suddenly that she had her arms around his neck before he could push her away, and, scorching his lips with

savage kisses, breathing hotly into his eyes, whispered insistently:

"It's a lie! You do love me! You do! And I you! Ah, my soft little Savoury Bit!"

This was her most caressing name for him, uttered only in moments of the greatest emotion; and it invariably intoxicated Yakov, arousing him to frenzied and brutal tenderness. Even now, it had the same effect. He crushed her to him, pawing, pinching, muttering breathlessly, between kisses:

"Slut. Strumpet. When you know...."

An hour later found him sitting on the couch, rocking her on his knees, reflecting in amazement:

"How quickly it passed over!"

Lying back wearily against him, she said:

"I got angry, and I thought I'd drop you. You're busy with your family all the time, funerals and all, and I got lonely. And I didn't know for sure if you really loved me. Now you'll love me more than ever, because you'll be jealous, that's why. When you're jealous...."

"If we could go away from here," said Yakov heavily.

"Umhm. To Paris. I can talk French."

They had not lit the lamp, and the room was dark and stuffy. Out in the street, though it was late, past midnight, reservists were shouting, and women's voices responding.

"We can't go abroad now. There's a war on," Yakov recalled. "A war, the devil take them all."

The woman returned to her former train of thought.

"There's no love without jealousy, except maybe dogs' love. Look at all the tragedies, all the dramas—all out of jealousy."

Yakov shuddered and said, with a short laugh:

"It was lucky the way the bullet went. It might have landed in my leg, but—look!—just a hole in my trousers."

Polina thrust her finger into the hole. Suddenly, half sobbing, she exclaimed, with hushed, but furious hatred:

"Ah, what a shame you didn't shoot him! Right in his indiarubber belly!"

"Be still!" said Yakov, shaking her roughly; but she hissed on, through clenched teeth, with unabated fury:

"The swine! How he insulted me! How you all.... You've no understanding of a woman!"

Parting her swollen lips to show her clenched fox teeth, she added:

"If a woman's unfaithful to you, that needn't mean she's stopped loving you!"

"Be still, I tell you," Yakov shouted, squeezing her until she cried out with pain.

"Ah, now I can feel you love me! Yasha, my Savoury Bit!"

Day was breaking when he left her, striding lightly down the street with the feeling of a man who has just won a valuable prize in dangerous contest. Just before he left, the hushed rejoicing that filled his heart received new stimulus. Preparing to go, he asked Polina for his revolver, which she had hidden away somewhere; and, as she refused to give it to him, he was compelled to explain that he was afraid to walk the streets without it, and to describe his encounter with Noskov. Polina's fright was very satisfying; it convinced him that she really loved him dearly. She wrung her hands, with many oh's and ah's, and cried reproachfully:

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Then, turning it over anxiously in her mind:

"Of course, it's awfully interesting. A real detective! If you take Sherlock Holmes—did you ever read it? Only out here, I suppose, even detectives are scoundrels."

"Of course they are," Yakov agreed.

Returning the revolver, she desired to test how well it worked, and persuaded Yakov to fire a shot up the stove chimney. To do this, he had to lie down flat on the floor. She lay down beside him. He pressed the trigger, and a cloud of ashes blew out at them from the open stove. With a frightened cry, Polina scrambled away. Suddenly, pointing, she said softly:

"Look!"

In the painted wood of the floor there was a narrow hole, slanting down further than they could see.

"Just to think it was death went through that hole," said Polina, and sighed, her fine, arched brows drawn together in a frown.

Never had she been so sweet, so much his own. Her eyes grew round with childish astonishment when he told her about Noskov,

and there was no sign of anger left in her sharp, boyish little face.

"She doesn't feel guilty," Yakov thought amazedly; and the thought was pleasant.

In parting, she said, fondling his beard:

"Oh, Yasha, Yasha! So that's how it is! Serious? Oh, Lord!... But that swine!"

Clenching both hands in one round fist, she shook them indignantly, complaining:

"Good Lord! How many swine!"

But suddenly, seizing Yakov's arm, she said in a low voice, with a thoughtful frown:

"Wait! Let me think! There's a girl here in town.... Yes, of course!"

And, beaming, she made the sign of the cross over Yakov and dismissed him.

"Go, my Savoury Bit."

The morning was cool and dewy. A breeze sighed in the orchards, and the pearly green of the sky was apple-scented.

"Of course, it was just out of temper she started playing around. I'll have to marry her, just as soon as father dies," he reflected magnanimously; and one of Serafim Consoler's jests recurred to mind:

"Any girl is like a drowning man—she catches at a straw. Be the straw, and grab her!"

The thought of the imperturbable lieutenant was disturbing. The lieutenant was no straw. He was angry, and would probably cause unpleasantness. However, he would most likely be sent off to the war. Even the thought of Noskov caused Yakov less uneasiness than usual, though, this being the hour at which the hunter most often waylaid him, he kept looking about him suspiciously, his hand in his revolver pocket, listening for the slightest sound.

But a week or two later Yakov's old fear of the hunter enveloped him once more, like acrid smoke. Out in the forest on a Sunday, examining a stretch of timber purchased for felling from Voroponov, Yakov saw the hunter pushing through the underbrush, with a sack on his back and innumerable traps hung to his belt,

"A lucky meeting for you," he said, coming up to Yakov and pulling off his cap. He wore it soldier-fashion, Yakov had noted—tilted over his right eye; and he pulled it off by the top, instead of the peak.

Yakov made no reply to his strange greeting, which seemed to hold a note of menace. He waited, clenching his teeth and gripping the revolver in his pocket. Noskov was also silent, poking at the lining of his cap and avoiding Yakov's eyes. A minute passed.

"Well?" Artamonov demanded. Noskov raised his dog eyes and said very distinctly, smoothing down his bristly hair:

"Your sweetheart, Polina Andreyevna, I mean, is getting friendly with priest Sladkopevtsev's daughter. Tell her to drop it."

"Why should I?"

"Because."

After a pause, in which he listened to the church bells ringing in the town, the hunter added:

"That's my honest advice, because I wish you well. And you can give me. . . ."

Looking up at the sky, he considered, and concluded:

"Thirty-five rubles."

"I ought to shoot him, the cur," thought Yakov Artamonov, counting out the bills.

The hunter took the money, swung around on his crooked legs, with a rattle of his traps, and made off into the underbrush, his cap still in his hand. Yakov, watching him, felt that this man had become even more unpleasant, more intolerable than before.

"Noskov!" he called quietly; and when the hunter stopped, half concealed by the low spruces, proposed:

"Why don't you drop this business?"

"Why should I?" Noskov demanded, thrusting his face forward. Artamonov thought he detected in the hunter's blank eyes a glint of fear, or, perhaps, of malice.

"It's dangerous," he explained.

"You've got to know how," said Noskov, and the glint in his eyes disappeared. "If you don't know how, any job is dangerous."

"As you please."

"You're talking against your own interests."

"What interest can there be in enmity?" Yakov muttered, regretting that he had said anything to the spy.

"What does he think he is? Arguing with me, the idiot!"

Mentorially, Noskov returned:

"That's a thing you can't get on without. Everyone has his own enmities, and his own interests. Good-bye!"

He turned his back on Yakov and pushed into the thick green of the spruces. Yakov listened awhile to the rustling of the prickly branches as he pushed them aside, and the crunching of dry twigs underfoot. Then he hurried to the clearing where his horse was waiting, and drove rapidly to town, to Polina's.

"The swine!" Polina cried, in almost joyous astonishment. "How'd he find out so fast that she comes to see me? Well, what do you say to that!"

"Why do you make friends with such people?" Yakov demanded crossly. But she rattled out, also crossly, twisting her gauzy yellow scarf:

"In the first place, it's for your own good! And in the second place—what am I to do? Keep cats, or dogs? Or Mavrins? I'm all alone all day, just like in prison. No one to go out walking with, even. And she's interesting. She gives me books to read, and magazines, and she's interested in politics, and tells me all about it. We went to school together, at Popova's, only then we had a fight."

Thrusting a hand against his shoulder, she talked on, more and more resentfully.

"Do you think it's easy, living this way, being a secret mistress? Sladkopevtseva says a mistress is like a pair of rubbers, only wanted when it's muddy. There! She's having an affair with that doctor of yours, and they don't make any secret of it. And you hide me away like an ulcer. You're ashamed, as if I was hunchbacked, or blind in one eye, or something. I'm no monster."

"Hold on!" said Yakov. "I'm going to marry you. I'm telling you seriously, for all you're a pig, and...."

"It's still to be settled which of us is piggier," she cried, and, giggling gleefully, repeated: "Piggier, wiggier—ah, I'm all mixed up! My Savoury Bit! My sweet unselfishness! Another man would have held his tongue. After all, that spy is useful to you."

As always, Yakov left her in an easier frame of mind. And just

a week later Elagin, the pock-marked, crook-nosed timekeeper, reported early one morning that weaver Mordvinov was in the hospital. A group of weavers had gone out fishing with a dragnet, at daybreak, and Mordvinov, trying to save the hunter, Noskov, from drowning, had almost been drowned himself. As the nasal voice droned on, Yakov stretched his legs under the desk, so as to thrust his trembling hands deeper into his pockets.

"They drowned him," he thought. But, recalling Mordvinov, a good-natured fellow with a soft, womanish face, he could not believe that this man was capable of killing.

"A lucky accident," he decided, breathing a sigh of relief. Polina, too, agreed that it was lucky.

"Of course," she said gravely, "it's better so. Because there'd have been a rumpus if he was killed any other way."

Still, she was sorry.

"It would have been more interesting to catch him, and make him confess, and then—well, hang him, or shoot him. Did you ever read...."

"Don't talk rot, Polina," put in Yakov, interrupting her regrets.

A few days passed peacefully. Yakov made a trip to Vorgorod. On his return, Miron said, with a worried frown:

"There's ugly doings at the mill again. Ekke has orders from the city to investigate the circumstances of that hunter's drowning. They've arrested Mordvinov, and Kiryakov, and that merry-andrew, stoker Krotov. And all the rest who were out fishing that day. Mordvinov's face is all scratched up, and his ear's torn. They seem to see something political about it. Not about the ear, of course."

He was standing by the piano, balancing his pince-nez on one finger and staring with screwed-up eyes into a corner of the room. In his rumpled Swedish jacket, rust-brown trousers, and dusty, knee-high boots, he had the look of an engine driver, while his high-boned, close-shaven cheeks and clipped moustache gave him a military air. His somewhat rigid features underwent very little change, no matter what he said, or in what tone.

"Idiotic times!" he said thoughtfully. "Now we've let ourselves in for another war. The same as always—we go to war to divert attention from our own stupidity; and we haven't got the sense or the power to go to war against stupidity. Yet all our problems, so

far, are domestic. In a peasant country, a workers' party dreaming of seizing power. And in that party, Ilya Artamonov, a merchant's son—a son of the class that's called upon to accomplish the great work of Europeanizing the country, industrially and technologically. Absurdity upon absurdity! Betrayal of class interests ought to be punished as a criminal offence. If you get down to it, it's the same thing as treason.... I can understand such things in an intellectual like Goritsvetov, who has no connections and no place to connect to, because he's ungifted and unfit for any sort of work, except maybe reading and talking. In general, it's my opinion that revolutionary activities, in Russia, are the only occupation for people with no gifts or abilities."

Miron talked as though he saw before him a whole roomful of listeners. He screwed his eyes tighter and tighter, until they were entirely closed. Yakov stopped listening, absorbed in his own worries: how would the investigation of Noskov's death end, and how would it affect him, Yakov Artamonov?

Miron's wife came in, big as a chest of drawers in her pregnancy. Glancing at her husband, she said tiredly:

"Go change your clothes."

Meekly enough, he fixed his pince-nez on his nose and left the room.

About a month later, all the arrested workers were released. Miron told Yakov sternly, in a tone admitting of no debate:

"Discharge them all."

Yakov had long since, by imperceptible degrees, formed the habit of obedience to his cousin's peremptory orders. It was rather convenient, indeed, relieving him of responsibility for the conduct of mill affairs. This time, however, he remarked:

"The stoker ought to be kept on."

"Why?"

"He's so jolly, and he's been working with us for years. He keeps the people amused."

"Yes? Well, perhaps we'll keep him, then."

And, licking his lips, Miron added:

"Clowns can be useful. That's true."

For some time it seemed to Yakov that all, on the whole, was going well. The war had put a damper onto people, had made

everyone more thoughtful, more subdued. But Yakov was accustomed to unpleasantness by now, and, feeling that his troubles were not yet over, waited in vague expectation of new blows. He had not long to wait. Nesterenko made his appearance in the town again, arm in arm with a tall lady who resembled Vera Popova. Meeting Yakov in the street, he fixed him with a penetrating stare; and when greetings were done, he asked:

"Can you come to see me, an hour from now? I'm at my father-in-law's. Only—my wife is dying, so I'll have to ask you not to ring at the front door. The bell will disturb her. Come in through the back. Good-bye!"

The hour dragged out interminably. When it was over, and Artamonov sat down wearily in the book-filled room, Nesterenko said quietly, as though listening for some other sound:

"Well, our friend's been done away with. That's certain, though it hasn't been proved. A skilful job, I must admit. Now, the thing is this: your lady love, Polina Andreyevna Nazarova, is friendly with a girl named Sladkopevtseva, who was arrested the other day in Vorgorod. Is that correct?"

"I don't know," said Yakov; and cold beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead. The gendarme raised a hand to his moustache, and, studying his fingernails, said very composedly:

"You do."

"Well, I believe she's met her."

"That's just it."

"What's he after?" Yakov wondered, looking glumly at Nesterenko's flat, drab, red-splotched face—his thick nose, and his muddy eyes, that seemed to drip grim tedium and radiate the smell of liquor.

"I'm not talking to you in my official capacity, but simply as an acquaintance who wishes you well and has your business interests at heart," the husky voice continued. "You see how the thing is, my dear ... marksman!" The gendarme chuckled. After a pause, he explained:

"I say, marksman, because I know of another time when you tried firearms without much luck. Well, you see, the thing is this: Sladkopevtseva is acquainted with Nazarova, who happens to be your lady love. Now, think it over yourself. Nobody could have known

about Noskov's profession but yourself and me. I don't count. Noskov himself was no fool, though he was sluggish, and...."

Nesterenko sighed, and continued, his eyes on the floor under his desk:

"We're all mortal. That leaves—you."

To Yakov Artamonov, the gendarme's lips seemed to shape, not words, but nooses. Finespun, invisible nooses, that circled his neck so tight that a cold spasm seized his chest, and his heart stood still, while everything around him whirled and whined like a winter storm. But Nesterenko continued, with a slowness of speech that was clearly deliberate:

"I think, in fact I'm almost sure, that you weren't as careful as you might have been. You must have said something. Eh? Don't you remember?"

"That's not so," said Yakov faintly, hoping his voice would not betray him.

"Are you sure?" the gendarme asked, fingering the ends of his moustache.

"It's not so," Yakov repeated, shaking his head.

"Strange. Very strange. However, matters can be mended. Look: Noskov will have to be replaced by another man, who will be equally useful to you. A fellow by the name of Minayev will come around to see you. You'll hire him, I hope."

"Very well," said Yakov.

"There! That's all. The matter's ended. Only I must ask you to be careful. Not a word to any ladies. Mum! Is that clear?"

"He talks as if I was a fool boy," Yakov reflected.

Then the gendarme began to talk about the approaching autumn flight of the geese, about the war, his wife's illness, and his sister, who was looking after her.

"But we have to be prepared for the worst," he concluded, and pulled the ends of his moustache up to the fat lobes of his ears. This raised his upper lip, revealing his yellow teeth.

"I must get away," thought Yakov. "He'll drag me into something. I must leave these parts."

And, returning home along the bank of the Oka, he muttered:

"The devil take you all. What use are you to me? What use?"

A light rain, harbinger of autumn, lazily sprinkled the earth,

speckling the yellow river; and the air, nauseatingly warm, breathed a something that intensified Yakov Artamonov's despondency. Was it really impossible, then, to live simply, peacefully, without all these senseless and needless alarms?

But the months rolled on, like a baggage train dragging through winter winds and snows, heavily laden with new alarms.

One of the Morozovs came back from the war—Zakhar, with a St. George cross on his breast. His hair was gone, his fire-seared scalp covered with red sores, an ear torn off; in place of his right eyebrow there was a crimson scar, and under it a dead, squashed eye. The other eye looked out at the world with stern attention. Zakhar struck up a friendship with the lame stoker, Vaska Krotov, and this pupil of Serafim Consoler soon boasted a new song:

Hey, rain and wind and snow and sleet,
And I lie in the trenches,
Like a blame fool idi-it,
Helping out the Frenchies.

Yakov asked Morozov:

"What's wrong, Zakhar? Aren't we fighting properly?"

"We've nothing to fight properly with," the weaver replied. His voice was loud and rude, and his words had the same reckless, brazen ring as the stoker's songs.

"We haven't got a master, Yakov Petrovich," he told the master to his face. "There's cheats and scoundrels in charge everywhere."

He and stoker Vaska stood out among the workers like lanterns in the darkness of an autumn night. When Tatyana's gay husband came out in a pair of ridiculously wide-seated trousers, the foul colour of Zakhar's army coat, the stoker looked him up and down and sang:

There's a lubber's pants, ho, ho!
No two ways about 'em.
Some folks want their heads to grow,
And other folks—their bottoms!

To Yakov's surprise, Mitya took no offence at this scoffing, but guffawed heartily, encouraging the stoker to further liberties. The workers also laughed. And the whole mill roared, one day, when

Zakhar Morozov led into the yard a woolly puppy, with its fluffy tail curled up martially over its back. From the tip of the tail, by a wisp of bast, dangled a little white St. George cross. This was too much for Miron, and Zakhar was arrested. The puppy remained with Tikhon Vyalov.

Cripples in army greatcoats appeared in the streets: armless, legless, battered, blind. The whole town took on the putrid colour of their uniforms. The crippled soldiers were taken out for walks by the ladies of the town, organized for this work by Vera Popova, who had grown stiff and gaunt as a broomstick. Polina, too, was recruited; but to Yakov she would cry, tossing her head protestingly:

"Oh, I can't, I just can't bear it! It's outrageous! Just think of it, Yasha: they're all so young, and strong, and all cut up and mutilated. And the way they smell! I can't bear it! Look—let's go away from here!"

"Where to?" Yakov would ask drearily. His woman, he saw, was growing more and more irritable. She smoked far too much, and her breath reeked of tobacco. All the women, generally—in the town, and particularly at the mill—were developing wicked tempers, grumbling, sneering, complaining of the high cost of living. Their husbands, whistling carelessly, demanded higher wages, at the same time putting less and less energy into their work. The sounds at the mill settlement, of an evening, were loud and ill-tempered as never before.

Among the workers moved the quiet fitter, Minayev, a swarthy, Jewish-looking man of about thirty, with a big, hooked nose. Yakov studiously avoided him, afraid to meet his brooding eyes; for the fitter stared at people painfully, as though he had forgotten something and were trying vainly to recall it.

Pyotr drifted about the yard like a fragment of dirty wreckage, barely dragging his aching legs. On his broad shoulders hung an old travelling coat, lined with worn fox. Stopping passing workers, he would question them sternly:

"Where are you going?"

And when they had answered, he would mumble, with a hopeless wave of the hand:

"Well, go ahead. Loafers. Parasites. Sucking my blood!"

His purple, bloated face quivered disgustedly, and his lower lip

would not stay closed. Yakov was ashamed that anyone should see his father so. Tatyana spent all her days poring over the newspapers, and something kept her so frightened that her ears were always flushed. Miron swooped back and forth as though on wings, to the gubernia centre, to Moscow, to Petrograd. Returning home, he would pace up and down in his broad-heeled American shoes and talk with malicious glee about a drunken, dissolute peasant who clung like a leech to the tsar.

"I don't believe there's really any such peasant," Olga, half-blind now, put in stubbornly from the sofa where she sat beside her daughter-in-law, with her two-year-old grandson, Platon, playing and crowing near her. "It's all made up, on purpose, as a lesson."

"Wonderful!" cried Tatyana's merry husband. "Magnificent! The countryside avenges itself! Eh?"

Rapturously, he rubbed together his plump little hands, overgrown with reddish wool. He alone, of them all, lived in confident expectation of some impending joy.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Tatyana vexedly. "I can't see what you're so pleased about!"

Gaping at her in amazement, Mitya croaked:

"Wha-at? You can't see? Why, can't you understand—the countryside is avenging itself for all it's had to endure! It's developed a destructive poison, in the shape of this one peasant. . . ."

"Hold on!" Miron put in, scowling. "Not so long ago, you sang a different tune."

But Mitya continued, almost frenziedly, pouring out his words in a breathless, emotional whisper:

"A symbol—that's what he is, not just a peasant! Three years ago they celebrated the tercentenary of their rule, and now. . . ."

"Rubbish," Miron said brusquely. Doctor Yakovlev chuckled, as usual. And Yakov Artamonov reflected that, should this sort of talk become known to the gendarme, Nesterenko. . . .

"Why do you say such things?" he asked. "What's the good of it?"

And again he urged them:

"Drop it!"

Even Miron, Yakov noted—and this dismayed him more than anything else—was nervous and preoccupied to an extraordinary

degree. In the final account, of all the people with whom Yakov came into contact, only Mitya remained unchanged, spinning about like a top as always, spattering jokes, and, of an evening, singing, with twanging guitar:

My wife lies in her grave....

But his songs no longer amused Tatyana.

"Ugh! You make me sick!" she would say, and leave the room to spend the evening with her children.

Mitya was very clever about keeping the workers satisfied. He advised Miron to buy up flour, cereals, dried peas, and potatoes in the rural districts, where food was cheaper, and sell them to the mill employees at cost. This pleased the workers, and Yakov saw that they put more faith in this merry fellow than in Miron. Further, Yakov noticed that Miron had begun to quarrel with Mitya more and more frequently.

"What are you trying to do—veer with the wind?" Miron would demand crisply, making no effort to hide his malice; but Mitya would respond, smiling:

"The people's will.... The people's rights...."

"Where do you stand? That's what I want to know," Miron would shout.

"That's enough noise," Artamonov senior would grumble; but Yakov would note a glint of pleasure in his father's dulling eyes. The old man liked to see his nephew and son-in-law quarrelling. He chuckled at Tatyana's shrill, peevish reproaches, chuckled when Natalya asked timidly:

"Pour me another cup, Tanya, please."

Every new development brought new elements of alarm. Each event seemed to spring up of itself, somehow, altogether unconnected with what had gone before. All at once Olga, who had gone entirely blind, caught cold, and, two days later, died. And a few days after her death, town and mill were shaken as by a thunderbolt: the tsar's abdication.

"What now? A republic?" Yakov asked his cousin, who was studying the newspaper in high elation.

"A republic, of course!" Miron replied. He was leaning over his desk, his hands pressed down upon the open newspaper; and sudden-

ly, under his weight, the paper snapped in two. To Yakov, this seemed an evil portent. But Miron straightened up, his face transfigured, and said in a strangely altered voice, very loud, but amicable:

"Renewal, return to normalcy—that's what's beginning for Russia, man!"

He spread his arms, as though to embrace Yakov, but immediately dropped one back to his side, and raised the other to adjust his pince-nez. Then, stretching out his hand again, so that he looked like a semaphore, he announced that he would leave for Moscow the very next evening.

Mitya, too, gesticulated like an excited cabdriver, shouting:

"Now everything will be fine. Now, at last, the people will give utterance to the mighty sentiments that have been pent up so long in their hearts!"

Miron no longer argued with Mitya, only smiling thoughtfully and licking his thin lips. And Yakov saw that, indeed, everything was fine, and everybody pleased. When the workers gathered in the yard, and Mitya informed them from the porch of what was going on in Petrograd, they all cheered, and, dragging him off the porch, began to toss him in the air. Mitya curled himself up into a ball, and flew very high; whereas Miron, when he, too, was tossed up, seemed to break to bits in the air, his arms and legs flying wildly. The older workers crowded around Mitya, and Gerasim Voyinov, a huge, muscular weaver, shouted:

"You're a comfortable fellow, Mitri Pavlovich, comfortable—see? Hurrah for Mitri Pavlovich, fellows!"

They cheered loudly, and stoker Vaska, his baldish crown gleaming, began to jig, roaring as though he were drunk:

Hey, the people were down below,
And the tsar's throne was high!
When they climbed up, they found on the throne
A silly magpie!

"More, Vaska!" the workers yelled.

They wanted to toss up Yakov also, but he ran away and hid in the house; for he was quite sure that, once he flew up, the workers would drop their arms and let him fall to the ground. Towards eve-

ning, sitting in the office, he heard Tikhon Vyalov's voice just outside the window, saying:

"What do you want with the pup? Sell him to me. I'll make a good dog out of him."

"Ah, is this a time for training dogs, old man?" returned the voice of Zakhar Morozov.

"Well, then, what will you do with him? Here—take a ruble, and make it a deal."

"Drop it."

Yakov put his head out of the window, and said:

"Such news—eh, Tikhon?"

"Umhm," the old man answered, and, glancing around the corner of the house, whistled softly.

"The tsar—so they've downed him!"

Tikhon bent to pull his boot top straight. To the ground, he said:

"The storm's broken. Like Antonushka used to say: the wagon lost a wheel!"

Straightening up, he made off around the corner of the house, calling quietly:

"Tulun, Tulun."

Gay and boisterous, the weeks sped by. Miron, Tatyana, the doctor—all the people Yakov encountered were pleasanter, more friendly with one another. Some strangers arrived from the city and took fitter Minayev away with them. Spring came, hot and sunny.

"Listen here, Savoury Bit," Polina said. "Say what you please, I can't understand it. The tsar refuses to rule, and all the soldiers are crippled or killed, and the police disbanded, and some sort of plain civilians running everything. How are we going to live? Every scoundrel can do anything he pleases, and now Zhiteikin won't give me any peace, I can tell you that. And all the others that were after me, and got turned down. I can't stay here any longer, with everything gone topsy-turvy. I won't. I have to live somewhere where nobody knows me. And besides, once it's been done—the revolution, and freedom, why, of course, it's so everyone can be able to live as he pleases!"

Polina spoke of this more and more urgently, more and more loquaciously; and Yakov, sensing an incontestable logic in her arguments, would answer soothingly:

"Wait another while, till things quiet down, and then. . . ."

But he no longer believed that the agitation surrounding him would ever settle. Day after day, as he could see, the clamour at the mill was growing louder, more menacing. A man to whom fear has become customary will always find cause for it; and Yakov began to fear Zakhar Morozov's roasted skull. Zakhar bore himself like an acknowledged sovereign. The workers flocked after him as ewes follow the sheep dog, and Mitya fluttered around him like a tame magpie. Indeed, Zakhar had acquired a certain resemblance to a big dog trained to walk upright; for, his burnt scalp evidently bothering him, he would sometimes wrap his head, turban-like in a Turkish bathtowel of Tatyana's that Mitya had given him, and this huge headdress seemed to press down upon his shoulders, making his figure squatter. He strutted pompously, like fat Ekke, the assistant ispravnik, with his thumbs stuck under the belt of his shabby army trousers, flipping his free fingers up and down as a fish waves its fins, and shouting every now and then:

"Order, comrades!"

He sat in judgment over three young fellows who had been caught stealing linen. In a voice that rang through the whole mill yard, he demanded of the thieves:

"Do you know who you're stealing from?"

And himself replied:

"From yourselves, and all of us! You can't steal now, you sons of bitches!"

He ordered the culprits whipped, and two of the workers gladly set to on them with willow switches, while stoker Vaska sang crazily, jigging:

See how vermin parasites get lashed today!
What fair judgment is dealt out today!

The song broke off. The stoker muttered something to himself, shrugging, then shouted suddenly:

Save thy people, oh Lord!

And Mitya yelled:

"Bravo!"

He ran about, a little man in grey trousers, his leather cap pushed far back on his head, with beads of perspiration on his red-whiskered face, and a greenish, tipsy joy shining from his eyes. The night

before, he had had a bad quarrel with his wife. Yakov had heard loud whispers floating from their window out into the orchard, and then Tatyana's voice had cried in unrestrained fury:

"You're a clown! You have no honour! Your convictions? Beggars have no convictions. It's all lies! A month ago, those convictions of yours.... I've had enough! I'm going to the city tomorrow, to stay with my sister. Yes, the children go with me."

This caused Yakov no surprise. He had long since noted that redheaded Mitya was becoming a more and more objectionable character. What did surprise Yakov, and even made him rather proud, was the fact that he had been the first to detect the redhead's unreliability. And now even Natalya, who only recently had shown for Mitya the same sentimental fondness that she lavished on the roosters in the barnyard, grumbled:

"What's come over him, arguing all the time, just like a sheeny! There's gratitude!"

Mitya would cry:

"Everything is wonderful! Life is a beauty, a beauty with brains! But it's time we forgot the fairy tales about the wolves and the sheep living in peace. The time for that has passed, Tatyana Petrovna!"

Miron would demand, with cold malice:

"And what will you say tomorrow?"

"Whatever life prompts! That's what! Well, what more?"

Miron and Tatyana skirted him as gingerly as though he were smeared with soot. A few days later, he went away to the city, with all his belongings: three big piles of books and a wicker box of clothes.

Everywhere, Yakov observed a bustling confusion, as at a conflagration. All the people around him were smouldering, giving off smoke that was obvious foolishness. And there was nothing to indicate that these insane times would soon be ended.

"Well," he told Polina, "I've made up my mind. We're leaving! We'll go to Moscow, first, and then we'll see."

"At last!" the woman cried joyfully, and, throwing her arms around him, kissed him warmly.

The July evening spread in reddish twilight over the orchard, breathing in at the windows the heavy odours of rain-wet, sun-warmed soil. A pleasant evening, but full of mournful thoughts.

Yakov lifted Polina's hot, damp hands from his shoulders, saying absently:

"Get into something. Button up. We've got to talk this over seriously."

Slipping from his knees, she darted to the bed and got into a wrapper. Then, with a businesslike air, she sat down beside him.

"You see," Yakov began, rubbing his beard against his cheek until the hair squeaked. "We've got to find some place, some country, where things are quiet. Where there's nothing you have to try to understand, and no need to worry your head over other people's business. That's what we want."

"Of course," said Polina.

"We'll have to watch our step all the time. Miron says the trains are packed with runaway soldiers. We'll have to act poor."

"Only be sure you take plenty of money along."

"Yes, of course. I won't let my folks know where I'm going. I'll say it's just a trip to Vorgorod—see?"

"Why make a secret of it?" Polina asked, surprised and suspicious.

He did not know why. The idea had only just arisen. But he felt that it was a good idea.

"Well, my father, you know, and Miron. They'll ask questions. There's no good in that. There's money in Moscow. I can get plenty of good money there."

"Make it soon, though," Polina pleaded. "You can see yourself. We can't live here. Everything's so dear, and you can't get a thing. And there's sure to be looting, because life is getting so hard."

Glancing over her shoulder at the door, she whispered:

"Look at my cook. She used to be so nice, and now she snaps at me, and she always looks drunk. She might murder me some night. Why not, when everything's in such a muddle? Yesterday I heard her whispering with someone. 'Good Lord!' I thought. 'Now it's coming!' But I opened the door, just a crack, as quiet as I could, and she was down on her knees, grunting! It's simply ghastly!"

"Hold on," Yakov put in, hushing her swift, nervous whisper. "I'll leave first. . . ."

"No," she said, very loud, bringing her fist down on her knee. "Me first! You'll give me the money, and. . . ."

"Don't you trust me, then?" he asked, insulted and angry; and received the firm reply:

"No. I don't. I'm frank. I tell you straight: no! How can a person trust anyone, when everyone's betrayed the tsar, and everything on earth? Do you trust anyone?"

Her argument was convincing; and still more convincing was her bosom, half revealed by the loose folds of her wrapper. Yakov Artamonov yielded. It was decided that she begin packing the very next day, and set out for Vorgorod, where she would await his arrival.

Next morning, Yakov complained at home of headache and pains in his stomach—plausibly enough, as he had lost much weight in the last few months, and grown sluggish and absent-minded, with a dull film over his rainbow eyes. Eight days later, he set out for the railway station, driving slowly along the edge of the neglected highway. Displaced cobblestones lay here and there, among deep pits full of humped-up mud, dried and cracked by the heat. Behind him lay just such a shattered and uprooted life; ahead, a glazed sun peered blindly down from the soft depths of a pit among the smoky clouds.

A month later, Miron Artamonov, returning from a trip to Moscow, stopped in to see Tatyana. Bowing his head and, seemingly studying the palm of his hand, he said:

"I have a rather sad piece of news for you. That vulgar woman Yakov lived with came to see me in Moscow, and said some persons on the train—you know the sort of people there are these days!—beat Yakov up and threw him out of the car. . . ."

"No!" Tatyana cried, making an effort to get up from her chair.

"While the train was moving. He died two days later, and she buried him in a village cemetery near Petushki station."

Tatyana pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Her thin shoulders heaved, and her black dress seemed to stream floorwards, as though this skinny, long-necked woman had begun to melt.

Miron adjusted his pince-nez, cracked his knuckles, rubbed his hands together, listened a while to a solitary church bell, sounding the call to evening services, and finally said, pacing up and down the room:

"What's the sense of crying? Between you and me, he was no

good for anything. And stupid to the point of indecency, if you'll forgive my saying so. It's a shame, of course. That's true."

"Good Lord!" said Tatyana, blinking. Her eyelids were red with crying. Wetting the tip of a finger with her tongue, she smoothed her eyebrows.

"That enterprising young woman," Miron went on, thrusting his hands into his pockets, "tried most unconvincingly to pose as an inconsolable widow. But she was so dressed up that it's quite clear she fleeced Yakov thoroughly. She says she wrote to the family."

Tatyana shook her head.

"So she didn't? Just as I thought. I don't think your father and mother ought to be told what's happened. Let them think Yakov's alive somewhere. Right?"

"Yes, that will be best," Tatyana agreed.

"True, Uncle Pyotr seems in no state to understand anything. But your mother would drown herself in tears."

Tatyana said, shaking her head:

"We'll all be done for pretty soon."

"Possibly, if we stay here. But I'm sending my wife and the children away right off, and I advise you to get out too, before Zakhar Morozov.... So we won't tell the old people anything. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll be getting home. My wife isn't well."

Extending his long arm, he shook her hand. As he left, he added:

"Travelling is terribly difficult nowadays. The roads are in a frightful state."

Artamonov senior lived in a state of semi-stupor, sinking gradually into heavier and heavier sleep. He spent the night and most of the day in bed, and the remaining hours in his armchair by the window. Outside the window stretched a blue void, dimmed now and then by clouds. Then the glass would mirror a fat old man with a sullen face, his eyes swollen, his beard matted and grey. Examining his reflection, Artamonov would mutter to himself:

"A handsome gnat!"

His wife would come and bend over him, trying to jog him awake, whimpering:

"You need to go away somewhere. You need treatment."

"Get out," Artamonov would tell her languidly. "Get out, nag. I'm sick of you. Let me be."

And, left to himself, he would sit listening. People were clamouring festively, in the yard, in the orchard, everywhere; but the mill—the mill was silent.

The accustomed companion within him, the disillusioned being whose prickly thoughts had been wont to enliven Artamonov, was gone, dead. And a good thing. The old man found thinking difficult. He had lost all desire for it. More, as he had long since realized, thinking was useless, because, think as you might, you could not understand a thing. Where had everyone disappeared to—Yakov, Tatyana, Mitya?

Sometimes he would ask his wife:

"Is Ilya back?"

"No."

"Not yet?"

"Not yet."

"Yakov?"

"Yakov neither."

"So. They're taking life easy. And Miron sucks the business like a leech."

"Don't think about that," Natalya would advise.

"Go away."

She would move away and sit down in the corner, turning dull eyes on this one-time man with whom she had spent all the years of her life. Her head was unsteady, her hands clumsy as though out of joint. She had grown thin, melted away like a tallow candle.

Now and then, and with increasing frequency, Pyotr Artamonov would be awakened by an incomprehensible bustle in the house, by the presence of strangers in his room. He would stare at them, trying to make sense of their loud ravings, while his wife wailed:

"Good Lord, what are you doing? Why? He's the master, I tell you. We're the masters! Let me take him away, then. He needs treatment. He needs to be in the city. Let me take him away."

"She wants to hide me. What for?" Artamonov wondered. "The fool. All her life, a fool. Yakov takes after her. All of them do. But Ilya—he takes after me. Wait till he comes home. He'll put things straight."

Rains, and then snow, and biting frost, and whistling storm.

Artamonov was jerked out of this semi-consciousness by an acute

sensation of hunger. He found himself out in the orchard, in the summerhouse. Through the glassed wall opposite him, and the wet branches brushing against it, the sky gleamed red and strangely near. It seemed to hang just beyond the trees, within arm's reach.

"I'm hungry," he said. There was no reply.

A damp, bluish murk hung over the orchard. There were two horses standing in front of the summerhouse, resting their heads on one another's necks. One was grey, the other some dark colour. On the bench nearby sat a man in a white shirt, putting in order a big coil of rope.

"Natalya! Don't you hear? Give me something to eat."

His wife had always come at his first call, whenever he awakened from his stupor. She had always been near at hand. Yet now, she was not there.

"Can she be ..." he wondered; and his head grew clearer. "Or maybe she's sick."

He raised his head. Through the bushes, something glittered near the door of the bathhouse. Then he saw that it was a rifle, with a bayonet at its muzzle, slung on the back of a greenish soldier whose figure was hidden by the bushes. Someone shouted, in the yard:

"What's this, comrades? Is that a way to treat horses? Pigs are treated better! And why's the hay left outside to get wet? Are you out to land in the bathhouse under lock and key?"

The man in the white shirt dropped his rope to the ground and got up, remarking guardedly to the soldier:

"He thinks he's it, the devil take him!"

"There's more commanders now than there used to be," the soldier responded.

"Who on earth appoints 'em all, the devils?"

"They appoint themselves. Everything gets done by itself, these days, my boy. Like in old wives' tales."

The man walked up to the horses and took them by their manes. Artamonov senior shouted, as loudly as he was able:

"Hey, there! Call my wife!"

"Shut up, old man," the answer came. "Hmph! His wife, he wants!"

The horses were led away. Artamonov passed a hand over his face and beard, felt his ear with icy fingers, and looked about him,

He was lying by the windowless back wall of the summerhouse, under a painted apple tree on which the red fruit hung in clusters, like rowan berries. He was lying on something hard and stiff. His shabby fox-lined coat was spread over him, and he had a warm winter jacket on, yet he was not hot. He could not understand why he should be out here. Perhaps the house was being cleaned, for some holiday? What holiday? Why were there horses in the orchard, and a soldier by the bathhouse? And who was that yelling in the yard?

"I tell you, comrade, you're just a brainless cub! What? The men are tired? It's too early to be tired! Don't play the fool!"

Though the shouting was distant, it deafened him, made his head hum. And his legs seemed to be gone. From the knees down, they refused to move. The apple tree on the wall had been painted by Vanya Lukin. A thief, he was. Later on, he had robbed a church, and died in prison.

Someone entered the summerhouse, a broad figure in a shaggy hat, bringing in a cold shadow and a strong smell of tar.

"Who's that—Tikhon?"

"Who else?"

Tikhon's gruff reply was also deafening. The old yardman swung his arms as though he were swimming across the creaky floor.

"Who's yelling out there?"

"Zakhar Morozov."

"And what's that soldier doing here?"

"There's a war on."

After a silence, Artamonov asked:

"Did the enemy get all the way out here?"

"This is a war against you, Pyotr Ilyich."

The employer said sternly:

"No jokes with me, you old fool. I'm no comrade of yours."

To which he received the calm reply:

"It's the last war. They don't want any more. And everyone's comrades, now. And for a fool, I am sort of old—that's true."

Clearly, Tikhon was mocking. Now he sat down unceremoniously at his employer's feet, without taking off his hat. A hoarse falsetto commanded, out in the yard:

"And remember: no civilians in the streets after eight o'clock!"

"Where's my wife?" Artamonov asked.

"She's gone foraging for bread."

"What do you mean—foraging?"

"What I say. Bread isn't stones. It don't lie around loose."

The blue darkness in the orchard was thickening. The soldier by the bathhouse yawned loudly. He could no longer be distinguished; only his bayonet glittered, like a fish in water. There were many questions Artamonov would have liked to ask; but he held his tongue. There was nothing sensible to be gotten out of Tikhon. And in any case, the questions kept skipping about in his brain, getting all tangled up, so that he could not tell which were most important. And he was very hungry.

Tikhon grumbled:

"I may be a fool, but I was the first to see the truth. See what a turn life's taken. I always said: hard labour for you all! And it's come. They flipped you out like dust, like so much shavings. That's how it is, Pyotr Ilyich. Yes, the devil whittled, and you whetted his knife. What for? You sinned, and sinned—there's no counting the sins! I watched it all, and wondered. When would it end? And now your end has come. You're being paid back in lead. The wagon lost a wheel!"

"He's raving," Artamonov decided. Still, he asked:

"Why am I out here?"

"They've turned you out of the house."

"Miron?"

"Everybody."

"What about Yakov?"

"He's been gone long since."

"Where's Ilya?"

"With the new power, they say. That must be why you're alive at all—because he's with them. Otherwise. . . ."

"He's raving." Artamonov was sure of that now, and fell silent, musing: "Doddering in his old age. That was only to be expected."

Small, lacklustre stars appeared in the sky. The stars had never looked like that before, that Pyotr could remember. Nor had there ever been so many of them.

Tikhon took his hat off, and, twisting it to and fro, resumed his grumbling:

"It's coming back on you, all that sly foolishness of yours. Beggars have it easier."

And suddenly, in an entirely different tone, he asked:

"Do you remember that boy? The clerk's youngster?"

"Well? What about him?"

Pyotr Artamonov did not know whether to be frightened, or merely surprised, by this unexpected question. But he knew well enough a moment later, when Tikhon said:

"You killed him, like Zakhar killed his puppy. What did you kill him for?"

Now Artamonov understood. Tikhon had laid information against him, after all these years, and now, sick as he was, he was under arrest. But this did not particularly alarm him. Rather, it exasperated him, by its inhuman stupidity. Propping himself on his elbows, he lifted his head and began to speak, quietly, with a mixture of reproach and mockery. There was a dryness in his mouth, and a bitter taste on his tongue.

"That's a lie! And besides, there's a time limit for any misdemeanor. The time limit's long past. You've missed out, yes, and gone off your head, besides. You forget what you saw, what you said yourself that day. . . ."

"Well, what did I say?" the old man put in. "I didn't see you do it, that's so; but I understood. I said what I did to see how you'd act. I lied, and you were only too pleased—grabbed at the lie with both hands! I've watched and watched—waited and waited. . . . And you're all of you the same. Alexei Ilyich made his drunken father-in-law set fire to Barsky's tavern. And your father guessed who was behind it, so he made sure the drunkard got beaten to death. Nikita Ilyich knew. He had brains, too. He might have held his tongue, only he got so angry at you, he told me about it. I said to him, 'You're a monk. You ought to forget such things. But me—I'll remember!' You made him afraid, the sort of things you did. Drove him to the noose, and then to the monastery—to pray for you! He was afraid, even, to pray for you. He didn't dare! And on account of that he lost his faith in God. . . ."

It seemed as though Tikhon would talk to the end of creation. He spoke quietly, thoughtfully, with no apparent malice. In the thick, hot murk of the advancing evening, his figure was almost indistin-

guishable. His husky words, like black beetles rustling by night, caused Artamonov no fear. But their weight bore him down; their unexpectedness dumbed him. He grew more and more certain that this incomprehensible man had lost his reason. Tikhon drew a long breath, like one who has thrown a heavy burden from his shoulders, and talked on, in the same monotonous drone, digging up things past and gone, things better forgotten.

"My faith, too, you killed—you Artamonovs. Nikita Ilyich killed my faith, all on account of you. He lost his, and killed mine. You have no God, no, nor no devil. The icons in your house are just to fool the world. What do you believe in? It's past understanding. Do you believe in anything? Frauds. Your whole lives were fraud. Now it's all uncovered. They've pulled the mask off you...."

Overcoming the resistance of his body, Artamonov swung down his fearfully heavy legs. But the soles of his feet did not feel the contact of the floor, and he had the feeling that his legs had broken away, had left him hanging in midair. Frightened, he clutched at Tikhon's shoulder.

"Where to?" the yardman demanded, roughly shaking him off. "Don't you touch me. You can't strangle me—you haven't got the strength. Your father, he was strong, but he wasted his strength on bragging. You killed my faith, I say. And now I'm afraid to die. All from watching your tricks, you devils."

Artamonov was growing steadily hungrier; and he was very much alarmed by the state of his legs.

"Can I be dying? I'm not even seventy-five. Good God...."

He tried to lie down again, but could not lift his legs. Then he told Tikhon:

"Help me. Lift up my legs."

Tikhon lifted the dead legs of his one-time employer onto the bench, spat, and sat down again, bending over his hat. Something glittered in his hand. Peering intently, Artamonov saw that it was a needle. Tikhon was sewing something up in his hat, in this darkness —thus confirming his insanity. A grey moth fluttered over his head. Out in the orchard, three strips of yellow light appeared. A voice, distant but clear, said:

"There's no turning back for us, comrades, and there never will be."

Tikhon drowned it out.

"Your father, too. He killed my brother."

"That's a lie," said Artamonov mechanically—but immediately asked: "When?"

"Then."

"Why do you lie and lie, you insane fool?" cried Artamonov, in sudden indignation. Hunger was gnawing at him, draining his strength. "What are you after? Are you my conscience? My judge? Why didn't you say anything, these thirty years and more?"

"Because I didn't. I was thinking."

"Piling up spite? Ekh.... Well, go on—inform the police."

"There is no police."

"Tell them: 'Look at this man. All my life, he fed and clothed me. Sentence him!' Ah, but you've informed already, haven't you? What are you after, I want to know. Threaten me, why don't you? Squeeze money out of me."

"You haven't got any money. You haven't got anything, nor ever did have. Judges? What do I care for your judges? I'm my own judge."

"Well, then, what are you threatening me with, you raving idiot?"

But Tikhon, Artamonov vaguely sensed, was not threatening at all. Tikhon grumbled:

"The end has come for all the sons of Cain. Why did they kill my brother?"

"It's a lie about your brother!"

The old men were talking faster now, interrupting one another.

"A lie? I was with him that night."

"With whom?"

"My brother. I ran away when your father killed him. That was his blood your father bled with, when he died. What did he need to spill blood for?"

"You're too late."

"Well, and now they've downed you, thrown you out. Nobody left to defend you. And I stand aside and watch, the same as ever."

"As crazy as ever."

Artamonov felt that the former ditch digger was driving him into a corner, into a pit, where all was obscure, incomprehensible, appalling. He repeated again and again:

"You're too late. It's a lie. You never had any brother. Your kind never has anything."

"We have conscience."

"You muddled my son for me, Ilya. You made him go wrong."

"It was you muddled me, you Artamonovs. Nikita Ilyich and his talk...."

"He said it was you started him that way."

"How many times I thought I'd kill your father! I almost swung my spade down on his head.... You're foxy."

"Yourself, you...."

"Serafim, you had to have. He mixed me up too. He never hurt anyone, but he didn't live right. How is that? Foxy tricks everywhere you turn."

"Who goes? Where to?" cried a loud, angry voice in the darkness. "How many times do you skunks have to be told? No gallivanting after eight!"

Tikhon got up, went to the door, and seemed to fall out into the darkness. Artamonov, crushed by excitement, hunger, fatigue, saw something black and broad cut across the three strips of greasy light in the orchard. He closed his eyes, in expectation of something still more fearful.

"Did you get anything?" Tikhon asked somebody.

"This. That's all."

His wife's voice. Where had she been? Why had she left him alone with this old man?

Artamonov opened his eyes, and, propping himself on his elbows, peered at the doorway, now plugged by two black figures. Suddenly he recalled how, all his life, he had puzzled over the problem: who was to blame? By whose fault had his life been so unbearably messed up, so saturated with disappointment and deceit? Now it was all clear.

His wife came up and, bending over him, whispered:

"Well, thank the good Lord...."

"There, Tikhon—she's the one to blame!" said Artamonov firmly, breathing a sigh of relief. "She was greedy, and she drove me. That's how it was!"

And, triumphantly, he growled:

"Nikita, too—it was all on account of her. You know yourself."

Artamonov gasped for breath. Strange: his wife did not get angry, or frightened. She did not begin to cry. Stroking his hair with an unsteady hand, she whispered, anxiously but caressingly:

"Shh. Don't make any noise. They're all so cross, out there."

"Give me something to eat."

She thrust into his hand a dill pickle and a soggy hunk of bread. The pickle was warm, and the bread stuck to his fingers like raw dough.

Artamonov cried out in amazement:

"What's this? This—for me? And that's all?"

"Quiet, in Christ's name," Natalya whispered. "There isn't anything. And the soldiers, too. . . ."

"Is this what you give me, for all that's past? For all my fears, and all my life?"

Mumbling, he weighed the bread in his hand. He realized dimly that something had happened, something intolerable, some mortal insult. And for this even she, Natalya, was not to blame.

He threw the bread towards the door, saying dully, but determinedly:

"I won't have it."

Tikhon picked up the bread, and blew at it. Natalya tried once more to thrust it into her husband's hand, whispering:

"Eat. Don't be angry."

Pushing her hand away, Artamonov closed his eyes tight and repeated, with bitter fury:

"I won't have it. Get away."

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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