लाल बहादुर शास्त्री प्रशासन अकादमी
Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration
मसूरी
MUSSOORIE

पुस्तकालय
LIBRARY

प्रवाप्ति संख्या
Accession No. ~~17090~~ 112776

वर्ग संख्या
Class No. 891

पुस्तक संख्या
Book No. GOK

M. GORKY

SELECTED WORKS



In two volumes

1948

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow

M. GORKY

SELECTED WORKS

I

Stories Plays

1948

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

Moscow



Contents

Stories

	Page
Makar Chudra. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	9
Old Izergil. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	22
Chelkash. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	44
Afloat. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	79
Twenty-six Men and a Girl. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	93
Malva. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	107
Song of the Stormy Petrel. *Translated by M. Wettlin*	160
Comrade. *Translated by R. Prokofieva*	162
The Ninth of January. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	168
Tales of Italy. *Translated by R. Prokofieva*	195
The Romancer. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	244
The Mordvinian Girl. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	264
A Man is Born. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	291
The Break-Up. *Translated by R. Prokofieva*	303
How a Song was Composed. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	327
The Philanderer. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	332
The Boss. *Translated by B. Isaacs*	349
A Droll Story. *Translated by J. Fineberg*	450

Plays

The Lower Depths. *Translated by M. Wettlin*	483
Enemies. *Translated by M. Wettlin*	563
Yegor Bulychev and Others. *Translated by H. Kasanina*	641


Stories

MAKAR CHUDRA

A COLD wet wind blew from the sea, wafting over the steppes the pensive melody of the splashing surf and the rustle of shrubbery on the beach. Now and then its gusts brought shrivelled yellow leaves and whirled them into the flickering flames of the campfire. The gloom of autumnal night around us quivered and receded apprehensively, disclosing for a brief moment the endless steppe on the left, the boundless sea on the right, and opposite me the figure of Makar Chudra, the old Gypsy, who was looking after the horses of his Gypsy camp pitched within fifty paces of where we sat.

Heedless of the cold blasts that blew open his Caucasian coat and mercilessly buffeted his bared hairy chest, he reclined in a graceful vigorous pose with his face towards me, drawing methodically at his huge pipe, emitting thick puffs of smoke through his mouth and nose, staring out over my head into the deathly hushed darkness of the steppes, talking incessantly and making not a single movement to shield himself from the cruel gusts of wind.

"So you're on the tramp? That's fine! You've made a splendid choice, my lad. That's the way: trot around and see things, and when you've seen all you want, lie down and die—that's all!

"Life? Other people?" he went on, having lent a sceptical ear to my protest about his "that's all." "H'm. Why should that worry you? Aren't you Life? Other people live without you and'll live their lives without you. Do you imagine anybody needs you? You're neither bread nor a stick, and nobody wants you.

"To learn and teach, you say? But can you learn how to make people happy? No, you cannot. You get grey hairs first before talking about teaching. Teach what? Every one knows what he wants. Those that are cleverer take what there is to take, the sillier ones get nothing, but every man learns himself.

"They're a curious lot, those people of yours. All herded together and treading on each other's toes when there's so much room in the world," he waved a sweeping hand towards the steppes. "And toiling away all the time. What for? Whom for? Nobody knows. You see a fellow ploughing, and think—there he is sweating out his strength drop by drop on that land, then he'll lie down in it and rot away. He leaves nothing after him, he sees nothing from that field of his and dies as he was born—a fool.

"D'you mean to say he was born to dig the earth and die without having managed to dig a grave for himself? Does he know what freedom is? Has he any idea of the vast and glorious steppe? Does the music of the steppe gladden his heart? He's a slave, from the moment he is born, a slave all his life long, and that's all! What can he do for himself? All he can do is to hang himself, if he learned a little sense.

"Now look at me; at fifty-eight I've seen so much that if you'd write it down on paper it would fill a thousand bags like the one you've got there. You just ask me what places I haven't been to? There aren't such places. You've got no idea of the places I've been to. That's the way to live—gad about the world, and that's all! Don't stay long in one place—it's not worth it! Like day and night that chase each other around the world, you keep chasing yourself away from thoughts of life, so as not to grow sick of it. Once you stop to think you'll get sick of life—that's how it always happens. It happened to me too. Humph! So it did, my lad.

"I was in prison, in Galicia. What am I living on this earth for?—I started to mope, feeling sort of dreary—it's dreary in prison, my lad, ever so dreary! And I felt sick at heart when I looked out of the window at the fields, so sick as though some one were gripping and wrenching my heart. Who can say what he lives for? No one can say it, my lad! And it's no use asking yourself about it. Live, and that's all. Go about and look around, and you'll never be bored. I very nearly hung myself by my belt that time, that's a fact!

"Huh! I spoke to a man once. He was a serious man, one of yours, a Russian. You must live, he says, not the way you want, but according to the word of God. Obey the Lord and he will give

you everything you ask for. He himself was all in rags and holes. I told him to ask God for a new suit of clothes. He fell into a rage and drove me away, cursing. And he'd just been telling me that one should forgive and love his fellow creatures. He might have forgiven me if what I said offended his lordship. There's a teacher for you! They teach you to eat less, while they themselves eat ten times a day."

He spat into the fire and fell silent, while refilling his pipe. The wind moaned plaintively and softly, the horses whinnied in the darkness, and the tender passionate strains of the *dumka* melody floated up from the Gypsy camp. The beautiful Nonka, Makar's daughter, was singing. I knew that deep throaty-toned voice of hers, that always sounded so strange, discontented and imperious, whether she sang a song or said "good day." The warm pallor of her dark-skinned face was fixed in a look of queenly hauteur, and the deep pools of her dark brown eyes shone with a realization of her own irresistible loveliness and disdain for everything that was not she.

Makar held out his pipe.

"Take a smoke! She sings well, that lass, eh? I should say so! Would you like a girl like that to love you? No? That's right! Never believe girls, and keep away from them. Girls find kissing better and more pleasant than I do smoking a pipe, but once you've kissed her say good-bye to your liberty. She'll bind you to her by invisible strings which you'll never be able to break, and you'll lay your soul at her feet. That's a fact! Beware of the girls! They're all liars! She'll say she loves you more'n anything in the world, but you just prick her with a pin and she'll break your heart. I know a lot about their kind, I do! Well, my lad, d'you want me to tell you a story, a true story? Try to remember it if you can, and it's a free bird you'll be all your life.

"Once upon a time there was a young Gypsy, a young Gypsy named Loiko Zobar. All Hungary and Bohemia and Slavonia and all around the sea everybody knew him—he was a fine lad! There wasn't a village in those parts, but where a half-dozen or so of the inhabitants didn't swear to God they'd kill him. But Loiko went on living, and if he took a fancy to a horse, Zobar'd be curvetting about on that horse even if you was to put a regi-

ment of soldiers to guard it! Ah! He wasn't afraid of anybody, not likely! Why, if the prince of devils with all his pack came to him, he'd as likely as not stick a knife in him, and he'd certainly curse him roundly and send the whole pack off with a flea in its ear—you can take that from me!

"And all the Gypsy camps knew him or had heard of him. All he loved was horses, and nothing more, and even then not for long—he'd ride 'em a bit then sell 'em, and the money was anybody's for the asking. He had nothing that he cherished—if you wanted his heart he'd tear it out of his breast and give it to you, as long as it made you happy. That's the kind he was, my lad!

"Our caravan was wandering at the time through Bukowina—that was about ten years ago. Once, on a night in spring, we were sitting around—myself, the old soldier Danilo who fought under Kossuth, and old Noor and all the others and Radda, Danilo's daughter.

"You know my girl Nonka, don't you? A beautiful maid she is! Well, you couldn't compare her to Radda—too great an honour! There aren't any words to describe that girl Radda. Maybe her beauty could be played on the violin, and even then only by a person who knew that violin as well as he did his own soul.

"She seared the hearts of many of fine lad she did, aye, many a fine lad! In Morava a magnate, an old, shock-headed man saw her and was struck all of a heap. Sat on his horse and stared, shivering as with the ague. He was pranked out like the devil on a holiday, in a rich Ukrainian coat embroidered with gold, and the sword at his side all set in precious stones flashed like lightning whenever his horse stamped its foot, and the blue velvet of his cap was like a bit of sky—he was a big lord, that old gent! He stared and stared, then he says to Radda: 'Hi, give me a kiss, I'll give you my purse!' She just turned away without a word! 'Forgive me if I've offended you, can't you look at me more kindly?' said the old magnate, immediately coming down a peg, and he threw a purse at her feet—a fat purse, brother! And she spurned it in the dust, casual like, with her foot, and that's all.

"'Ah, what a maid!' he groaned, and flicked his horse with his riding crop and was gone in a cloud of dust.

"The next day he came again. 'Who's her father?' he went thundering about the camp. Danilo stepped out. 'Sell me your daughter, take whatever you want!' And Danilo, he says: 'Only the nobility sell everything from their pigs to their conscience, but I fought under Kossuth, and don't traffic in anything!' The other became furious, made a snatch for his sword, but one of the boys stuck a lighted tinder in the horse's ear and he made off with his rider in a flash. We struck tents and moved off. We hadn't been travelling two days when up he dashes again! 'Hi, you,' he says, 'before God and you my conscience is clear, give that maid to me in marriage. I'll share all I have with you, I'm mighty rich!' He was all on fire and swaying in the saddle like feather-grass in the wind. That set us all thinking.

" 'Well, daughter, what do you say?' Danilo muttered under his moustache.

" 'What would the eagle be if she went into the crow's nest of her own free will?' Radda asked us.

"Danilo laughed, and so did we all.

" 'Well said, daughter! Hear that, Sir? Nothing doing! Look among the doves—they're more docile.' And we moved on.

"That gentleman seized his cap, threw it to the ground and galloped away so furiously that the very earth shook. That's the kind of girl Radda was, my lad!

"Yes! Well, one night as we sat around we heard music floating over the steppe. Fine music! It set your blood on fire and lured you into the unknown. That music, we all felt, made one yearn for something after which, if you got it, life would no longer be worth living, unless it was, as kings over all the earth, my lad!

"Well, a horse loomed out of the darkness, and on the horse a man sat and played as he approached us. He drew up at the campfire, ceased playing and smiled down at us.

" 'Ah, why, that's you, Zobar!' Danilo cried out to him joyfully. Yes, that was Loiko Zobar!

"His moustaches lay on his shoulders and mingled with his locks, his eyes were as bright as stars and his smile was like the sun so help me God! He and his horse might have been forged of a single piece of iron. There he stood red as blood in the

firelight, his teeth flashing in a smile! Damned if I didn't love him then more than I loved myself, even before he had spoken a word to me or had as much as noticed my existence!

"Yes, my lad, that's the kind of man he was! He'd look into your eyes and captivate your soul, and you wouldn't be the least bit ashamed of it, only feel proud about it. With a man like that you feel nobler yourself. Such men are rare, my friend! Perhaps that's better so. If there'd be too much of a good thing in this world it wouldn't be looked on as a good thing. Aye! Well, let's get on with the story.

"Radda she says: 'You play well, Loiko! Who made you such a sweet-toned delicate fiddle?' He laughed—'I made it myself! And I made it not of wood, but from the breast of a young girl whom I loved dearly, and the strings I play on are her heartstrings. The fiddle plays a little false, but I know how to handle the bow!'

"Our breed, you know, tries straight away to befog a girl's eyes, so they be dimmed with sad yearning for a fellow without kindling his own heart. That was Loiko's way too. But Radda was not to be caught that way. She turned away with a yawn and said: 'And people said Zobar was clever and adroit—what liars!' With that she walked away.

" 'Oho, pretty maid, you've got sharp teeth!' said Loiko with *a flashing eye, getting* off his horse. 'How do you do, brothers! *Well, here I am come to you!*'

" 'Welcome, guest!' said Danilo in reply. We kissed, had a talk and went to bed.... We slept soundly. In the morning we saw that Zobar's head was tied up with a rag. What's that? Oh, his horse accidentally hurt him with its hoof while he was asleep.

"Ha-a! We guessed who that horse was and smiled into our moustaches, and Danilo smiled too. Well, wasn't Loiko worthy of Radda? I should think so! However fair a maid may be, she has a narrow, petty soul, and though you'd hang a pood of gold round her neck she'd never be any better than she was. Well, anyway!

"We lived a pretty long time on that spot, things were going well with us and Zobar was with us. That was a comrade for you! Wise like an old man, informed on everything and knew how to read and write Russian and Magyar. When he'd start speaking you'd forget about sleep and could listen to him for ages! As

for playing—well salt my hide if there's another man in the world could play like that! He'd draw his bow across the strings and your heart'd begin to flutter, then he'd draw it again and it'd stop beating while you listened, and he just played and smiled. You felt like crying and laughing one and the same time when listening to him. Now you'd hear some one moaning bitterly, pleading for help and lacerating your heart as with a knife; now the steppe telling the heavens a fairy tale, a sad tale; now a maid weeping, bidding farewell to her beloved! And now a valiant youth calling his beloved to the steppe. Then suddenly—heigh-ho! A brave merry tune fills the air, and the very sun, it seems, bids fair to start a jig up in the sky! Yes, my lad, that's how it was!

"Every fibre in your body understood that song, and you became its slave, body and soul. If Loiko had then cried out: 'To knives, comrades!' we'd have snatched up our knives as one man and followed him blindly. He could do anything he wanted with a man, and everybody loved him, loved him mightily—only Radda had no eyes for the lad. That wouldn't have been so bad, worse was she mocked him. She smote that lad's heart sorely, aye sorely! He'd gnash his teeth, Loiko would, pulling at his moustache. Eyes darker than an abyss, and sometimes with a gleam of something fit to harrow up the soul. At night he'd go far out into the steppe, would Loiko, and his fiddle would weep till morning, weep over the death of Loiko's liberty. And we lay listening and thinking: what's to be done? We knew that if two stones are rolling down on each other it's no use getting between them—they'd crush you. That's how things were.

"Well, we all sat assembled, discussing affairs. Then things got dull. So Danilo asks Loiko: 'Sing a song, Loiko, something to cheer the soul!' The lad glanced at Radda who was lying at a little distance with her face looking up into the sky, and drew his bow across the strings. The fiddle spoke as though it were really a maiden's heart, and Loiko sang:

Hey-ho! A flame the heart doth feed,
Vast the steppe and wide!
Fleet as the wind my gallant steed,
Strong-armed rider astride!

"Radda turned her head, and rising on her elbow, smiled mockingly into the singer's eyes. He reddened like the dawn.

Hey-ho-hey! Up comrade arise!
Onward let us race!
Where steppe in deepest darkness lies,
To waiting dawn's embrace!
Hey-ho! We fly to meet the day,
Soaring above the plain!
Touch not thee in passing, pray
The beauteous moon with thy mane!

"Did he sing! Nobody sings like that any more! And Radda says, letting the words drop:

" 'You shouldn't fly so high, Loiko. You might fall and come down on your nose in a puddle and wet your moustache, be careful.' Loiko glared fiercely at her and said nothing—he swallowed it and went on singing:

Hey-ho-hey! Lest daybreak's flush
Overtake us in idle slumber,
Away, away, ere for shame we blush,
And men begin to wonder!

" 'What a song!' said Danilo, 'never heard anything like it before, may the Devil make a pipe out of me if I lie!' Old Noor twitched his moustache and shrugged his shoulders and everybody was delighted with that brave song of Zobar's! Only Radda didn't like it.

" 'That's how a wasp once buzzed when he tried to imitate the cry of an eagle,' said she, and it was as if she had thrown snow over us.

" 'Maybe you'd like a taste of the whip, Radda?' Danilo said, starting up, but Zobar threw his cap on the ground and spoke, his face as dark as the earth:

" 'Stop, Danilo! A spirited horse needs a steel bridle! Give your daughter to me as wife!'

" 'Now you've said something!' said Danilo with a smile. 'Take her if you can!'

" 'Good!' said Loiko and spoke thus to Radda:

" 'Well, lass, listen to me a while and don't put on airs! I've seen a lot of your sisterhood in my time, aye quite a lot! But not

one of them ever touched my heart like you have. Ah, Radda, you have snared my soul! Well? What's to be must needs be, and ... the steed does not exist on which one could escape from one's self!... I take you to wife before God, my conscience, your father and all these people. But mind, you are not to oppose my will—I am a free man and will live the way I want!' And he went up to her, his teeth clenched and eyes flashing. We saw him holding out his hand to her—now, thought we, Radda has bridled the horse of the steppe! Suddenly we saw his hand go up and he fell, hitting the ground with the back of his head with a crash!...

"Good heavens! It was as if a bullet had struck the lad in the heart. Radda, it appears, had swept the whiplash round his legs and pulled it, sending him off his feet.

"There she was lying back again without stirring, with a mocking smile on her face. We waited to see what would happen next. Loiko sat on the ground clutching his head as though afraid it would burst. Then he got up quietly and walked off into the steppe without a glance at anyone. Noor whispered to me: 'Keep your eye on him!' And I crawled after Zobar into the darkness of the steppe. Yes, my lad!"

Makar knocked the ashes out of his pipe and began refilling it again. I drew my coat closer about me and lay looking at his old face, blackened by the sun and winds. He was whispering to himself, shaking his head sternly; his grizzled moustache moved up and down and the wind stirred the hair on his head. He was like an old oak tree seared by lightning, but still strong and sturdy and proud of its strength. The sea still carried on a whispered converse with the shore and the wind still carried its whispers over the steppe. Nonka had stopped singing, and the clouds that had gathered in the sky made the autumn night still darker.

"Loiko dragged his feet wearily along, his head bent and hands hanging nervelessly by his sides, and when he reached a ravine by the stream he sat down on a boulder and groaned. It was a groan that made my heart bleed for pity, but I didn't go up to him. Grief won't be comforted by words, will it? That's just it! He sat on for an hour, then another, and a third, just sat without stirring.

"And I was lying on the ground nearby. It was a bright night, the whole steppe was bathed in silver moonlight and you could see far away in the distance.

"Suddenly, I saw Radda hurrying towards us from the camp.

"That cheered me up! 'Ah, splendid!' I thought, 'brave lass, Radda!' She drew close, but he hadn't heard her coming. She put her hand on his shoulder; Loiko started, unclasped his hands and raised his head. Then he leapt to his feet and gripped his knife! 'Ah, he'll knife the maid, I thought,' and I was just going to shout out to the camp and run to them when I suddenly heard:

" 'Drop it! I'll smash your head!' I looked—there was Radda with a pistol in her hand aimed at Zobar's head. There's a hell-cat for you! Well, I thought, they're now matched in strength, I wonder what'll happen next?

" 'Look here!'—Radda thrust the pistol into her waistband—'I didn't come here to kill you, but to make up—drop the knife!' He dropped it and looked sullenly into her eyes! It was a sight, brother! There were two people glaring at each other like animals at bay, and both such fine, brave people. There were just the shining moon and I looking on, that's all.

" 'Now, listen to me, Loiko. I love you!' said Radda. He merely shrugged, as though tied hand and foot.

" 'I've seen brave youths, but you're braver and better in face and soul. Any of them would have shaven their moustache had I so much as winked my eye, all of them would have fallen at my feet had I wished it. But what's the sense? They're none too brave anyway, and I'd have made them all womanish. There are few brave Gypsies left in the world as it is, very few, Loiko. I never loved anybody, Loiko, but you I love. But I love liberty too! I love liberty, Loiko, more than I do you. But I cannot live without you, as you cannot live without me. So I want you to be mine, body and soul, do you hear?' He smiled a twisted smile.

" 'I hear! It cheers the heart to hear your speeches! Say some more!'

" 'This more I want to say, Loiko: no matter how you twist I'll have my way with you, you'll be mine. So don't waste time—my kisses and caresses are awaiting you, and I shall kiss you sweetly, Loiko! Under my kisses you shall forget your adventurous life ... and your lively songs which so gladden the hearts of the Gypsy lads will be heard no more in the steppe—you shall sing other songs, tender love songs to me, Radda.... Waste not

time then—I have spoken, therefore tomorrow you shall obey me like the youth who obeys his elder comrade. You shall bow the knee to me before the whole Gypsy camp and kiss my right hand—then I shall be your wife.'

"So that's what she was after, the mad girl! It was unheard of! It had been the custom once among the Montenegrins, so the old men said, but never among the Gypsies! Well, my lad, can you think of anything funnier than that? Not if you racked your brains a year, you wouldn't!

"Loiko recoiled and his cry rang out over the steppe like that of a man wounded in the breast. Radda winced but did not betray herself.

" 'Well, good-bye till tomorrow, and tomorrow you will do as I bade you. Do you hear, Loiko?'

" 'I hear! I will,' groaned Zobar and held his arms out to her. She went without even turning her head, and he swayed like a tree broken by the wind and dropped to the ground, sobbing and laughing.

"That is what the accursed Radda did to the poor lad. I had a job bringing him to his senses.

"Ah well! Why the devil should people have to drain the cup of misery? Who cares to hear a human heart moaning in pain and grief? Make it out if you can!...

"I went back to the camp and told the old men all about it. They thought the matter over and decided to wait and see what would happen. And this is what happened. When we all gathered next evening around the campfire Loiko joined us. He was gloomy and had become terribly haggard overnight and his eyes were sunken. He cast them down and, without raising them, said to us:

" 'I want to tell you something, comrades. I looked into my heart this night and found no place therein for the old carefree life of mine. Radda alone dwells in it—and that's all! There she is, beautiful Radda, smiling like a queen! She loves her liberty more than me, and I love her more than my liberty, and I have decided to bend my knee to her, as she bade me, so that all may see how her beauty has conquered brave Loiko Zobar, who until he knew her used to play with the girls like a gerfalcon with the ducks. After that she will become my wife and will kiss and caress me, so that I will have no more desire to sing you songs

and will not regret my liberty! Is that right, Radda?' He raised his eyes and looked darkly at her. She silently and sternly nodded her head and pointed her hand to her feet. And we looked on, understanding nothing. We even felt like going away, not to see Loiko Zobar prostrate himself at a maid's feet, even though that maid were Radda. We felt sort of ashamed, and sorry and sad.

"'Well!' cried Radda to Zobar.

"'Aha, don't be in a hurry, there's plenty of time, you'll have more than enough of it ...' he retorted with a laugh. And that laugh had a ring of steel in it.

"'So that's all I wanted to tell you, comrades! What next? It remains next but to test whether Radda has so strong a heart as she showed me. I'll test it—forgive me, brothers!'

"Before we could fathom these words Radda lay stretched on the earth with Zobar's curved knife sunk to the hilt in her breast. We were horror-struck.

"And Radda pulled out the knife, threw it aside, and pressing a lock of her black hair to the wound, said loudly and audibly with a smile:

"'Farewell, Loiko! I knew you would do that!...' and she died....

"D'you grasp the kind of maid that was, my lad? A hell of a maid she was, may I be damned to eternity!

"'Oh! Now I'll kneel at your feet, proud queen!' Loiko's loud cry echoed all over the steppe, and throwing himself to the ground he pressed his lips to the feet of dead Radda and lay motionless. We took off our caps and stood in silence.

"What do you say to that, my lad? Aye, that's just it! Noor said: 'We ought to bind him!...' No hand would lift to bind Loiko Zobar, not a hand would lift, and Noor knew it. He waved his hand and turned away. And Danilo picked up the knife which Radda had cast aside and gazed long at it, his moustache twitching. The blade of that knife, so curved and sharp, was still wet with Radda's blood. And then Danilo went up to Zobar and stuck the knife into his back over the heart. For he was Radda's father, was Danilo the old soldier!

"'There you are!' said Loiko in a clear voice, turning to Danilo, and he followed on the heels of Radda.

"And we stood looking. There lay Radda, pressing a lock of

hair to her bosom, and her open eyes stared into the blue sky, while at her feet brave Loiko Zobar lay stretched. His face was covered by his locks and you couldn't see his face.

"We stood lost in thought. Old Danilo's moustaches trembled and his bushy brows were knitted. He stared at the sky and said nothing, while Noor, grey old Noor, lay down with his face on the ground and all his old body was racked with sobs.

"There was something to cry over, my lad!

"... So you're going on the tramp—well, go your way, don't turn off the road. You go straight on. Maybe you won't go to the dogs. That's all, my lad!"

Makar fell silent, and putting the pipe into his pouch, wrapped his coat over his chest. Rain began to fall in a drizzle, the wind was rising, the sea growled and rumbled angrily. The horses one by one came up to the dying campfire and regarding us with their big intelligent eyes stopped motionless around us in a dense ring.

"Hey, hey, ho!" Makar cried to them kindly, and patting the neck of his favourite black horse, said, turning to me:

"Time to go to sleep!" and, drawing his coat over his head and stretching his great length out on the ground he fell silent. I did not feel like sleeping. I gazed into the darkness of the steppe and before my eyes swum the queenly beautiful image of proud Radda. She was pressing a lock of hair to the wound in her breast and through her delicate swarthy fingers the blood oozed drop by drop, falling to the ground like flaming-red little stars.

Following close on her heels there floated the vision of the brave Gypsy lad Loiko Zobar. His face was screened by thick black locks from under which big cold tears fell fast....

The rain grew heavier and the sea was chanting a mournful solemn dirge to the proud pair of Gypsy lovers—to Loiko Zobar and to Radda, the daughter of the old soldier Danilo.

And they both hovered silently in the misty darkness, and the dashing Loiko, try as he may, was unable to catch up with the proud Radda.

OLD IZERGIL

I

I HEARD these stories at a place on the Bessarabian coast, near Akkerman.

One evening, having finished our day's grape picking, the group of Moldavians with whom I was working, went off to the beach. I remained behind with old Izergil, reclining on the ground, in the shade of a thick vine, silently watching the silhouettes of the people who were going down to the sea merge with the falling shadows of night.

They strolled down to the beach singing and laughing. The men in short tunics and wide pantaloons had bronzed faces, thick black moustaches and heavy locks of hair that reached down to their shoulders. The women and girls, merry and graceful, had dark blue eyes, and their faces too were bronzed. Their black, silky hair hung loose down their backs, and the warm, light breeze, that blew through the tresses, caused the ornamental coins that were plaited into them to tinkle. The wind blew in a broad, even stream; but now and again it seemed to leap over some invisible obstacle, and heavy gusts caused the women's hair to spread in fantastic manes around their heads, giving them the appearance of having walked out of some strange legend. As they receded further and further away from us, the night and my imagination clothed them with increasing beauty.

Someone was playing a fiddle.... A girl was singing in a soft contralto. The sound of laughter was heard....

The air was impregnated with the pungent odour of the sea and of the greasy exhalation of the earth, which the rain had thoroughly saturated just before sundown. Even now fragments of clouds wandered across the sky in grotesque shapes and colours—here soft, like wreaths of smoke, blue and ash-grey, and there ragged, like

fragments of rock, a dull black or brown. Between them fondly peeped dark blue patches of the sky, dotted with golden stars. All this —the sounds and smells, the clouds and the people—looked strangely beautiful and sad, like the beginning of a wonderful tale. And everything seemed as though it were checked in its growth, as if it were dying. The sounds of the voices, receded further into the distance, subsided, and became nothing but mournful sighs.

"Why didn't you go with them?" old Izergil asked me, nodding in the direction in which the people had gone.

Time had bent her double; her once shining black eyes were dull and bleary. Her dry voice sounded strange; it crackled, as if she were crunching bones.

"I didn't feel like it!" I answered.

"Ekh!... You Russians are born old. You are all as gloomy as demons.... Our girls are afraid of you.... But you are young and strong...."

The moon rose, large, round and blood-red, seemingly out of the bowels of this steppe, which had absorbed so much human flesh and blood in its time, and probably for that reason had become so rich and fertile. And as it rose it threw upon us the lace-like shadows of the vine leaves, and the old woman and I appeared to be covered with a net. To the left of us the shadows of the clouds flitted across the steppe; and the clouds themselves, lit up by the bluish rays of the moon, seemed brighter and more transparent.

"Look! That's Larra!"

I looked in the direction in which the old woman pointed with her trembling hand and crooked fingers, and I saw shadows floating, many of them; but one was darker and thicker than the rest, and it moved faster and lower than its sisters—it fell from a clump of cloud which was floating nearer to the ground and was moving faster than the others.

"I can't see anybody," I said.

"Your eyes are worse than mine, an old woman's! Look! Over there! The dark one, running across the steppe!"

I looked again, and again saw nothing but shadows.

"That's a shadow! Why do you call it Larra!"

"Because it is he. He is now no more than a shadow. No wonder! He has lived thousands of years; the sun dried up his body

his blood and his bones, and the wind blew them away like dust. You see what God can do to a man for being proud!"

"Tell me how it happened!" I begged of the old woman, expecting to hear one of the wonderful stories that are composed in the steppes.

And she told me the following story.

"This happened many thousands of years ago. Far beyond the sea, where the sun rises, there is a country with a big river; and in that country every tree leaf and blade of grass gives as much shadow as a man needs to shelter him from the sun, which is very hot there.

"That's how bountiful the earth is in that country!

"In that country there lived a powerful tribe of men. They herded their cattle and spent their strength and manhood in hunting, in feasting after the hunt, singing songs and frolicking with the girls.

"One day, during a feast, one of the girls, black-haired and tender like the night, was carried away by an eagle, which swooped down from the sky. The arrows which the men shot at the eagle, pitiful things, failed to reach it and dropped back to earth. The men then went out to search for the girl, but they searched in vain. They failed to find her. And then they forgot about her, as everything on earth is forgotten."

The old woman sighed and paused. Her grating voice had sounded like the complaints of all the forgotten ages which had revived in her breast in shadowy recollections. The sea had softly accompanied the opening of one of those ancient legends which had probably been composed on its shore.

"Twenty years after, the girl came back herself, worn and haggard. With her was a young man, handsome and strong, as she herself had been twenty years before. When they asked her where she had been, she said that the eagle had carried her away to the mountains, and she had lived with him there as his wife. The young man was her son; his father was dead. When he grew feeble he soared for the last time high into the sky and, folding his wings, dropped heavily onto the jagged crags of the mountain and was killed....

"Everybody looked in wonder at the eagle's son and saw that he differed in no way from themselves, except that his eyes were cold and proud, like those of the king of birds. When they talked

to him he answered if he had a mind to, or else remained silent; and when the elders of the tribe came and spoke to him, he addressed them as an equal. They regarded this as an affront. They upbraided him and said he was still an unfeathered arrow with an unsharpened point, and told him that they were honoured and obeyed by thousands like him, and by thousands twice as old as he. But he looked boldly at them and answered that he had no equal, and if others honoured them, he did not wish to do so. Oh! . . . Then they became really angry with him, and angrily they said:

" 'There is no place for him among us! Let him go wherever he wills!'

"He laughed and went where he willed—to a beautiful girl who had been gazing intently at him: he went up to her and embraced her. But she was the daughter of one of the elders who had rebuked him; and although he was so handsome she pushed him away, for she was afraid of her father. She pushed him away and walked off; but he struck her, and when she fell to the ground he stood upon her chest, so that the blood spurted from her mouth to the sky. The girl gasped, writhed like a snake, and died.

"All those who witnessed this were petrified by fear—this was the first time a woman had been killed among them in this way. They stood silent for a long time, now looking at the dead girl lying on the ground with open eyes and bloodstained mouth, and now at the young man standing beside the girl, proudly facing them all—he did not hang his head as if asking to be punished. When they recovered from their surprise they seized and bound him, and left him there; for they thought it would be too simple a matter to kill him off-hand, that would not satisfy them."

The night grew darker and became filled with strange, soft sounds. The marmots whistled mournfully in the steppe, and the metallic grating of the grasshoppers was heard in the leaves of the vine; the leaves sighed and whispered to each other; the full moon, blood-red before, was now pale and grew paler as it rose over the earth; the bluish haze spread more widely over the steppe. . . .

"And so they gathered together to devise the punishment that would fit the crime. . . . Some suggested that he should be torn apart by horses, but this was thought too lenient. Others proposed that each one should shoot an arrow at him, but this too was rejected.

Somebody proposed that he be burnt at the stake, but this was rejected because the smoke from the fire would prevent them from seeing how he suffered. Many proposals were made, but not one of them seemed to be satisfactory. And while they were discussing this, his mother knelt before them in silence, unable to find either the tears nor the words with which to plead for mercy. They talked and talked for hours until, at last, one of the wise men, after long reflection, said:

" 'Let us ask him why he did it!'

"They asked him, and he answered:

" 'Unbind me! I will not speak while I am bound!'

"And when they unbound him he asked in a tone as if he was speaking to slaves:

" 'What do you want?'

" 'You have heard', answered the wise man.

" 'Why should I explain my conduct to you?'

" 'So that we may understand. Listen, proud one! You will die.... Make us understand what you have done. We shall remain alive, and it is useful for us to know more than we know now.'

" 'Very well, I will tell you, although I myself do not quite understand what happened. I think I killed her because she rebuffed me.... But I wanted her.'

" 'But she was not yours!' he was told.

" 'Do you use only that which belongs to you? I see that every man possesses only speech, arms and legs... but he owns cattle, women, land ... and many other things.'

"In answer to this he was told that for every thing a man takes he pays with himself: with his wisdom, his strength, and sometimes with his life. But he answered that he wanted to keep himself whole.

"They talked to him for a long time and at last realized that he regarded himself as the first in the land and had no thought for anybody but himself. They were all horrified by the isolation to which he had doomed himself. He belonged to no tribe; he had not a mother, nor cattle, nor a wife, and he wanted nothing of the kind.

"When the people realized this they began to discuss again what punishment to inflict upon him. But this time they did not debate for long. The wise man, who had remained silent up to now, spoke up and said:

" 'Stay! I have a punishment. A terrible punishment. You would not have thought of one like it in a thousand years! The punishment lies in himself. Let him go. Let him be free. That will be his punishment!'

"In that instant a wonderful thing happened. A loud clap of thunder burst in the sky, although no clouds were visible. The celestial powers thus signified their approval of what the wise man had said. All bowed low and dispersed. But the young man, who was now given the name of Larra, which means outcast, laughed loudly at the people who were leaving him. He laughed as he remained alone, as free as his father had been. But his father had not been a human, whereas he was. And so he began to live as free as a bird. He stole up to the tribe's encampment and carried away their cattle, their girls, everything he wanted. They shot arrows at him, but his body was protected by the invisible armour of his supreme punishment—he could not die. He was agile, rapacious, strong and cruel, but he never met men face to face. He was seen only at a distance. And so he hovered alone, round the habitations of the tribe, for a long, long time, for many scores of years. But one day he came very near to the habitations of the tribe and when the men ran out to seize him he did not run away, and made no signs that he intended to defend himself. One of the men guessed what was the matter and shouted out loudly:

" 'Don't touch him! He wants to die!'

"And all halted at once, not wishing to ease the lot of the one who had done them evil, not wishing to kill him. They halted and jeered at him. He stood trembling, listening to the jeers, and seemed to be searching for something in his bosom. Suddenly he stooped, picked up a rock and rushed at the men. But they, avoiding his blows, did not strike him; and when, at last, he fell to the ground with a despairing cry of weariness, they stood aside and watched him. He raised himself, picked up a knife which one of the men had dropped during the fray, and plunged it into his own breast. But the blade snapped as if it had struck a stone. He fell down again and beat his head on the ground, but the ground yielded to the blows and only dents were left in it.

" 'He cannot die!' the people shouted gleefully.

"They went away and left him. He lay face upwards and saw mighty eagles soaring high in the sky, like black dots, and his eyes

were filled with bitterness, enough to poison all the inhabitants of the world. Since then he has remained alone, free, waiting for death. And so he roams and roams around, roams everywhere.... Do you see? He is already like a shadow, and so he will remain forever. *He understands neither the speech of men nor their actions, he understands nothing. He does nothing but roam and roam, searching* for something.... He knows not life, nor does death smile upon him. He has no place among men.... That is how a man was punished for his pride!"

The old woman sighed and stopped speaking, and her head, which had drooped to her breast, swayed to and fro several times, in a very queer way.

I looked at her. It seemed to me that sleep had overcome her, and for some reason I felt very sorry for her. She had ended her story in such an exalted and admonitory tone, but for all that, there was a furtive, slavish note in it.

The people on the beach began to sing, and to sing in a strange way. First the contralto voice was heard. It sang two or three bars and then another voice started the song from the beginning while the first continued ... and then a third, a fourth and a fifth voice began the song, one after the other. Suddenly, the same song was started, from the beginning, by a chorus of male voices.

The voice of each woman was heard distinctly from the rest, and all their mingled voices sounded like a rainbow-coloured mountain stream that comes tumbling from ledge to ledge, leaping and gurgling as they merged with the deep tones of the male voices which floated upward to meet them, separating from them, drowning them, and again rising high, pure and strong, one after another.

Because of the voices, the sound of the sea could no longer be heard.

II

"Have you ever heard singing like that anywhere else?—Izergil asked me, raising her head and smiling, revealing her toothless gums.

"No, I haven't, I've never heard anything like it anywhere...."

"And you never will. We are very fond of singing. Only handsome people can sing well, handsome people, who are fond of life. We are

fond of life. Aren't the people who are singing over there tired after their day's work? They worked from sunrise to sunset, but as soon as the moon rose they began to sing! Those who don't know how to live would have gone to bed, but those who find pleasure in life—sing."

"But health. . . ." I began.

"One always has enough health to live. Health! If you had money, wouldn't you spend it? Health is the same as gold. Do you know what I did when I was young? I wove carpets from sunrise to sunset, almost without getting up. I was as lively as a sunbeam, and yet I was obliged to sit all day long, as motionless as a stone. And I sat so long that all my bones ached. But when night came, I hurried to the one I loved, to fondle and embrace him. And this I did for three whole months, while love lasted; I spent all my nights with him. And yet I have lived right up to now—I had enough blood in my veins, didn't I? And how much I loved! How many kisses I took, and gave!. . ."

I looked into her face. Her black eyes remained dull, her recollections had roused no spark in them. The moon lit up her dry, cracked lips, sharp chin with the grey hairs on it, and her wrinkled nose, which was drawn up, like the beak of an owl. Her cheeks were dark hollows, in one of which lay a strand of ash-grey hair which had straggled from under the scarlet rag which she had wound about her head. Her face, neck and hands were wrinkled, and every time she moved I expected the dry skin to crack and break and fall away in pieces, leaving before me a bare skeleton, with dull, black eyes.

She began to talk again in her grating voice:

"I lived with my mother near Falma, on the very bank of the River Birlat; I was fifteen years old when he first came to our farm. He was tall and graceful and had a black moustache, and he was so jolly! He was in a boat, and he called out in a ringing voice, so that we heard him through the window: 'Hey! Have you any wine . . . and something to eat?' I looked out of the window and through the branches of the ash tree I saw the river, all blue from the moon. And he, in a white tunic with a broad sash round his waist with the ends dangling at his side, was standing with one foot in the boat and the other on the bank, swaying and singing to himself. When he saw me he said: 'What a lovely lass lives here!. . . And I didn't know!' As if he knew all the lovely lasses in the world but me. I

gave him wine and some boiled pork.... Four days later I gave myself to him, entirely. We used to go rowing together, at night. He used to come and whistle softly like a marmot, and I used to leap out of the window into the river like a fish. And then we would go rowing, on and on.... He was a fisherman on the Prut, and later, when my mother learned about everything and beat me, he tried to persuade me to go with him to Dobruja, and further, on to the branches of the Danube. But by that time I had already ceased to love him—all he did was sing and kiss, and nothing more! I got tired of it. At that time a gang of Huzulians roamed those parts, and they had their lovers there.... Now, those girls had a merry time! One of them would wait and wait for her Carpathian, wondering whether he was in prison, or had been killed in a fight somewhere, and suddenly he would turn up alone, or with two or three of his comrades, as if he had dropped from the skies. He would bring her rich presents—after all, they came by everything so easily! And he used to feast at her house and praise her to his comrades. This pleased her very much. I asked a friend of mine who had a Huzulian for a lover to let me see them.... What was her name? I have forgotten.... I have begun to forget everything now. This was very long ago. No wonder I have forgotten it! Well, she introduced me to one of those lads. A handsome fellow.... He was red-haired, all red—moustaches and locks! A fiery head! But he looked so sad. Sometimes he was tender, but at other times he used to fight and roar like a wild beast. Once he slapped my face ... and I sprang at him like a cat and dug my teeth into his cheek.... After that he had a dimple in that cheek, and he used to like me to kiss the dimple...."

"But what became of the fisherman?" I enquired.

"The fisherman? Oh, he ... he joined that gang of Huzulians. At first he kept begging with me to go with him and threatened to throw me into the river if I didn't, but he gave it up after a time. He joined the gang and got himself another girl.... They were both hanged together—this fisherman and the other lad. I went to see them hanged. It was in Dobruja. The fisherman went to the gallows weeping, he was as pale as death; but the other lad calmly smoked his pipe. He went along smoking, his hands in his pockets, one moustache lying on his shoulder, and the other dangling over his chest. He saw me, and taking his pipe out of his mouth he called

out: 'Good-bye! . . .' I grived for him a whole year. Ekh!. . . This happened just as they were about to leave for their homes in the Carpathians. They had a farewell party in a Rumanian's house, and there they were caught. Only two were taken. Several were killed, and the rest got away. . . . They paid the Rumanian out for this, though, . . . they set fire to his house, to his windmill and his cornfields. He became a beggar after that."

"Did you do it?"—I asked.

"Those Huzulians had lots of friends, I was not the only one. . . . Whoever was their best friend, that one said these prayers for the dead. . . ."

The singing on the beach had stopped by now, and the old woman's voice was accompanied only by the sound of the surging sea—that pensive, restless sound was indeed a splendid accompaniment to this tale of a restless life. The night became milder, made brighter by the pale light of the moon, the vague sounds of the restless life of the night's invisible inhabitants gradually died out, they were drowned by the increasing sound of the waves . . . for the wind was rising.

"There was also a Turk that I was in love with. I lived in his harem, in Skutari. I lived there a whole week. It was not so bad. . . . But I grew tired of it. . . . Nothing but women and women. . . . He had eight of them. . . . All day long they did nothing but eat, sleep and talk nonsense. . . . Or else they'd quarrel and cackle at each other like hens. . . . He was no longer young, that Turk. His hair was almost grey, and he looked so pompous. He was rich too. He talked like a bishop. . . . He had black eyes . . . and they looked straight at you . . . right into your soul. He was very fond of saying his prayers. I first saw him in Bucharest . . . in the market place. He was walking about like a king, looking ever so important. I smi'ed at him. That same evening I was seized in the street and carried to his house. He was a merchant who traded in sandal and palmwood, and he had come to Bucharest to buy something. 'Wi'l you come with me?' he asked me. 'Oh, yes, certainly!' 'All right!' And so I went with him. He was rich, was that Turk. He had a son—a dark little boy, and so graceful. . . . He was about sixteen. It was with him that I ran away from the Turk. . . . I ran away to Bulgaria, to Lom-Palanka. . . . There a Bulgarian woman stabbed me in the chest because of her lover, or her husband, I have forgotten which.

"I lay sick for a long time in a nunnery. A Polish girl nursed me. She had a brother, a monk in a monastery near Arzer-Palanka, and he used to visit her. He wriggled like a worm in front of me.... When I got well I went away with him... to his country, Poland."

"Wait a minute! What became of the little Turk?"

"The boy? He died. Whether it was from homesickness, or from love, I don't know, but he withered, like a newly-planted tree which gets too much sun.... He simply dried up.... I can almost see him now, lying all transparent and bluish, like a piece of ice; but the flame of love was still burning in him.... And he kept on begging me to bend over and kiss him.... I loved him and, I remember, I kissed him a lot....Then he got very bad—he could scarcely move. He lay on his bed and begged me pitifully, like a beggar asking for alms, to lie next to him and warm him. I did so, and as soon as I got next to him he would get as hot as fire. Once I woke up and found he was quite cold.... He was dead.... I wept over him. Who can say? Perhaps it was I who killed him. I was then twice his age. And I was so strong and full of vigour.... But he, he was only a boy!"

She sighed and—for the first time that I saw—crossed herself three times and mumbled something with her dry lips.

"Well, so you went to Poland"—I prompted her.

"Yes ... with that little Pole. He was a mean and despicable thing. When he wanted a woman he used to sidle up to me like a tomcat and speak to me with words that flowed from his lips like hot honey; but when he did not want me he used to snarl at me, and his words sounded like the crack of a whip. Once we were walking along the river bank and he was arrogant and offensive to me. Oh! Oh! wasn't I mad! I bubbled like boiling pitch! I took him up in my arms like a child—he was only a little fellow—held him and squeezed his sides so hard that his face became livid. And then I swung him round and threw him into the river. He yelled. It was so funny to hear him yell. I looked down at him struggling in the water and then went away. I didn't meet him again after that. I was lucky in that way: I never met again the men I had loved. Meetings like that are not at all pleasant. It's like meeting the dead."

The old woman stopped speaking and sighed. I pictured to myself the people she had resurrected: the fiery-red, bewhiskered Huzu-

lian going to his death, calmly smoking his pipe; probably he had cold blue eyes which had looked upon everything with a firm and concentrated gaze. At his side is the black-whiskered fisherman from the Prut, weeping, not wanting to die. His face is pallid in anticipation of death, his merry eyes are now dull, and his moustaches, now moist with tears, dangle disconsolately from the corners of his contorted mouth. And the old, pompous Turk, probably a fatalist and a despot, and by his side his son, a pale and tender flower of the Orient, poisoned by kisses. And the conceited Pole, polite and cruel, eloquent and cold.... All are only pale shadows now, and the one whom they had embraced was sitting beside me alive, but withered by time, without a body, without blood, with a heart without desires, and with eyes that lacked the glint of life—also almost a shadow.

She began to speak again:

"I had a hard time in Poland. The people who live there are cold and false. I could not understand their serpent's language. They hiss when they speak.... Why do they hiss? God must have given them this serpent's language because they are false. I roamed about the country not knowing where I was going, but I saw that they were preparing to rise in revolt against you Russians. I reached the town of Bokhnia. A Jew bought me, not for himself, but to trade with my body. I consented to this. To be able to live one must be able to do something. I couldn't do anything, so I had to pay with my body. But I thought to myself: when I get enough money to enable me to go back home on the Birlat I will break my chains, no matter how strong they may be. What a life I led there! Rich gentlemen used to come to my house and feast there. That cost them a pretty penny, I can tell you. They used to fight over me and ruin themselves. One of them tried a long time to get me, and this is what he did. One day he came to visit me, accompanied by his servant who carried a bag. The gentleman took the bag and spilled its contents over my head. Golden coins poured from the bag, hitting my head, but the ringing sound they made as they struck the floor was delightful to my ears. For all that I drove that gentleman away. He had a fat, moist face and a belly like a big pillow. He looked like a well-fed pig. Yes, I drove him away, although he told me that he had sold all his land, his house and his horses to be able to be-

sprinkle me with gold. At that time I loved a worthy gentleman with a scarred face. His face was criss-crossed with scars, from wounds inflicted by the Turks, with whom he had recently been fighting on behalf of the Greeks. Now that was a man! He was a Pole, so why should he bother about the Greeks? But he went to help them fight their enemies. His face was slashed, he lost an eye, and also two fingers from his left hand.... He was a Pole, so why should he bother about the Greeks? The reason is that he admired brave deeds, and a man who admires brave deeds will always find an opportunity to perform them. There is always room for brave deeds in life, you know. And those who find no opportunity to perform them are simply lazybones or cowards, or else they do not know what life is, because if people knew what life is, they would all want to leave their shadow in it after they have gone. And then life would not devour people without leaving a trace.... Oh, that man with the scars was a really good man! He was ready to go to the end of the world to do something worth while. I suppose your people killed him during the rebellion. Why did you go to fight the Magyars? All right, all right, don't say anything!"

Commanding me not to say anything, old Izergil fell silent herself and became lost in thought. After a little while she said:

"I also knew a Magyar. One day he left my house—this was in the winter—and he was found only in the spring, when the snow had thawed; they found him in a field with a bullet through his head. What do you think of that? You see, love kills no fewer people than the plague does; I'm sure you'll find it so if you counted up.... What was I talking about? About Poland.... Yes, I played my last game there. I met a squire there.... Wasn't he handsome! As handsome as the devil. I was already old, oh, so old! Was I already forty? Yes, I believe I was.... He was still proud, and still spoilt by us women. It cost me a lot to get him.... Yes. He wanted to take me like a common woman, but to this I would not agree. I was never anybody's slave. I had already settled with the Jew. I gave him a lot of money, and I was already living in Cracow. I had everything then, horses, and gold, and servants.... He used to come to me as proud as a demon and wanted me to throw myself into his arms. We quarrelled.... I remember I even lost my good looks because of it. This dragged on for a long time.... But I won in the

end; he went down on his knees to me.... But soon after he took me, he gave me up. Then I realized that I was already old.... Oh, how bitter that was! Oh, so bitter! You see, I loved that devil.... But when we met he used to jeer at me.... Mean fellow! And he used to make fun of me to others, I knew that. That was hard to bear, I can tell you! But I had him near me, and after all I loved him. When he went off to fight you Russians I was sick with longing for him. I tried to fight the feeling down, but couldn't.... And so I decided to go to him. He was stationed in the woods, near Warsaw.

"But when I got there I found out that your people had already beaten them... and that he was a prisoner in a village, not far away.

"That means that I won't see him any more, I thought to myself. But oh, how I longed to see him! So I tried to get to him. I dressed up as a beggar, pretended to be lame, and tying up my face I went to the village. It was filled with Cossacks and soldiers.... It cost me a lot to be there! I found out where the Poles were. I could see that it would be no easy task to get there. But I had to get there! So one night I crept up to the place, through a vegetable plot, between the furrows, suddenly a sentry barred my way.... But I could already hear the Poles singing and talking loudly. They were singing a song to the Mother of God, and I could hear my Arkadek's voice. I couldn't help thinking bitterly of the time when men used to crawl in front of me, and here I was, crawling on the ground like a snake for the sake of a man, and perhaps crawling to my death. The sentry heard me and stepped forward. What was I to do? I got up from the ground and went towards him. I had no knife with me or anything, only my hands and my tongue. I was sorry I had not taken my dagger with me. I whispered: 'Wait!' But the soldier pointed his bayonet at my throat. I whispered to him: 'Don't stab me, wait! Listen to me, if you have a soul! I have nothing to give you, but I beg of you....' He lowered his rifle and said to me, also in a whisper: 'Go away, woman! Go away! What do you want here?' I told him that my son was a prisoner here. 'Do you understand, soldier—a son! You have a mother, haven't you? Look at me, then—I have a son like you, and he's over there! Let me have a look at him, perhaps he will die soon ... and perhaps you will be killed tomorrow. Won't your mother weep for you? Won't it be hard for you to die without having seen your mother? So it

will be for my son. Take pity on yourself, and on him, and on me—a mother!'

"Oh, how long I pleaded with him! It was raining, and we were both drenched. The wind raged and roared, buffeting me, now in the back and now in the chest. I stood swaying in front of that stony-hearted soldier, but he kept on saying: 'No! No!' And every time I heard that cold word the desire to see my Arkadek flared up still hotter in my breast.... While I was talking I sized up the soldier—he was short and thin, and he coughed. I dropped to the ground in front of him and embraced his knees, pleading with him with burning words to let me pass. Suddenly I gave a hard tug and the soldier fell to the ground, into the mud. I quickly turned him over face downwards and pressed his face down into a puddle to prevent him from shouting. But he didn't shout, he only struggled, trying to throw me off his back. I pressed his face deeper into the mud with both my hands, and he was suffocated. Then I dashed to the barn where the Pole was locked up. 'Arkadek!' I whispered through a chink in the wall. They have sharp ears, have those Poles. They heard me and stopped singing! I could see his eyes opposite mine. 'Can you come out here?' I whispered. 'Yes, through the floor!' he said. 'Come out, then.' And four of them crept out from the barn; three, and my Arkadek. 'Where's the sentry?' Arkadek asked me. 'He's lying over there!' And we crept along quietly, ever so quietly, crouching low on the ground. The rain was pouring down in torrents, the wind roared. We left the village and entered a forest. We walked for a long time in silence. We walked quickly. Arkadek held my hand; his hand was hot and trembling. Oh! I felt so good walking by his side, he not saying a word. Those were the last moments—the last good moments of my greedy life. At last we came out on a meadow and halted. They thanked me, all four of them. Oh, how long and how much they talked, something I didn't understand! I listened to them, but kept my eyes fixed on my gentleman, wondering what he would do. Suddenly he embraced me and said in such an important tone.... I don't remember what he said exactly, but what he meant was that he would love me now out of gratitude for having helped him to escape. And he dropped down on his knees in front of me and said with a smile: 'My queen!' False dog! I was so mad that I kicked him and

wanted to slap his face, but he staggered and jumped to his feet. He stood in front of me pale and threatening.... The other three also stood frowning at me. And nobody said a word. I looked at them and felt—I remember it quite well—only a feeling of disgust and apathy. I said to them: 'Go!' Those dogs asked me: 'Will you go back there and tell them which way we've gone?' Weren't they mean, eh? Still, they went away, and I went away too.... Next day your people took me, but they soon let me go. Then I realized that it was time for me to build myself a nest. I'd had enough of living like a cuckoo! I had become heavy, my wings were weak, and my feathers had lost their sheen.... Yes, it was time, high time! So I went to Galicia, and from there to Dobruja. Since then I have been living here, nearly thirty years. I had a husband, a Moldavian. He died about a year ago. And now I am living like this! Alone.... No, not alone. With them."

With that the old woman waved her hand in the direction of the sea. It was all quiet on the beach now. Now and again a brief, deceptive sound was born, only to die again.

"They are fond of me. I tell them such a lot of interesting things, and they like that. They are all still young.... It feels good to be with them. I look at them and think to myself: 'I was like them once.... Only in my time people had more vim and vigour, and that was why life was merrier and better.... Yes!..."

She fell silent. I felt sad sitting next to her. But she dozed, nodding her head and whispering to herself.... Perhaps she was praying. A cloud rose up from the sea—black, heavy and with rugged contours, like the peaks of a mountain range. It crept over the steppe; and as it moved fragments of cloud broke away from its summit and speeded on in front, putting the stars out, one after another. The sea surged more loudly. In the vines, at a little distance from us, the sounds of kissing, whispering and sighing were heard. Far away in the steppe a dog whined.... The air irritated the nerves with a strange smell which tickled the nostrils. As they crept across the sky the clouds cast on the ground numerous shadows, like flocks of birds, which disappeared and appeared again.... Of the moon only a blurred, opal patch remained, and now and again even this was blotted out by a grey clump of cloud. And far away in the steppe, now black and grim, as if hiding and concealing

something within itself, tiny blue lights flashed. They appeared for an instant, now here and now there, and vanished, as if a number of people scattered over the steppe, at some distance from each other, were searching for something, and lighting matches, which the wind at once blew out. They were bluish tongues of flame, and there was something weird about them.

"Can you see any sparks?" Izergil asked me.

"What, those blue ones?" I said, pointing into the distance.

"Blue? Yes, that's them.... So they are flying after all! Well, well! I can't see them any more. There's lots of things I can't see now."

"Where do those sparks come from?" I asked the old woman.

I had heard something about those sparks before, but I wanted to hear what old Izergil would tell me about them.

"Those sparks come from the burning heart of Danko." she said. "Once upon a time there was a heart, which one day burst into flame.... Well, those sparks come from that flame. I will tell you about it.... This too, is an old tale.... Old. All old! You see what a lot of things happened in the old days! There's nothing like it nowadays—no great deeds, no men, no stories.... Why?... Well, tell me! You can't tell me.... What do you know? What do any of you young people know? Ekh ... ekh! If you looked into the past well enough, you would find an answer to all your riddles.... But you don't look, and that's why you don't know how to live.... Don't I see how people live? Oh, I see everything, although my eyes are not as good as they used to be! And I see that people don't live, but grub for a living, and spend all their lives on that. And having deprived themselves of everything worth having, having wasted all their time, they begin to bemoan their fate. What's fate got to do with it? Everybody decides his own fate! I see all sorts of people nowadays, but I don't see any strong ones! What's become of them?... And there are fewer and fewer handsome ones."

The old woman became lost in thought, wondering what had become of the strong and handsome men and women; and she gazed into the dark steppe, as if seeking for an answer there.

I waited for her story in silence, for I feared that if I asked her anything she would go off at a tangent again.

At last she began to speak and told me the following story:

III

"Once upon a time, long, long ago, there lived a tribe of people who lived in the steppe, surrounded on three sides by a dense forest. They were a merry, strong and brave people. But one day misfortune befell them. Alien tribes appeared out of the unknown and drove them deep into the forest. The forest was dark and swampy, because the trees were very old, and their branches were so closely entangled that they shut out the sky, and the sun's rays could scarcely pierce the dense leafage and reach the ground. When the sun's rays did reach the ground, they raised such a stench that people died from it. And then the women and children of this tribe wept and the men became despondent. They realized that they must leave the forest if they wanted to survive, but there were only two ways by which they could do this: they could go back, to their old habitations, but there they would meet their strong and wicked foes; or they could push forward, but here their way was barred by the giants which embraced each other so closely with their mighty branches and clung so tenaciously to the swampy ground with their gnarled roots. These trees stood silent and motionless in grey gloom in the daytime, and at night they seemed to crowd still closer around the people when they lit their fires. Day and night these people—who had been accustomed to the broad open spaces of the steppe—were cramped in this dark, evil-smelling forest, which seemed to want to crush them. It was still more frightful when the wind blew through the treetops and the forest was filled with a sinister humming that sounded like a funeral dirge. These people were strong and could have gone out to those who had vanquished them, but they dared not die in battle, because they had traditions to preserve, and if they were killed, their traditions would perish with them. And so they sat through the long nights in mournful reflection amidst the humming of the forest and the poisonous stench of the swamp. And as they sat the shadows cast by their campfires leaped around them in a silent dance; and it seemed as though these were not shadows that were dancing, but the evil spirits of the forest and swamp celebrating their triumph.... And so these people sat and pondered. But nothing—neither hard work nor women—wears out the bodies and souls of men as much as mournful thoughts. And so these peo-

ple grew feeble because of their thoughts.... Fear was born among them and it fettered their strong arms. The women gave birth to horror by their wailing over the bodies of those who died from the stench, and over the fate of the living who were fettered by fear. And cowardly words began to be heard in the forest, at first softly and timidly, but later more loudly and loudly.... The people were already willing to go to the enemy to make him a gift of their freedom; all were terrified by death; not one was afraid of a life of slavery.... But just then Danko appeared and saved them all unaided."

Evidently the old woman had often related the story of Danko's burning heart, for she spoke in an accustomed singsong tone, and her voice, low and grating, vividly conjured up in my mind the noise of the forest amidst which the unhappy hunted people were dying from the poisonous breath of the swamp.

"Danko was one of those people, young and handsome. Handsome people are always brave. And so he said to his comrades: 'You can't remove the rock from the path by thinking. Those who do nothing can achieve nothing. Why are we wasting our strength in thinking and grieving? Rise up! Let us hew our way through the forest, it must have an end—everything in the world has an end! Let us go! Come on!'

"They looked at him and saw that he was the best one among them, for great strength and living fire shone from his eyes.

"'Lead us!' they said.

"And he led them...."

The old woman stopped speaking and gazed into the steppe where the darkness was growing more intense. Far away the sparks from Danko's burning heart flashed every now and again, like blue flowers which bloomed only for an instant.

"And so Danko led them. All followed him like one man, for they believed in him. It was a hard road! It was dark; at every step the swamp opened its greedy, putrid maw and swallowed men; and the trees barred their road like a solid wall, their branches intertwined and their roots stretching in all directions like snakes. Every step cost those people much sweat and blood. They fought their way on for a long time.... The forest became thicker as they went, and their strength was giving out! And so they began to

murmur against Danko and say that he was young and inexperienced, and did not know where he was leading them. But he went on in front of them, cheerful and calm.

"One day a storm broke over the forest and the trees whispered to each other in a sinister and threatening way. The forest became so dark that it seemed that all the nights which had existed since it arose had gathered together in this one place. And these little people pushed their way through the giant trees amidst the frightful din of the storm; they pushed on, and the mighty swaying trees creaked and hummed in anger, while the lightning flashed over the treetops, illuminating them with its cold blue light, only to vanish as quickly as it had appeared. The people were frightened. The trees, lit up by the cold flashes of lightning, looked as if they were alive, as if they were stretching their long, gnarled arms, intertwined in a close net around them, in order to detain them, to prevent them from escaping from their dark captivity. And out of the gloom among the branches, something frightful, dark and cold stared at them. It was a hard road, and the people, wearied by it, lost heart. But they were ashamed to confess their weakness, and so they vented their anger on Danko, the man who was marching in front of them. They began to complain that he did not know how to lead them. What do you think of that!

"They halted amidst the sinister sounds of the forests, amidst the quivering darkness, tired and angry, and upbraided Danko:

"'You, wretched man,' they said, 'are the cause of our misery! You led us and wore us out, and now you shall die for this!'

"'You said: "Lead us!" and I led you!' exclaimed Danko, facing them proudly. 'I have the courage to lead, and that is why I led you! But you? What have you done to help yourselves? You have only walked, and have not been able to preserve your strength for a long journey! You only walked, and walked, like a flock of sheep!'

"But these words only enraged them all the more.

"'You shall die! You shall die!' they shouted.

"The forest hummed and hummed, echoing their cries, and the lightning tore the darkness into shreds. Danko looked at those for whose sake he had toiled so hard and saw that they were like wild beasts. They crowded around him, not a human expression in

any one of their faces, and no mercy could be expected from them. Then anger flared up in Danko's heart, but out of pity for the people he subdued it. He loved these people, and believed that they would perish without him. And so he yearned to save them, to lead them out on to an easier road, and the light of this mighty yearning shone in his eyes.... But they, seeing this, thought his eyes were burning with rage, that it was rage that caused them to shine so brightly; and they stood alert, like wolves, waiting for him to attack them; and they closed in around him to be able to seize and kill him. He guessed their thoughts, and this made the fire in his heart burn still brighter, for their thoughts saddened him.

"The forest continued to hum its mournful dirge, the thunder roared, and the rain poured down in torrents....

"'What can I do for these people?' shouted Danko in a voice that drowned the thunder.

"Suddenly, he clutched at his breast, tore it open, plucked out his heart and held it high above his head.

"It burned as brightly as the sun, even brighter. The whole forest fell silent, and became lit up with this torch of human love. The darkness fled from the light deep into the forest, and quivering, fell into the putrid maw of the swamp. The people were petrified with amazement.

"'Let us go!' shouted Danko, dashing forward and lighting up the path with his burning heart.

"They surged after him, as if enchanted. Then the forest hummed again, the trees swayed with astonishment, but the noise was drowned by the tramping of the feet of the people as they ran. They all ran quickly and boldly, drawn on by the wonderful spectacle of the burning heart. Now, too, people perished, but perished without complaints or tears. And Danko was still in front, and his heart blazed and blazed.

"Suddenly the forest opened before them, let them out, and remained behind, dense and silent; and Danko, and all the people, plunged into a sea of sunshine and pure air, which had been purified by the rain. Behind them the storm raged over the forest; but here the sun shone, the steppe heaved as if it were breathing, the grass sparkled with the jewels of rain on their blades, and the river glistened like gold.... Evening had fallen, and the river,

reflecting the rays of the setting sun, looked red, like the blood that flowed in a hot stream from Danko's torn breast.

"Danko, proud and brave, scanned the vast steppe stretching before him; he gazed joyfully at the free land and laughed, and pride rang in his laughter. And then he fell down and died.

"The people, overjoyed, and full of hope, did not see that he was dead, and they did not see that his brave heart was still burning beside his dead body. Only one of them, more observant than the rest, saw this and, moved by fear, he stepped upon the proud heart.... And the heart burst into sparks and was extinguished....

"That's what causes the blue sparks which appear in the steppe before a storm!"

Now that the old woman had finished her beautiful story, a great silence reigned in the steppe, as if it too was amazed at the strength of will displayed by the brave man Danko, who for the sake of men had plucked his burning heart out and had died, without asking for any reward for himself. The old woman dozed. I looked at her and asked myself how many more tales and recollections remained in her mind. And I thought of Danko's great burning heart, and of the human imagination which had created such beautiful and thrilling legends.

Izergil was now fast asleep. The wind blew aside the rags she wore and exposed her withered breast. I covered her old body and stretched out on the ground next to her. The steppe was dark and silent. Clouds still floated slowly and despondently across the sky.... The hollow, mournful sounds of the sea reached my ears.

CHELKASH

THE BLUE southern sky, darkened by dust, bore a leaden hue; the hot sun, looking down onto the greenish sea as if through a fine grey veil, was barely reflected in the water, which was chopped by the strokes of boats' oars, ships' propellers, the sharp keels of Turkish feluccas and of other vessels that ploughed backwards and forwards in the congested port. The granite-fettered waves, borne down by the immense weights that glided over their crests, beat against the ships' sides and against the shore, growling and foaming, befouled with all sorts of junk.

The clang of anchor chains, the clash of the buffers of the railway cars that were bringing up freight, the metallic wail of iron sheets slipping onto the cobble-stones, the muted sounds of wood striking wood, of rambling carts, of ships' sirens rising to a shrill, piercing shriek and dropping to a muffled roar, and the loud voices of the dock labourers, the seamen and the military Customs guards —all mingled in the deafening music of the working day, and quivering and undulating, hovered low in the sky over the port. And from the land, rising to meet them, came wave after wave of other sounds, now muffled and rumbling, causing everything around to vibrate, and now shrill and shrieking, rending the dusty, sultry air.

The granite, the iron, the timber, the cobble-stones in the port, the ships and the men, all breathed the mighty sounds of this fervent hymn to Mercury. But the human voices, scarcely audible in this tumult, were feeble and comical; and the very men who had originally produced these mighty sounds were comical and pitiful to look at. Their grimy, ragged, nimble bodies, bent under the weight of the merchandise they carried on their backs, flitted to and fro amidst clouds of dust and a welter of heat and sound. They looked insignificant compared with the steel giants, the mountains of merchandise, the rattling railway cars and everything else around them which they themselves had created. The things they them-

selves had created had enslaved them and robbed them of their personality.

The giant steamers, lying with steam up, shrieked and hissed and heaved deep sighs; and every sound they emitted seemed to breathe scorn and contempt for the grey, dusty, human figures that were creeping along their decks, filling the deep holds with the products of their slavish labour. The long files of dock labourers carrying on their backs hundreds of tons of grain to fill the iron bellies of the ships in order that they themselves might earn a few pounds of this grain to fill their own stomachs, looked so droll that they brought tears to one's eyes. The contrast between these tattered, perspiring men, benumbed with weariness, turmoil and heat, and the mighty machines glistening in the sun, the machines which these very men had made, and which, after all is said and done, were set in motion not by steam, but by the blood and sinew of those who had created them—this contrast constituted an entire poem of cruel irony.

The overwhelming noise, the dust which irritated one's nostrils and blinded one's eyes, the baking and exhausting heat, and everything else around, created an atmosphere of tense impatience that was ready to burst out in a terrific upheaval, an explosion that would clear the air and make it possible to breathe freely and easily—after which silence would reign over the earth, and this dusty, deafening, irritating and infuriating tumult would pass away, and the town, the sea and the sky would be tranquil, serene and magnificent....

A bell struck twelve in slow regular strokes. When the last brassy vibrations died away, the savage music of labour sounded softer and a moment later sank to a muffled, discontented murmur. Human voices and the splash of the sea became more audible. It was dinner time.

I

When the dock labourers stopped work and scattered over the port in noisy chattering groups to buy the victuals that the market women were selling, and had squatted down on the cobble-stones in shady corners to eat their dinner, Grishka Chelkash turned up, an old timer, well-known to the people in the port, a confirmed

drunkard, and a skilful, daring thief. He was barefooted; his legs were encased in a pair of threadbare corduroy trousers; he wore no hat, and his dirty cotton blouse with a torn collar, which exposed the brown skin drawn tightly over his lean collar bones. His matted, black, grey-streaked hair and his sharp crinkled, rapacious face showed that he had only just got up from sleep. A straw was entangled in his brown moustache, another was sticking to the bristle on his left cheek, and he had a freshly plucked linden twig stuck behind one ear. Tall, gaunt, slightly round-shouldered, he strode slowly over the cobble-stones, wrinkling his hawk-like nose and casting his keen, grey, flashing eyes around, looking for somebody among the dock labourers. Now and again his long, thick, brown moustache twitched like the whiskers of a cat, and his hands, held behind his back, rubbed against each other, while his long, crooked, grasping fingers nervously intertwined. Even here, among the hundreds of rough hoboes like himself, he at once became conspicuous by his resemblance to the hawk of the steppe, by his rapacious leanness, and by his deliberate gait, outwardly calm and even, but internally agitated and alert, like the flight of the bird of prey that he reminded one of.

When he drew level with a group of bare-footed dockers who were sitting in the shade of a pile of coal-laden baskets, a thickset lad, whose stupid face was disfigured by scarlet blotches and his neck badly scratched—evidently the results of a recent scrap—got up to meet him. Walking by the side of Chelkash, he said in an undertone:

"The sailors are missing two bales of cloth.... They're searching for them."

"Well?" asked Chelkash, looking the lad up and down.

"What do you mean, well? I say they are searching for them. That's all."

"What? Have they been asking for me to go and help in the search?"

Chelkash smiled and looked in the direction of the warehouse of the Volunteer Fleet.*

"Go to hell!"

* A merchant shipping company.—*Trans.*

The lad turned to go back, but Chelkash stopped him with the exclamation:

"Hey! You do look a sight! Who messed up your shop front like this?" And then he enquired: "Have you seen Mishka about here anywhere?"

"Haven't seen him for a long time!" retorted the other, leaving Chelkash to rejoin his mates.

Chelkash proceeded on his way, greeted by everybody as an old acquaintance; but today he was obviously out of sorts, and instead of replying with his customary banter, he snarled in answer to the questions put to him.

Suddenly a Customs guard appeared from behind a pile of merchandise, a dark-green, dusty, and truculently erect figure. He stood in front of Chelkash, defiantly barring his way, clutched the hilt of his dirk with his left hand and put out his right to take Chelkash by the collar.

"Halt! Where are you going?" he demanded.

Chelkash stepped back a pace, raised his eyes to the guard's good-natured but shrewd face and smiled drily.

The Customs guard tried to pull a stern face; he puffed out his round, red cheeks, twitched his brows and rolled his eyes ferociously, but he succeeded only in looking comical.

"How many times have I told you not to go prowling around these docks. I said I'd smash your ribs in if I caught you! But here you are again!" he shouted.

"How do you do, Semyonich! We haven't met for a long time!" Chelkash answered serenely, proferring his hand.

"It wouldn't break my heart if I didn't see you for a century! Clear out of here!"

Nevertheless, Semyonich shook the proferred hand.

"Tell me," continued Chelkash, retaining Semyonich's hand in his tenacious fingers and familiarly shaking his hand. "Have you seen Mishka anywhere around here?"

"Who's Mishka? I don't know any Mishka! You'd better clear out, brother, or else the warehouse guard will see you, and he'll. . . ."

"That red-haired chap I worked with on the *Kostroma* last time," persisted Chelkash.

"The one you go thieving together, you mean, don't you? They took that Mishka of yours to the hospital. He met with an accident and broke his leg. Now go along, brother, while I'm asking you quietly, otherwise I'll give you one in the neck!"

"There! And you say you don't know Mishka! You do know him after all! What are you so wild about, Semyonich?"

"Now then, now then! Don't try to get round me! Clear out of here, I tell you!"

The guard was getting angry, and looking round from one side to another, he tried to tear his hand out of Chelkash's close grip. But Chelkash calmly gazed at the guard from under his thick eyebrows and keeping a tight ho'd on his hand went on to say:

"Don't hustle me! I'll have my say and then go away. Well now, tell me, how're you getting on? How's the wife, and the children? Are they well?" With flashing eyes, and teeth bared in an ironic smile, he added: "I've been wanting to pay you a visit for a long time, but I've been too busy ... drinking. ..."

"Now, now! None of that! None of your jokes, you skinny devil! I'll give it to you hot if you don't look out!... What! Do you intend to go robbing in the streets and houses now?"

"Whatever for? There's plenty of stuff lying about here. Plenty I tell you, Semyonich! I hear you've swiped another two bales of cloth! Take care, Semyonich! See you don't get caught!"

Semyonich trembled with indignation, foamed at the mouth, and tried to say something. Chelkash released his hand and calmly made for the dark gates in long, regular strides. The guard kept close on his heels, swearing like a trooper.

Chelkash brightened up and whistled a merry tune through his teeth. With his hands in his trouser pockets he strode along unhurriedly, throwing biting quips and jests to right and left and getting paid in his own coin.

"Hey, Grishka! Look how the bosses are taking care of you!" shouted a dock labourer from a crowd of men who were sprawling on the ground, resting after dinner.

"I've no boots on, so Semyonich is seeing that I don't step onto something sharp and hurt my foot," answered Chelkash.

They reached the gates. Two soldiers ran their hands down Chelkash's clothes and then gently pushed him into the street.

Chelkash crossed the road and sat down on the curbstone opposite a tavern. A file of loaded carts came rattling out of the dock gates. Another, of empty carts, came from the opposite direction, their drivers bumping on the seats. The docks belched forth a howling thunder and clouds of biting dust. . . .

Chelkash felt in his element amidst this frenzied bustle. Solid gains, requiring little labour but much skill, smiled in prospect for him. He was confident of his skill, and wrinkling his eyes he pictured to himself the spree he would have next morning when his pockets were filled with bank notes. . . . He thought of his chum, Mishka; he would have been very useful to him that night if he had not broken his leg. He swore to himself as doubt crossed his mind as to whether he would be able to manage alone, without Mishka. He wondered what the weather would be like at night, and looked at the sky. He lowered his eyes and glanced down the street.

A half a dozen paces away, on the cobbles, leaning back against the curb, sat a young lad in a coarse blue homespun blouse and trousers of the same material, bast shoes on his feet, and a dilapidated brown cap on his head. Beside him lay a small knapsack and a scythe without a haft, wrapped in straw and carefully tied with string. The lad was broad-shouldered, thickset, fair-haired, and had a sunburnt weather-beaten face and large blue eyes, which looked at Chelkash trustfully and good-naturedly.

Chelkash bared his teeth, poked his tongue out, and pulling a horrible face, stared at the lad with wide-open eyes.

The lad blinked in perplexity at first, but soon he burst out laughing and shouted between his chuckles: "Aren't you funny!" And then, scarcely rising from the ground, he shifted awkwardly over to Chelkash, dragging his knapsack through the dust and rattling the heel of his scythe over the cobble-stones.

"Been on the booze, eh, brother?" he asked Chelkash, tugging at the latter's trousers.

"Yes, baby, something like that!" confessed Chelkash with a smile. He at once took a fancy to this sturdy, good-natured lad with the bright childish eyes. "You've been out haymaking, eh?" he enquired.

"Yes! . . . But it was plenty of work and little pay. I made nothing by it. And the people! Hundreds of them! Those people from

the famine districts came pouring in and knocked the price down. The job was hardly worth taking. In the Kuban they paid only sixty kopecks. Something awful!... And they say that before they used to pay three, four and five rubles!"

"Before!... Before they used to pay three rubles just to look at a Russian! I used to do this job myself about ten years ago. I would go to a stanitsa* and say—I'm a Russian! And they'd look me up and down, feel my arms, shake their heads in wonder and say: 'Here, take three rubles!' And then they'd give you food and drink, and invite you to stay as long as you like!"

The lad listened to what Chelkash was saying with mouth wide open and amazement and admiration written on his round, tanned face; but soon he realized that the hobo was pulling his leg, and, smacking his lips, he burst into a hearty laugh. Chelkash kept a straight face, hiding his smile under his moustache.

"I'm a boob! You talk as if it was all true, and I listen to it and believe it.... But, still, so help me God, things were better there before!"

"Well, and what am I saying? Ain't I saying that before things were...."

"Stop kidding!" interrupted the boy with a wave of his hand. "What are you, a shoemaker? Or a tailor? You, I mean."

"Me?" asked Chelkash in his turn, and after thinking for a moment, he said: "I'm a fisherman."

"A fish-er-man! Is that so! So you catch fish?"

"Fish! Why fish? The fishermen here don't only catch fish. Mostly it's drowned bodies, lost anchors, sunken ships—things like that. They have special hooks for this work...."

"Yah! It's all lies!... They must be the fishermen they sing about in the song:

On arid shores
We spread our nets,
And barns and sheds we trawl....

"Have you ever met fishermen like that?" asked Chelkash with a smile, looking hard at the boy.

* Cossack village.—*Trans.*

"Met them? No, where could I have met them? But I've heard about them. . . ."

"What do you think of them?"

"That kind of fisherman, you mean? Well . . . they're not a bad lot. They're free. They have freedom. . . ."

"What's freedom to you?. . . Do you like freedom?"

"What do you think? Be your own master. Go where you like, do what you like. . . . I should say so! You can keep yourself straight and have no milestone round your neck. Have a good time, and nothing to worry about, except keep God in mind. What could be better?"

Chelkash spat contemptuously and turned his head away.

"With me it's like this," continued the boy. "My father's dead. We've only a patch of a farm. My mother's old. The land's all dried up. What can I do? I've got to live. But how? I don't know. I thinks to myself—I'll go and be a son-in-law in a good house. But what's the use? It would be all right if the father-in-law gave his daughter a share of his property, and we could set up for ourselves. But do you think he'd do that? Not a bit. The devil wants to keep it all for himself and expects me to slave for him . . . for years! You see what I mean? But if I could earn a hundred or a hundred and fifty rubles, I'd be independent, and I'd say to the father-in-law—you can keep your property! If you give Marfa a share, all well and good. But if you don't . . . thank God she's not the only girl in the village! I'd be quite free. On my own. . . . Y-e-s!" The boy heaved a deep sigh and went on to say: "But what can I do now? Nothing. I'll have to go and slave for a father-in-law. I thought I'd go to the Kuban and earn a couple of hundred rubles, and then everything would be all right. I'd be able to live like a gentleman. But I didn't make anything. So I'll have to go as a labourer after all. . . . I'll never have my own farm now! Ah, well!"

It was quite evident that the lad was extremely reluctant to go as a son-in-law, for as he finished speaking his face became beclouded with grief and he squirmed as he lay on the ground.

Chelkash asked him:

"Where are you bound for now?"

"Home, of course! Where else?"

"How do I know? You might be bound for Turkey. . . ."

"T-u-rkey!" drawled the boy in astonishment. "What Christians go to Turkey? That's a nice thing to say!"

"You're a fool!" said Chelkash, heaving a sigh and turning his head away again. This sturdy peasant lad stirred something in him....

He became conscious of a vague, but steadily growing feeling of vexation gnawing at the pit of his stomach which prevented him from concentrating his mind on the task he had before him that night.

Offended by the snub which had just been administered to him, the boy muttered something under his breath and now and again cast a sidelong glance at the hobo. He pouted his lips, puffed out his cheeks, and far too rapidly blinked his eyes in the most comical fashion. He was obviously disappointed at the conversation with this bewhiskered tramp having been brought to such an abrupt close.

But the tramp paid no more attention to him. He sat on the curbstone engrossed in thought, whistling softly to himself, and beating time with his dirty, bare heel.

The lad wanted to pay him out for the snub.

"Hey, fisherman! Do you often go on the booze?" he began, but the "fisherman" suddenly turned his face towards him and asked:

"Listen, baby! Do you want to do a job of work with me tonight? Tell me quick!"

"What kind of job?" the lad asked suspiciously.

"What do you mean, what kind? Any kind I give you.... We'll go fishing. You'll row the boat."

"Oh, all right. Not so bad. I don't mind taking a job. But ... I won't get into trouble with you, will I? You're a dark one.... There's no understanding you."

Chelkash again became conscious of a feeling like heartburn rising in his chest. In a low voice of cold anger he said:

"Then don't chatter about what you don't understand.... If you're not careful I'll give you a crack over the head that'll make you understand."

His eyes flashed. He jumped up from the curbstone, twirled his moustache with the fingers of his left hand and clenched his right hand into a hard brawny fist.

The boy was frightened. He glanced round rapidly, blinked timidly, and also sprang to his feet. The two stood looking each other up and down in silence.

"Well!" asked Chelkash sternly. He was burning and trembling with rage at the insult he had received from this callow youth whom he had despised when talking to him, but whom he now hated because he had such a healthy, tanned face, bright blue eyes and short sturdy arms, and because he lived in a village somewhere, had a home there, and some rich farmer was asking him to be his son-in-law; because of his whole past and present, but most of all because this lad, who was only a baby compared with himself, dared to love freedom, the value of which he did not appreciate, and which he did not need. It is always unpleasant to see a man whom you regard as being inferior to and lower than yourself love or hate the same things that you love and hate and thereby resemble you.

The lad glared at Chelkash and felt that the latter was his master.

"Oh . . . I don't mind," he said. "I'm looking for a job, ain't I? It's all the same to me who I work for, you or somebody else. All I wanted to say was . . . you don't look like a working man, you're . . . er . . . so ragged. Of course, I know it might happen to anybody. Lord, haven't I seen enough drunkards! Lots of them! And some even worse than you."

"All right, all right! So you agree?" Chelkash interrupted in a milder tone.

"Me? Why, of course! With pleasure! But how much will you pay me?"

"I pay according to results. It depends on the results. . . . On the catch. D'you understand? You might get a fiver. Will that be all right?"

Now that it was a question of money the peasant wanted to be definite, and he wanted his employer to be definite too. Again distrust and suspicion awoke in his mind.

"No, that doesn't suit me, brother!"

Chelkash also began to play the part.

"Don't argue. Wait! Let's go to the pub!" he said.

They walked down the street side by side. Chelkash twirled his moustache with the important air of an employer. The lad's face

expressed complete readiness to obey, and at the same time complete distrust and apprehension.

"What's your name?" Chelkash asked him.

"Gavrila," the boy answered.

When they entered the dingy smoke-begrimed tavern, Chelkash walked up to the bar and in the familiar tone of a frequenter ordered a bottle of vodka, some shchi, roast meat, and tea. When all this was served, he curtly said to the barman: "On tick!" The barman silently nodded his head. This scene impressed Gavrila and roused in him a profound respect for this man, his master, who was so well known and enjoyed such credit in spite of his disreputable appearance.

"Well, we'll have a bite now and then talk business. But wait here a moment, I have somewhere to go," said Chelkash.

He went out. Gavrila looked around him. The tavern was in a basement; it was damp and dismal, and a suffocating smell of vodka fumes, stale tobacco smoke, tar, and of some other pungent substance pervaded the place. At a table, opposite Gavrila, sat a red-bearded drunken man in seaman's dress, covered from head to foot with coal dust and tar. Hiccoughing every now and again, he sang a song in twisted and broken words that sometimes sounded like a hiss and sometimes were deeply guttural. He was evidently not a Russian.

Behind him sat two Moldavian women, ragged, black-haired and sunburnt, and they too were drunkenly singing a song.

Out of the gloom other figures emerged, all strangely dishevelled, all half drunk, noisy and restless....

Gavrila began to feel afraid and longed for the return of his master. All the noises of the tavern merged in one monotonous tone, and it seemed as though some enormous beast was growling, as though, possessing hundreds of different voices, it was angrily and blindly struggling to get out of this stone pit, but was unable to find the exit. Gavrila felt as though his body was absorbing something intoxicating and heavy, which made him dizzy and dimmed his eyes, which were roaming round the tavern with curiosity mixed with fear....

Chelkash came back and they began to eat and drink, talking as they proceeded with their meal. After the third glass of vodka, Gav-

rila was drunk. He felt merry and wanted to say something to please his master, who was such a fine fellow and had given him this splendid treat. But the words which welled up in his throat in waves could not, for some reason, slip off his tongue, which had suddenly become so strangely heavy.

Chelkash looked at him and said with an ironic smile:

"Half seas over already! Ekh, you milksop! What will you be like after the fifth glass?... Will you be able to work?"

"Don't ... be ... afraid ... brother," stammered Gavrila. "You'll ... be ... satisfied. I love you! Let me kiss you, eh?"

"Now then, none of that! Here, have another drink!"

Gavrila took another drink, and another, until everything around him began to float in even, undulating waves. This made him feel unwell and he wanted to vomit. His face looked foolishly solemn. When he tried to talk he smacked his lips in a comical way and mooed like a cow. Chelkash gazed at him absently, as if recalling something, thoughtfully twirling his moustache and smiling sadly.

The tavern rang with a drunken roar. The red-haired seaman was sleeping with his head resting on his elbows.

"All right, let's go," said Chelkash, getting up from the table.

Gavrila tried to get up too, but could not. He swore, and laughed idiotically as drunken men do.

"What a wash-out!" muttered Chelkash, resuming his seat at the table opposite Gavrila.

Gavrila kept on chuckling and gazing stupidly at his master. The latter stared back at him, keenly and thoughtfully. He saw before him a man whose life had fallen into his wolfish clutches. He felt that this life was in his power to turn in any direction he pleased. He could crumple it like a playing card, or could help place it in a firm peasant groove. He felt that he was the other one's master, but through his mind ran the thought that this lad would never have to drain the cup of bitterness that fate had compelled him, Chelkash, to do.... He both envied and pitied this young life, he despised it, and was even conscious of a feeling of regret as he pictured the possibility of it falling into other hands like his own.... But in the end all these feelings merged into one that was both paternal and practical. He was sorry for the lad, but he need-

ed him. He took Gavrila under the armpits, lifted him up and gently prodding him from behind with his knee, he pushed him out into the tavern yard, laid him in the shade of a wood-pile, sat down beside him and lit his pipe. Gavrila wriggled about for a while, moaned, and fell asleep.

II

"Are you ready?" Chelkash in an undertone asked Gavrila, who was fumbling with the oars.

"In a minute! This rowlock's loose. Can I give it just one bang with the oar?"

"No! Don't make a sound! Force it down with your hand and it will slip into its place."

Both were noiselessly handling a boat that was moored to the stern of one of a whole flotilla of small sailing barges laden with oak staves, and of large Turkish feluccas laden with palm and sandal wood and thick cyprus logs.

The night was dark. Heavy banks of ragged clouds floated across the sky. The sea was calm. The water, black and thick, like oil, gave off a humid, saline smell and lazily lapped against the ship's sides and the beach, gently rocking Chelkash's boat. Far from the shore loomed the dark hulls of ships, their masts pointing to the sky, tipped with different coloured lights. The sea, reflecting these lights, was dotted with innumerable coloured patches, which shimmered on its soft, black, velvety surface. The sea was sound asleep, like a labourer after a hard day's work.

"We're off!" said Gavrila, dropping his oars into the water.

"Aye, aye!" said Chelkash, pulling hard with his steering oar to bring the boat into the strip of water between the barges. The boat sped swiftly over the slippery water, and with each stroke of the oars the water was lit up with a bluish phosphorescent radiance that trailed like a long, soft, fluttering ribbon from the boat's stern.

"Does your head still ache?" Chelkash asked in a kindly voice.

"Something awful!... It's ringing like a bell.... I'll splash some water over it in a minute."

"There's no need to do that. Take this. It'll help your inside, and you'll soon get better," said Chelkash, handing Gavrila a flask.

"I doubt it.... Well, God bless us...."

A soft gurgling sound was heard.

"Hey, you! That's enough!" said Chelkash, stopping the boy from drinking more.

The boat pushed ahead again, noiselessly and swiftly winding its way among the ships.... Suddenly it shot out from among the crowd of ships, and the sea—infinite and mighty—spread out before them into the blue distance, where mountains of clouds towered out of the water—some violet and grey with puffy yellow borders, others greenish, the colour of sea water, and others of a dull, leaden hue, of the kind which throw heavy, mournful shadows. The clouds moved slowly, now merging with and now skirting each other, mingling their colours and forms, absorbing each other and again emerging in new shapes, majestic and frowning.... There was something sinister in the slow movement of this soulless mass. It seemed as though over there, on the edge of the sea, their number was infinite, and that they would eternally creep across the sky in this indifferent manner with the malicious object of preventing it from shining again over the slumbering sea with its millions of golden eyes—the multi-coloured stars, living and dreamily radiant, exciting lofty desires in men to whom their pure radiance is precious.

"The sea's fine, isn't it?" asked Chelkash.

"Not bad! Only it makes me feel afraid," answered Gavrila, pulling strongly and steadily at the oars. The water was barely audible as it splashed under the strokes of the long oars and shone with the warm bluish light of phosphorus.

"Afraid! You boob!" exclaimed Chelkash contemptuously.

He, the thief, loved the sea. His vibrating nervous nature, thirsting for impressions, could not contemplate enough the dark, boundless, free and mighty expanse. He felt hurt when he heard this answer to his enquiry about the beauty of the thing he loved. Sitting in the stern, he cleaved the water with his oar and calmly gazed ahead, feeling that he would like to glide far away over its velvety surface.

The sea always gave him a warm expansive feeling which filled his whole soul and purged it somewhat of the dross of

everyday life. He appreciated this, and loved to see himself a better man, here, amidst the water and the air, where thoughts of life, and life itself, always lose, the former their painful acuteness, and the latter all value. At night, the sound of the sea's soft, breathing as it slept floats evenly over its surface, and this limitless sound fills a man's soul with serenity, and gently subduing its evil impulses, rouses in it mighty dreams....

"Where's the tackle?" Gavrila suddenly asked, looking anxiously into the bottom of the boat.

Chelkash started.

"The tackle? I've got it here, in the stern."

He felt ashamed at having to lie to this boy, and he also regretted the thoughts and feelings that had been disturbed by this boy's question. It made him angry. The familiar sense of burning rose in his breast and throat, and this irritated him still more.

"Now look here!" he said to Gavrila in a hard, stern voice. "You sit still and mind your own business. I hired you to row. Do the job I hired you for. If you wag your tongue too much, you'll be sorry for it! Do you understand me?"

The boat shivered for a moment and stopped. The oars remained in the water, causing it to foam. Gavrila wriggled uncomfortably on his seat.

"Row!"

A foul oath shook the air. Gavrila swung back his oars. The boat shot forward, as if with fright, and sped on at a rapid, jerky pace, noisily cleaving the water.

"Steady now, steady!"

Chelkash stood up in the stern, and keeping hold of the steering oar, he glared coldly into Gavrila's pale face. Bending forward, he looked like a cat crouching for a spring. In his rage he ground his teeth so hard that it could be distinctly heard, and Gavrila's teeth, chattering with fear, were no less audible.

"Who's that shouting?" came a stern cry from the sea.

"Row! Row, you devil!... Quieter!... I'll murder you, you dog!... Go on!... Row!... One! Two! Make a sound, and I'll tear you limb from limb!" hissed Chelkash. And then he went on in a jeering tone: "Afraid! Booby!"

"Mother of God.... Holy Mary ..." whispered Gavrila, trembling with fear and exertion.

The boat swung round smoothly and returned to the docks, where the ship's lights crowded in multi-coloured groups, and the tall masts were visible.

"Hey! Who's that shouting?" came the voice again, but it sounded more distant this time. Chelkash became calmer.

"It's you that's shouting," he said in answer to the distant voice, and then he turned to Gavrila, who was still muttering his prayers, and said: "Well, brother, you're lucky! If that devil had come after us, it would have been all up with you. Do you understand what I mean? I'd have put you over to feed the fishes!"

Chelkash now spoke calmly and even good-humouredly, but Gavrila still trembling with fear, begged of him:

"Let me go! I ask you in the name of Christ, let me go! Put me ashore somewhere! Ay-ay-ay!... I'm lost! I'm a lost man! Remember God and let me go! What do you want me for? I'm no good for this sort of job.... I've never been on one like this before.... This is the first time.... Lord! I'm lost, I'm lost! Christ, how you fooled me, brother, eh? It's a sin.... You are damning your own soul!... Some business...."

"What business?" Chelkash asked sternly. "What business, eh?"

The lad's fear amused him, and he delighted in it as well as in the thought of what a terrible fellow he, Chelkash, was.

"Shady business, brother!... Let me go, for God's sake!... What do you want me for?... Please.... Be good...."

"Shut up! If I didn't need you, I wouldn't have taken you. Do you understand?... Well, shut up!"

"Lord!" sighed Gavrila.

"Stop snivelling, or you'll get it in the neck!" snapped Chelkash.

But Gavrila, unable to restrain himself any longer, sobbed quietly, wept, sniffed, wriggled on his seat, but rowed strongly, desperately.

The boat shot forward like an arrow. Again the dark hulls of the ships loomed before them, and soon the boat was lost among them, winding like a shuttle in and out of the narrow strips of water between them.

"Now listen! If anybody asks you about anything, you're to keep mum, if you want to keep alive, that is! Do you understand me?"

"Ekh!" sighed Gavrila resignedly in answer to this stern command. Then he added bitterly: "I'm done for, I am!"

"Stop snivelling, I tell you!" said Chelkash in an angry whisper.

This whisper robbed Gavrila of all capacity to think; his mind was benumbed by a chill foreboding of evil. He mechanically dropped the oars, leaned far back, raised the oars and dropped them again, all the time keeping his eyes riveted on the tips of his bast shoes.

The sleepy murmur of the waves sounded angry and terrifying. They entered the docks.... From beyond its granite walls came sounds of human voices, the splashing of water, singing and shrill whistling.

"Stop!" whispered Chelkash. "Ship your oars! Hold on to the wall! Quieter, you devil!"

Gavrila clutched at the wall and worked the boat along; the thick coating of slime that covered the masonry deadened the sound of the gunwale as it scraped along its side.

"Stop!... Give me the oars! Come this way! Where's your passport? In your knapsack? Give me your knapsack! Look sharp! That's to prevent your running away, my friend.... You won't run away now. You might have bolted without the oars, but you'd be afraid to run away without your passport. Wait here! Mind! If you blab—I'll find you even if you're at the bottom of the sea!"

Suddenly clutching at something with his hands, Chelkash leaped upwards and vanished over the wall.

Gavrila shuddered.... All this had happened so quickly. He felt the accursed burden of fear which weighed upon him in the presence of this bewhiskered, skinny thief, dropping, slipping off his shoulders.... Here was a chance to get away!... He breathed a sigh of relief and looked around. On the left towered a black, mastless hull; it looked like an enormous coffin, deserted and empty.... Every wave that struck its side awoke a hollow, muffled echo that sounded like a sigh. On the right, the grey stone wall of the mole stretched above the surface of the water, like a cold, heavy serpent. Behind him loomed some black piles, and in front, in the space between the wall and the coffin, he could see the sea, silent, desolate, and the black clouds floating above it. The clouds

moved across the sky slowly, large and ponderous, spreading horror out of the darkness and seeming ready to crush one with their weight. All was cold, black and sinister. Gavrila grew frightened again, and this fright was worse than that with which Chelkash imbued him; it gripped his breast in its powerful embrace, reduced him to a helpless clod and held him fast to the seat of the boat.

Silence reigned all around. Not a sound was heard, except for the sighing of the sea. The clouds still crept across the sky slowly and lazily, but they rose out of the sea in infinite numbers. The sky too looked like a sea, but a restless one, suspended over the calm, smooth and slumbering sea below. The clouds seemed to be descending upon the earth in grey, curly waves, into the chasms from which the wind had torn them, and upon the newly-rising waves, not yet crested with angry greenish foam.

Gavrila felt crushed by this gloomy silence and beauty and yearned to see his master again. Suppose he didn't come back?... Time passed slowly, more slowly than the clouds creeping across the sky.... And as time passed the silence became more sinister.... At last the sounds of splashing and rustling and something resembling a whisper came from the other side of the mole. Gavrila thought he would die on the spot.

"P'st! Are you asleep? Hold this.... Careful now!" It was Chelkash's muffled voice.

Something heavy and cube-shaped dropped from the wall. Gavrila caught it and put it in the bottom of the boat. A second object of the same kind followed. And then Chelkash's tall figure appeared over the wall, the oars appeared out of somewhere, Gavrila's knapsack fell at his feet, and breathing heavily, Chelkash slipped into the stern of the boat.

Gavrila gazed at him with a pleased but timid smile.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"Yes, a bit! Now then take to the oars and pull! Pull with all your might! You've done well, my lad! Half the job's done. The only thing now is to slip past those devils out there—and then you can get your share and go home to your Masha. I suppose you have a Masha, haven't you?"

"N-no!" answered Gavrila, pulling at the oars with all his might. His chest heaved like a pair of bellows and his arms worked

like steel springs. The water swirled from under the boat's keel, and the blue track at its stern was wider now. Gavrila was drenched with his own perspiration, but he continued to row with all his might. Twice that night he had had a terrible fright; he did not wish to have a third one. All he longed for was to get over this accursed job as quickly as possible, to go ashore and run away from this man before he did indeed kill him, or get him landed in jail. He decided not to discuss anything with him, not to contradict him, to do all he told him to do, and if he succeeded in escaping from him, to offer a prayer to St. Nicholas the Miracle-Worker the very next morning. An ardent prayer was ready to burst from his breast at this very moment, but he restrained himself. He puffed like a steam engine and now and again glanced at Chelkash from under his brows.

But Chelkash, tall, thin, his body bent forward, looking like a bird ready to take to flight, peered with hawkish eyes into the darkness ahead and twitched his beak-like nose. He grasped the steering oar tightly with one hand and with the other twirled his moustache, which also twitched from the smiles that twisted his thin lips. He was pleased with his haul, with himself, and with this lad who was so terribly frightened of him, and whom he had converted into his slave. He watched Gavrila putting every ounce of strength into his oars and felt sorry for him. He wanted to cheer him up.

"Hey!" he said softly with a laugh. "You were frightened, weren't you?"

"N-no! Not much," gasped Gavrila.

"You needn't pull so hard now. It's all over. There's only one spot that we've got to pass.... Take a rest...."

Gavrila obediently stopped rowing, wiped the perspiration from his face with his sleeve and dropped the oars.

"Well, have another go now," said Chelkash after a little while. "But don't make the water talk. There's a gate we have to pass. Quietly now, quietly! They're a stern lot here.... They wouldn't hesitate to shoot and bore a hole in your head before you have time to shout—oh!"

The boat now glided slowly over the water making scarcely a sound, except for the blue drops that dripped from the oars and

caused small, blue, momentary patches to form on the water where they fell. The night became darker and even more silent. The sky no longer resembled a storm-tossed sea—the clouds had spread and covered it with a smooth heavy blanket that hung low and motionless over the water. The sea became still calmer and blacker, its warm saline odour became still more pungent, and it no longer seemed as broad as it was before.

"I wish it would rain!" whispered Chelkash. "We'd get through as if we were behind a curtain."

On the right and left eerie structures loomed out of the black water—barges, motionless, gloomy, and also black. But on one of them a light was moving; evidently somebody carrying a lantern was walking on the deck. The sea sounded plaintive and hollow, as it lapped against the sides of the barges, and the barges answered with a cold, muffled echo, as if arguing with the sea and refusing to yield to its plaint.

"A cordon!" exclaimed Chelkash in a scarcely audible whisper.

The moment Chelkash told him to row more slowly, Gavrila was again overcome by that feeling of tense expectation. He bent forward and peered into the darkness, and he felt as if he were growing, as if his bones and sinews were stretching within him, giving him a dull pain; his head, filled with but one thought, ached; the skin on his back quivered, and small, sharp, cold needles were shooting through his legs. His eyes ached from the tenseness with which he peered into the darkness, out of which, every moment, he expected to hear the cry: "Stop, thief!"

And now, when Chelkash whispered "cordon," Gavrila shuddered; a piercing, burning thought shot through his brain and sent his taut nerves tingling. He wanted to shout and call for help.... He opened his mouth, rose slightly from the seat, stuck out his chest and took a deep breath—but suddenly he was paralysed by fear, which struck him like a whip. He closed his eyes and collapsed in the bottom of the boat.

Ahead of the boat, far away on the horizon, out of the black water, an enormous, fiery-blue sword rose and cleaved the darkness of the night; it ran its edge over the clouds and then lay on the breast of the sea, a broad blue strip. And within this bright strip ships appeared out of the darkness, ships hitherto invisible, black,

silent, and shrouded in the solemn gloom of the night. They looked as though they had long been at the bottom of the sea, sent there by the mighty power of the storm, and had now risen at the command of the fiery sword that was born of the sea—had risen to look at the sky and at everything that was on the water.... Their rigging, clinging to their masts like festoons of seaweed brought up from the sea bottom together with the black giants who were enmeshed in their net. The sinister blue sword rose again out of the depth of the sea, and flashing, again cleaved the night, and again lay flat on the water, but in another direction. And where it lay, other ships' hulls, hitherto invisible, appeared.

The boat stopped and rocked on the water as if in perplexity. Gavrila lay in the bottom of the boat, his face covered with his hands. Chelkash jabbed at him with his foot and hissed furiously:

"That's the Customs cruiser, you fool.... It's an electric lamp! Get up, you dolt! They'll shine the light on us in a minute and everything will be all up with you and me! Get up!"

At last a kick from the heel of a heavy top boot heavier than the first caught Gavrila in the back. He started up, and still afraid to open his eyes, took his seat, groped for the oars and began to row.

"Quieter! Quieter, or I'll murder you!... What a dolt you are, the devil take you! What frightened you, ugly mug? A lantern, that's all it is! Quieter with the oars... you sour-faced devil!... They're on the lookout for smugglers.They won't see us—they're too far out. Don't be afraid, they won't see us. Now we...." Chelkash looked round triumphantly. "Of course! We're out of it! Phew!... Well, you're lucky, you thick-headed boob!"

Gavrila said nothing. He pulled at the oars and, breathing heavily, looked out of the corners of his eyes in the direction where the fiery sword was rising and falling. He could not possibly believe what Chelkash said—that this was only a lantern. The cold blue radiance that cleaved the darkness caused the sea to sparkle with mysterious silvery brilliance, and Gavrila again felt hypnotized by that soul-crushing fear. He rowed mechanically, crouching as if expecting a blow from above, and now he was bereft of all desire—he was empty and soulless. The excitement of this night had driven everything human out of him.

But Chelkash was jubilant. His nerves, accustomed to shocks, were now relaxed. His moustache twitched voluptuously and a light shone in his eyes. He felt splendid. He whistled through his teeth, inhaled deep breaths of the moist sea air. He looked around, and smiled good-naturedly when his eyes fell upon Gavrila.

The wind swept down and chopped up the sea. The clouds were now thinner and less opaque, but they covered the whole sky. The wind, though still light, was freely sweeping over the sea, but the clouds were motionless and seemed to be absorbed in grey, dull thought.

"Now lad, it's time you pulled yourself together! You look as if all your guts have been squeezed out of your body and there's nothing left but a bag of bones! It's all over now. Hey!"

Gavrila was pleased to hear a human voice at last, even if that voice was Chelkash's.

"I can hear what you say," he said softly.

"Very well, then, milksop.... Come and steer and I'll take the oars. I suppose you're tired."

Gavrila mechanically changed places with Chelkash, and as they crossed, Chelkash saw the boy's woe-begone face, and he noticed that his legs were trembling. He felt sorry for him. Patting him on the shoulder, he said:

"Come on, lad! Don't be so down in the dumps. You've earned a good bit tonight. I'll reward you well, my boy. Would you like the feel of a twenty-five ruble bill?"

"I don't want anything. All I want is to get ashore...."

Chelkash waved his hand in disgust, spat, took up the oars and began to row, swinging the oars far back with his long arms.

The sea woke up and began to play with its little waves, giving birth to them, ornamenting them with fringes of foam, dashing them against each other, and breaking them up into fine spray. The foam melted with hisses and sighs, and the air all around was filled with a musical splashing noise. Even the darkness seemed to come to life.

Chelkash began to talk.

"Well now, tell me," he said. "You'll go back to your village and get married, and start grubbing the earth and sow corn. The wife will start bearing children. You won't have enough food for

them. Well, you'll be struggling all your life.... Is there any pleasure in that?"

"Pleasure! I should say there isn't!" answered Gavrila with a shudder.

Here and there the wind rent the clouds apart and scraps of the sky with one or two stars in them peeped between the spaces. Reflected in the sea, these stars played among the waves, now vanishing and now twinkling again.

"Steer to the right!" said Chelkash, "we shall be there soon.... Y-e-ss!.... We're finished. It was a nice job! D'you see how it is?... One night's work, and we land a cool five hundred!"

"Fi-v-e hundred?!" drawled Gavrila incredulously. But he at once caught fright and hurriedly asked, kicking one of the bales at the bottom of the boat: "What's this?"

"That's worth a lot of money. If we sold it at its proper price we could get a thousand for it. But I'll ask for less.... Clever, ain't it?"

"Y-e-s?" drawled Gavrila interrogatingly. "I wish I could get a bag like that!" he added with a sigh as he suddenly remembered his village, his wretched farm, his mother, and all that was distant and dear to him, and for the sake of which he had left home to earn some money, and had gone through all the horrors of this night. He was overwhelmed by a wave of recollections of his little village which scrambled down the steep slope to the river that was concealed by birches, willows, ash, and bird cherry.... "Wouldn't that be fine," he murmured with a mournful sigh.

"Y-e-s!" continued Chelkash. "I'm thinking how nice it would be for you now to take the train home.... Wouldn't you have all the girls running after you! You could choose any one you liked! You could build yourself a new house.... I don't think you'll have enough to build a new one though...."

"That's true ... it won't be enough to build a house. Timber's dear in our parts."

"Well, you could repair the old one. What about a horse? Have you got one?"

"A horse! Yes, I've got a horse, but she's too old, the devil."

"Well, you could buy a horse. Ekh, a f-i-n-e horse! And a cow ... sheep ... and poultry.... Eh?"

"Oh, don't talk about it!... Good Lord! Wouldn't I live then!"

"Y-e-s, brother, it wouldn't be at all bad.... I've got some idea of what that kind of life is. I had my own little nest once.... My father was one of the richest men in our village...."

Chelkash lazily pulled at the oars. The boat rocked on the waves that were playfully lapping against its sides, barely moving over the dark sea which was becoming more and more boisterous. The two men dreamed as they rocked on the water, thoughtfully gazing around. Wishing to soothe the lad and cheer him up, Chelkash had turned Gavrila's thoughts to his village and had begun the talk in a bantering tone, hiding his smile under his moustache. When questioning Gavrila and reminding him of the joys of peasant life, in which he himself had long been disillusioned, had forgotten and had only recalled now he gradually allowed himself to be carried away by this new train of thought. He stopped questioning the lad about his village and its affairs, and, before he was aware of it, continued in the following strain:

"The main thing in peasant life, brother, is freedom! You're your own master. You have a house. It's not worth much, but it's your own. You have land; only a patch, but it's your own! You are a king on your land!... You have a face.... You can demand respect from everybody.... Isn't that so?" he concluded feelingly.

Gavrila stared at him with curiosity, and he too was carried away by the same feeling. In the course of this conversation he forgot the kind of man he was dealing with and saw before him a peasant, like himself, stuck to the land forever by the sweat of many generations, bound to it by the recollections of childhood, but who had voluntarily run away from it and its cares, and was suffering due punishment for this truancy.

"Yes, brother, what you say is true!" he said. "Oh how true! Look at yourself. What are you now without land? Land is like a mother, you can't forget it so easily."

Chelkash awoke from his musing.... He was conscious of that irritating heartburn which he always felt whenever his pride—the pride of the reckless daredevil—was touched by anybody, particularly by one whom he despised.

"Stop sermonizing!" he said fiercely. "Did you think I was talking seriously?... You must take me for a fool!"

"You're a funny chap!" Gavrila blurted out, feeling crushed again. "I wasn't talking about you, was I? There's lots of men like you. Lots of them! Ekh! How many unhappy people there are in the world!... Roaming around!..."

"Here, come and take the oars, you boob!" commanded Chelkash, for some reason restraining the flood of oaths that came rushing up into his throat.

They changed places again, and as he stepped over the bales in the bottom of the boat to reach the stern, Chelkash felt an almost irresistible desire to give Gavrila a push that would send him tumbling into the sea.

The conversation was not resumed, but Chelkash felt the breath of the village even in Gavrila's silence.... Musing over the past, he forgot to steer, with the result that the boat, turned by current, drifted out to sea. The waves seemed to understand that the boat had lost its way and began to toss it higher and higher, lightly playing with it, causing kindly blue lights to flash under the oars. And before Chelkash's mental vision floated pictures of the past, of the distant past which was separated from the present by a wall of eleven years of hobo life. He saw himself as a child; he saw his village; his mother, a plump ruddy-cheeked woman with kind grey eyes; he saw his father, a red-bearded giant with a stern face; he saw himself as a bridegroom, and he saw his wife, black-eyed Anfisa, a soft, buxom, cheerful girl with a long plait of hair; he saw himself again as the handsome Guardsman; again he saw his father, now grey and bent by toil, and his mother wrinkled and bowed; he also saw the vision of his return to his village from the army, and how proud his father was of his Grigori, of this handsome, sturdy, bewhiskered soldier.... Memory, that scourge of the unhappy, reanimates even the stones of the past, and even pours a drop of honey into the poison that one had once to drink....

Chelkash felt as if he were being fanned by the tender, soothing breath of his native air, which wafted to his ears the kind words of his mother, the grave speech of his earnest peasant father, many forgotten sounds and many fragrant smells of mother earth which has only just thawed, which has only just been ploughed, and is only just being covered with the emerald silken carpet of winter wheat.... He felt lonely, uprooted and isolated forever

from the way of life which had produced the blood that now flowed in his veins.

"Hey! Where are we going?" suddenly exclaimed Gavrila.

Chelkash started and looked round with the alert gaze of a bird of prey.

"Christ, look where we have drifted to! Lay to the oars! Pull! Pull harder!"

"You've been dreaming, eh," Gavrila asked with a smile.

"I'm tired. . . ."

"So now we won't get caught with these, will we?" Gavrila asked, kicking at the bales at the bottom of the boat.

"No. . . . You can ease your mind on that score. I'll deliver them and get the money. . . . Y-e-s!"

"Five hundred?"

"No less."

"A tidy sum! Wish I had it! Ekh, wouldn't I play a tune with it!"

"On the farm?"

"I should say so! I'd. . . ."

And Gavrila flew off on winged dreams. Chelkash remained silent. His moustache drooped; his right side, splashed by the spray, was dripping wet. His eyes were now sunken and had lost their brightness. Everything rapacious in him had sagged, subdued by humiliating thoughts, which were reflected even from the folds of his grimy blouse.

He swung the boat round abruptly and steered towards something black that loomed out of the water.

The sky was again overcast and rain fell, a fine, warm rain, which pattered merrily as the drops struck the backs of the waves.

"Stop! Be quiet!" commanded Chelkash.

The boat's nose struck the side of a barge.

"Are they asleep, or what, the devil's?" growled Chelkash, catching hold with a boat hook of some ropes that were dangling from the deck. "Drop the ladder! Blast it! It must go and rain now! Why couldn't it have rained before! Hey, you swabs! Hey!"

"Is that you, Selkash?" came a voice from above that sounded like the mewing of a cat.

"Come on, drop the ladder!"

"Kalimera, Selkash!"

"Drop the ladder, you hell-smoked devil!" roared Chelkash.

"Oh how angry he eez tonight.... Eloy!"

"Up you go, Gavrila!" said Chelkash to his mate.

Within a moment they were on the deck, where three dark-bearded figures were animatedly chattering to each other in a strange lisping tongue and looking over the gunwale down at Chelkash's boat. A fourth, wrapped in a long chlamys, went up to Chelkash, silently shook hands with him, and then glanced suspiciously at Gavrila.

"Get the money by the morning," said Chelkash to him curtly. I'll turn in now. Come on, Gavrila! Do you want anything to eat?"

"All I want is to sleep..." answered Gavrila, and five minutes later he was snoring, while Chelkash, sitting beside him, was trying on somebody's top boot, pensively spitting on the side and whistling a mournful tune through his teeth. Then he stretched out beside Gavrila, put his hands under the back of his head and lay there, twitching his moustache.

The barge rocked gently on the playful water. Something creaked plaintively. The rain pattered softly on the deck. The waves splashed against the side of the barge.... And it all sounded so sad, like a cradle song sung by a mother who had no hopes of happiness for her son....

Chelkash bared his teeth, raised his head, looked around, whispered something to himself, and lay down again.... He spread out his legs, and this made him look like a huge pair of scissors.

III

He woke up first, looked around anxiously, calmed down at once and looked at Gavrila who was still sleeping, snoring lustily, with a smile spread all over his boyish, healthy, sunburnt face. Chelkash sighed and climbed up a narrow rope ladder. A patch of leaden sky peered down the hatchway. It was already light, but the day was dull and grey, as it usually is in the autumn.

Chelkash returned about two hours later. His face was flushed and his moustaches were dashingly screwed upward. He wore a tunic and buckskin breeches, and a pair of tall, stout top boots. He looked like a huntsman. Although not new, the costume was still

sound and suited him well. It made him look broader, concealed his gauntness and gave him a martial appearance.

"Hey, you calf, get up!" he cried, pushing Gavrila with his foot.

Gavrila jumped up. Still half asleep, he failed to recognize Chelkash and stared at him with dull, sleepish eyes. Chelkash burst out laughing.

"You do look fine!" exclaimed Gavrila at last, with a broad smile. "Quite a gentleman!"

"That doesn't take long with us. Well, aren't you a frightened baby! You thought you were going to die a thousand times last night, didn't you?"

"Yes, but judge for yourself. It was the first time I was on a job like that! I might have damned my soul for the rest of my life!"

"Would you come with me again?"

"Again?... Well.... What can I say? What will I get out of it? Tell me that!"

"Well, suppose you'd get two rainbow ones?"

"Two hundred rubles? That's not so bad.... I'd go for that...."

"But wait a minute! What about damning your soul?"

"Well ... perhaps ... it won't be damned!" answered Gavrila with a smile. And if it won't... I'll be a made man for life."

Chelkash laughed merrily and said:

"All right! Enough of joking, let's go ashore...."

They were in the boat again. Chelkash at the tiller and Gavrila at the oars. Above them was the grey sky, evenly overcast with clouds. The dull green sea played with the boat, boisterously tossing it on its waves, which were still merrily casting bright salty sprays into the boat. Far ahead loomed a yellow strip of sandy shore, and behind them stretched the vast expanse of the sea, furrowed by packs of waves that were ornamented with fluffy white foam. There, too, in the distance, were numerous ships; far on the left was visible a whole forest of masts, and the white houses of the town, whence came a muffled rumble which, mingling with the splashing of the waves, created fine, powerful music.... And over all was cast a thin film of grey mist, which made things seem remote from each other....

"Ekh! There'll be hell let loose this evening!" said Chelkash, nodding in the direction of the sea.

"A storm?" asked Gavrila, ploughing the waves with powerful strokes. He was already drenched from head to foot from the spray which the wind scattered over the sea.

"That's it!" said Chelkash.

Gavrila looked into his face enquiringly....

"Well, how much did they give you?" he asked at last, realizing that Chelkash was not inclined to talk.

"Look!" said Chelkash, showing Gavrila something that he drew from his pocket.

Gavrila saw a roll of coloured bills, and his eyes lit up with joy.

"Ekh!... And I thought you were kidding me! How much have you got there?"

"Five hundred and forty!"

"My word!" exclaimed Gavrila in a whisper, following the five hundred and forty rubles with his greedy eyes as Chelkash put the money back into his pocket. "Ekh! If only I had as much as that!"—and he heaved a mournful sigh.

"Won't we have a wonderful time, my lad!" exclaimed Chelkash cheerfully. "Ekh, we'll go on the spree!... Don't worry! You'll get your share.... I'll give you forty. Does that satisfy you? I'll give it to you right now if you want to?"

"If it's not too much for you.... Why not? I'll take it!"

Gavrila trembled with the expectation that gnawed in his breast.

"Oh, you devil's baby! I'll take it, you say! Well, take it, please! Do me a favour! I don't know what to do with all this money! Help me to get rid of it. Take it, do!"

Chelkash held out several bills. Gavrila took them with a trembling hand, dropped the oars and tucked the bills inside his blouse, greedily screwing up his eyes and inhaling noisily, as if he were drinking something very hot. Chelkash watched him with an ironic smile. Gavrila again took up the oars and rowed with downcast eyes nervously, hurriedly, as if afraid of something. His shoulders and ears twitched.

"You're greedy!... That's bad.... But it's not surprising.... You're a peasant ..." said Chelkash pensively.

"But look what you can do with money!" exclaimed Gavrila, aflush with excitement; and he began to talk rapidly, hurriedly, as if trying to catch up with his thoughts and clutching at words,

about life in the village with money and without money, about the honour, abundance and pleasure one can acquire with money.

Chelkash listened attentively, with a grave face and eyes screwed up as if thinking hard. Now and again he smiled with satisfaction.

"Here we are!" he exclaimed, interrupting Gavrila.

A wave lifted the boat and landed it on the sandy beach.

"Well, it's all over now, brother. Pull the boat up higher so that it won't be washed away. They'll come for it. And now we must part!... It's eight versts from here to town. I suppose you are going back to town, aren't you?"

A shrewd, good-natured smile lit up Chelkash's face, and his whole bearing indicated that he had thought of something pleasing to himself and surprising for Gavrila. Thrusting his hands in his pocket, he rustled the bills that were lying in them.

"No.... I ... won't go ... I ..." gasped Gavrila as if he were choking.

Chelkash looked at him and asked:

"What's ailing you?"

"Nothing ... only...." Gavrila's face was alternately flushed and ashen-grey, and he stood there wriggling, whether from a desire to hurl himself upon Chelkash, or because he was torn by another desire difficult to fulfill, it was hard to say.

Chelkash felt uneasy at the sight of the lad's agitation and he waited to see what the upshot of it would be.

Gavrila began to laugh in a queer way that sounded more like sobbing. He hung his head, so that Chelkash was unable to see the expression on his face; only his ears were visible, and these grew red and pale by turns.

"Go to the devil!" exclaimed Chelkash, waving his hand in disgust. "Have you fallen in love with me, or what? Stands there wriggling like a girl! Or is it that you don't want to part from me? Now then, you booby! Speak up, or else I'll go away!"

"You'll go away?" shrieked Gavrila.

The sandy, deserted beach shuddered at the sound of this shriek, and the sandy ridges washed up by the waves of the sea seemed to heave. Chelkash too shuddered. Suddenly Gavrila darted towards Chelkash, threw himself at his feet and flinging his arms around his knees gave a sudden tug. Chelkash staggered and dropped heavily

to the sand. Grinding his teeth, he raised his long arm and was about to bring his clenched fist down upon Gavrila's head when the blow was checked by the lad's shy and plaintive whisper:

"Be a good fellow!... Give me that money! For the sake of Christ, give it to me! It isn't much to you. You got it in one night.... Only one night, but it would take me years.... Give it to me, and I will pray for you! Always.... In three churches.... I'll pray for the salvation of your soul!... You will only throw the money away.... But I, I'd put it in the land! Give me the money! It isn't much to you. You can easily get some more. One night ... and you are rich! Do me a good turn. After all, you're a lost man.... There's nothing before you.... But I.... Oh.... What couldn't I do with the money! Give it to me!"

Chelkash sat on the sand, frightened, amazed and angry, leaning back and propping himself up with his arms, saying not a word, but staring with wide open eyes at the lad who was pressing his head against his knees and whispering, gasping and pleading. At last he pushed the boy away, jumped to his feet, thrust his hand in his pocket, took out several bills and flung them at Gavrila.

"Here you are! Take them ..." he shouted, trembling with excitement, filled with both intense pity and hatred for this greedy slave. And having thrown the money at him, he felt like a hero.

"I wanted to give you more myself," he said. "My heart was softened last night, thinking of my village.... I thought to myself: I'll help the lad. I just waited to see what you would do, whether you would ask for it or not. But you.... Ekh! You've got no guts! You're a beggar!... Is it worth while tormenting yourself like that for money? Fool! Greedy devils!.... They've no self respect.... They'd sell themselves for five kopecks!...

"Angel!... May Christ guard and save you! I'm a different man now.... I'm rich!" squealed Gavrila, in a transport of joy, putting the money inside his blouse with a trembling hand. "You are an angel!... I shall never forget you, not as long as I live!... And I'll tell my wife and my children to pray for you!"

Hearing these rapturous cries and seeing the lad's radiant face distorted by this paroxysm of greed, Chelkash felt that he, a thief, a rake, torn from all his kith and kin, would never become a greedy,

low, self-degrading creature like this. No! He would never sink so low!... And this thought and feeling, making him conscious of his own freedom, kept him on the deserted seashore with Gavrila.

"You've made me happy for life!" shouted Gavrila again, seizing Chelkash's hand and pressing it against his own face.

Chelkash remained silent, baring his teeth like a wolf. Gavrila kept on chattering:

"And just imagine! As we were coming here I was thinking to myself: I'll give him, meaning you, one c-rr-a-c-k over the head with the oar ... take the money, and chuck him, meaning you, into the sea.... Nobody would miss him, I thought to myself. And even if he was missed, nobody would worry about him. He's not the kind of man anybody would make a fuss about!... No use to anybody. Who would stand up for him?!"

Chelkash seized Gavrila by the throat and barked:

"Give that money back!"

Gavrila struggled, but Chelkash's other arm wound round him like a snake.... There was a screech of tearing cloth, and Gavrila lay on the sand kicking his legs, his blouse ripped down to the hem, his eyes staring with wild amazement and his fingers clutching the air. Chelkash stood there, tall, straight, thin, with a rapacious look on his face. Baring his teeth he laughed a staccato, sardonic laugh, while his moustache twitched nervously on his sharp angular face. Never in all his life had he been so cruelly insulted, and never had he been so angry.

"Well, are you happy?" he asked Gavrila amidst his laughter. And then, turning his back on him, he strode off in the direction of the town. But he had barely taken half a dozen paces when Gavrila crouched like a cat, jumped to his feet, and with a wide swing of his arm hurled a large pebble at Chelkash, exclaiming fiercely:

"Take that!"

Chelkash gasped, put his hands to his head, staggered, swung round to face Gavrila and fell prone on the sand. Gavrila gazed at the prostrate man dumbfounded. He saw his leg move, he saw him try to raise his head and then stretch out and tremble like a taut string. And then Gavrila dashed off, as fast as his legs could carry him, into the distance, where a shaggy black cloud hung over the misty steppe, and where it was dark. The waves surged

up on the sandy beach, merged with it and surged back again. The surf hissed, and the air was filled with spray.

Rain fell at first slowly, but soon in heavy dense streaks, pouring down from the sky. And the streaks wove an entire net of water threads, a net which at once covered the expanses of steppe and sea. Gavrila vanished in this net. For a long time nothing was visible except the rain, and the long body of the man lying on the sand on the seashore. But out of the rain Gavrila reappeared, running as fast as a bird upon the wing. He ran up to Chelkash, dropped to his knees in front of him and turned him over on the sand. His hand came in contact with something warm, red and sticky.... He shuddered and started back with horror written on his pallid face.

"Brother, get up!" he whispered into Chelkash's ear amidst the pattering of the rain.

Chelkash came to, pushed Gavrila away and said in a hoarse voice:

"Go away!..."

"Brother! forgive me! It was the devil who tempted me..." whispered Gavrila in a trembling voice, kissing Chelkash's hand.

"Go.... Go away ..." gasped Chelkash.

"Take this sin from my soul!... Please! Forgive!..."

"For.... Go away!... Go to hell!" Chelkash suddenly shouted, sitting up. His face was pale and angry, his eyes were dull and heavy, and the lids drooped as if he very much wanted to sleep. "What else do you want? You've done your job.... Now go! Clear out!"

And he lunged at grief-stricken Gavrila with his foot, but the effort was too much for him, and he would have sunk back to the sand had not Gavrila put his arm round his shoulders. Chelkash's face was now on a level with Gavrila's. Both were pale and horrible to look at.

"Pht!" and Chelkash spat into his hireling's wide-open eyes.

Gavrila wiped his eyes with his sleeve and whispered:

"Do what you like.... I shan't say a word. Forgive me, for the sake of Christ!"

"Worm!... You haven't got guts for anything!..." shouted Chelkash contemptuously, and then, tearing his blouse from under

his coat, he began silently to bandage his head, now and again grinding his teeth with pain. At last he said through his clenched teeth, "Did you take the money?"

"No, I didn't take it, brother! I don't want it! It only causes trouble!..."

Chelkash put his hand into the pocket of his coat, drew out the roll of bills, took a rainbow-coloured one from it and put it back in his pocket, and threw the rest at Gavrila, saying:

"Take this and clear out!"

"I won't take it, brother!... I can't! Forgive me!"

"Take it, I tell you!..." roared Chelkash, rolling his eyes horribly.

"Forgive me ... and then I'll take it ..." said Gavrila timidly, dropping down on the rain-drenched sand at Chelkash's feet.

"Liar! You will take it! I know you will, you worm!" said Chelkash in a confident voice. Pulling Gavrila's head up by the hair, he pushed the money into his face and said:

"Take it! Take it! You've earned it! Take it. Don't be afraid! Don't be ashamed of having nearly killed a man! Nobody would punish you for getting rid of a man like me. They would even thank you for it if they got to know of it. Take it!"

Seeing that Chelkash was joking, Gavrila felt relieved. He grasped the money tightly in his hand and enquired in a tearful voice:

"But you do forgive me, brother, don't you, eh?"

"Angel!..." answered Chelkash mockingly in the same tone of voice. Rising and swaying on his feet, he said: "Forgive? There's nothing to forgive! You tried to do me in today, and I might try to do you in tomorrow."

"Ekh, brother, brother!" sighed Gavrila, mournfully shaking his head.

Chelkash stood in front of him with a queer smile on his face; and the rag on his head, gradually becoming red, began to look like a Turkish fez.

The rain was now pouring down in torrents. The sea murmured with a hollow sound, and the waves beat furiously and angrily upon the shore.

The two men remained silent.

"Well, good-bye!" said Chelkash ironically, walking off.

He staggered, his legs trembled, and he held his head in a queer way, as if afraid it would drop off.

"Forgive me, brother!" Gavrila begged once again.

"Never mind!" answered Chelkash coldly, continuing on his way.

He staggered on, holding his head with his left hand and slowly twirling his yellow moustache with the right.

Gavrila gazed after him until he vanished in the curtain of rain, which was now pouring from the clouds more densely than ever, in thin, endless streaks, and enveloping the steppe with impenetrable gloom, the colour of steel.

He then took off his soaking cap, crossed himself, looked at the money that he grasped tightly in his hand, heaved a deep sigh of relief, put the money inside his blouse and strode firmly along the beach, in the direction opposite to that in which Chelkash had gone.

The sea howled and hurled large, ponderous waves upon the sandy shore, smashing them into spray and foam. The rain beat heavily upon the water and the land.... The wind shrieked.... The air all around was filled with whining, roaring, and rumbling.... The rain blotted out both sea and sky.

Soon the rain and the spray from the waves washed away the red stain on the spot where Chelkash had lain, and washed out the tracks that Chelkash and the young lad had made on the sandy beach.... And nothing was left on the deserted seashore to remind one of the little drama in which these two men had been the actors.

AFLOAT

AN EASTER STORY

I

THE LEADEN clouds crept slowly over the sleepy river, seeming to sink lower and lower; in the distance their grey tatters appeared to touch the surface of the swift, turbid springtide waves, and where they touched the water, rose towering to the skies in an impenetrable wall of cloud, blocking the current and barring the way of the rafts.

And the waves, ineffectually trying to lift this wall, beat vainly against it in a low, plaintive murmur, recoiling from each impact to roll back into the damp gloom of the fresh spring night.

But the rafts sailed on, and the distance receded before them in a wilderness of heavy tumbled cloud masses.

The shores were invisible, hidden by the night, pushed back by the sweeping surge of the tide.

The river resembled a sea. The sky above it was wrapped in clouds. Everything was damp, oppressive and dreary.

The rafts glided swiftly and noiselessly over the waters, and in front of them a steamboat loomed out of the darkness, its funnel shooting out a merry swarm of sparks and its wheel blades churning the water....

Two red lanterns on the shallows glimmered larger and brighter, and the lamp on the mast swayed gently from side to side and winked mysteriously at the darkness.

The air was filled with the plash of water and the heavy sighs of the engine.

"Look ou-oot!" came a deep-chested shout from the rafts.

At the tail-end of the raft two men stood at the helm oars. One of them was Mitya, the son of the timber-floater, a fair, sickly-looking, thoughtful youth of twenty. The other was Sergei, the hired

workman, a morose-faced strapping fellow with a red beard framing a set of strong prominent teeth with a bared upperlip drawn up in a sarcastic expression.

"Put over to larboard!" a loud cry from the head of the rafts once more rent the darkness.

"We know what to do, what you hollering about?" muttered Sergei testily, and taking a deep breath he bent his body to the oar.

"Oo-ooch! Get going, Mitya!"

Mitya, with his feet braced against the wet logs, lugged the heavy pole of the tiller over to him with his thin hands, breaking into a hoarse cough.

"Put her over... more to port!... Godammit!" cried an anxious infuriated voice in front.

"All you know's to yell! Your weakly son couldn't break a straw across his knee, and you put him on the tiller and then holler all over the river. Too stingy to hire another man, damned skinflint—messing around with your daughter-in-law. Well, yell yourself blue now!..."

Sergei now grumbled aloud, apparently not afraid of being heard—in fact, as though wanting to be heard....

The steamboat raced past the rafts, churning the waters under its blades into a hissing foam. The logs pitched and tossed from the surge, and the braces made from twisted branches creaked with a dreary wet sound.

The steamer's lighted windows gazed out upon the river and the rafts like a row of huge eyes, casting their reflection in shimmering bright patches on the turbulent water, then vanished from sight.

The heaving swell threw waves splashing over the rafts, the logs tossed up and down, and Mitya, swaying on his feet, clung hard to the tiller for fear of losing his balance.

"Now, now!" Sergei muttered mockingly, "doing a dance! Mind your father doesn't yell at you again.... Or he'll give you a poke in the ribs that'll send you dancing properly! Put over to starboard! Heave-ho, now! Oo-ooch!..."

And Sergei, with brawny arms, powerfully plied his oar, cleaving deep into the waters....

Tall and energetic, a trifle morose and sarcastic, he stood as if rooted to the logs with his bare feet, tensely poised, peering into the distance, ready at any moment to veer the rafts round.

"Christ, look at the way your dad's cuddling Mashka! The devils! No shame or conscience—the man hasn't! Why don't you go somewhere, away from those foul devils?... eh? D'you hear what I say?"

"I hear!" said Mitya in an undertone, keeping his eyes averted from where, through the misty gloom, Sergei could see his father sitting.

"I hear! Ugh, you sop!" mocked Sergei and burst into a laugh.

"Some goings-on, I tell you!" he went on, provoked by Mitya's apathy. "There's an old devil for you! Marries off his son, then takes his daughter-in-law for himself and doesn't give a rap! The old blighter!"

Mitya said nothing and gazed back at the river where the clouds have closed in another dense wall.

Now the clouds were everywhere, and it seemed that the rafts were not floating down the current but standing motionless in the thick black water, crushed beneath the weight of these dark-grey masses of cloud which had fallen upon it from the heavens and stemmed its progress.

The river looked like a fathomless pool hedged in by towering mountains and clothed in a dense cloak of mist.

An oppressive stillness reigned all around, and the water, gently lapping the sides of the raft, lay as if in a hushed expectancy. There was an infinite sadness, a timid question in that frail sound, the only one amid the night, that seemed only to deepen its stillness....

"A bit of a breeze now wouldn't be bad..." said Sergei. "Though better not—a wind'll bring rain," he debated with himself as he filled his pipe.

There was the flash of a lighted match, the sizzling sound of a clogged pipe, and the broad face of Sergei swum out of the murk in the light of a flickering red flame.

"Mitya!" came his voice. He was less morose now, and the amused tone in his voice was more in evidence.

"What?" answered Mitya in an undertone, his eyes still peering into the distance, staring at something he saw there through his big melancholy eyes.

"How'd the thing happen, my lad, eh?"

"What thing?" retorted Mitya in a tone of annoyance.

"How d'you get married? What a scream! How'd it happen? Now, you went to bed with your wife—and what happened next, eh?!"

"Hey, you fellows there! Look ou-oot!" a warning shout echoed across the river.

"He can yell all right, that damned rip!" Sergei observed in a tone of admiration, and returned to his subject.

"Well, come on, tell us about it! Mitya! Tell us how it happened, eh?"

"Oh, leave me alone. Sergei! I told you already!" said Mitya in a pleading whisper, and, probably aware that he would not shake off the importunate Sergei, he hurriedly began:

"Well, we went to bed. And I says to her—'I can't be your husband, Maria. You're a strong healthy lass, and I'm a sick, weakly man. I didn't want to marry at all, but Dad made me—you've got to, he says, and that's that! I'm not fond of your sex, and still less of you,' I says. 'Too lively by half.... Yes.... And I can't do anything of that kind... you know.... It's just filthy and wicked.... Children too.... You've got to answer for them before God....'"

"Filthy!" screamed Sergei, rocking with laughter, "Well, and what about her, Masha—what did she have to say, eh?"

"She.... 'Well, what am I to do now,' she says. Sits and cries. 'Why don't you like me?' she says. 'It isn't as if I was ugly,' she says. She's a shameless hussy, Sergei!... 'What am I to do—go to my father-in-law with my fine health?' I told her—'do just as you please.... Go wherever you want. I can't go against my soul. Grandpa Ivan used to say that thing's a mortal sin. We're not beasts, you and I, are we?' And all she does is cry. 'You've spoiled my life, youth, poor girl that I am.' I was awfully sorry for her. 'Never mind, things'll come round somehow. Or, maybe you'll go into a convent?' I says. She starts swearing at that—'you're a fool, Mitya, a scoundrel, that's what you are....'"

"Well, I'm blowed!" stuttered Sergei in amazement. "D'you actually mean to say you gave her that bit of advice—told her to go into a convent?"

"That's what I told her," answered Mitya simply.

"And she called you a fool?" said Sergei in a rising voice.

"Yes.... She swore at me."

"I should think so too! And quite right! I'd have boxed your ears in the bargain if I was her," he added in a sudden change of tone. He now spoke sternly and weightily.

"D'you think a man can go against the law? That's what you've gone and done! It's the way of the world—and that's all there is to it! There's no arguing about it! And what do you do? Crikey, what a thing to say! Go into a convent! Silly ass! What d'you think the lass wants? And you talk about a convent! Good lor', some people make you sick! D'you realize what you've done, you muff? You're no damned good yourself and you've ruined that girl's life, made her that old gaffer's mistress—and led the old fellow into the sin of lechery. Look how much law you've broken! Silly ass!"

"The law's in a man's soul, Sergei. It's the same law for all—don't do anything that goes against the soul and you won't be doing any evil on earth," said Mitya gently and soothingly, with a toss of his head.

"But that's just what you have done!" Sergei countered energetically. "A man's soul! Bah!... What's the soul got to do with it? You can't put a ban on everything—it isn't done. The soul.... You've got to understand it first, brother, and then talk...."

"No, Sergei, that's not so!" Mitya broke in warmly, seeming to have suddenly kindled. "The soul's always pure, brother, like a dewdrop. It's in a shell, that's where it is! It's deep. And if you hearken to it you won't go wrong. It'll always be God's way if it's done the soul's way. For isn't God in the soul?—and if so, the law's there too. It's God who created it. God who breathed it into man. Only you've got to be able to look into it. Only by forgetting self can a man...."

"Hey, you! Sleepy devils! Look sharp!" a thundering voice echoed over the river.

Judging by its lustiness the voice clearly belonged to a healthy, vigorous man pleased with himself and the world, a man richly endowed with vitality and well aware of it. He shouted not because he was provoked to do so by the raftsmen, but because his heart swelled with a sense of elation and vigour, the sheer joy of living that sought an outlet and found it in that lusty boisterous sound.

"Hear him bark, the old devil!" Sergei noted with pleasure, keeping a vigilant lookout in front of him. "Spooning like a couple of doves! Ain't you envious, Mitya?"

Mitya turned his eyes indifferently to the fore oars where two figures could be seen running across the rafts from side to side, now stopping close to each other, now merging into a dark blur.

"Don't you envy 'em?" repeated Sergei.

"Why should I? It's their sin, and they'll answer for it," answered Mitya quietly.

"So!" drawled Sergei ironically, and refilled his pipe. The darkness was once more lit up by a red glow.

The night grew deeper, and the grey, black clouds descended still lower over the still broad river.

"Where'd you get all that wisdom from, Mitya, eh? Or were you born that way? You don't take after your Dad a bit. He's full o' spunk, your Dad is. Just think—the old fellow's half a century, and look at the peach he's getting off with! She's a regular beauty! And hasn't she fallen for him—you can see that with half an eye. Yes, she loves him, my dear fellow. She's crazy about him. Who wouldn't love a trump like that? The king of trumps, that's what your Dad is, a topnotcher. It does your heart good to see the way he handles his work; he's made a pretty penny too; looked up to plenty, and his head's screwed on right. M'yes. You don't take after your Dad, or after your mother either, Mitya? I wonder what your father'd do if your mother, Anfisa, had been alive? Humph! I can just see it.... She was pretty hot stuff too, your Ma was.... A match for Silan."

Mitya was silent, leaning on his oar and gazing into the water.

Sergei fell silent too. From the front of the rafts came a woman's rippling laughter, answered by a man's deep laugh. Their figures, woven into the darkness, were barely visible to Sergei, who peered at them with curiosity through the gloom. One could distinguish that the man was tall and was standing by the oar with his legs wide apart half-facing a plump little woman who was leaning her bosom against another oar within ten feet of the first. She wagged a premonitory finger at the man and went into gales of merry laughter. Sergei turned away with a sigh of regret, and after a profound silence, began again:

"Ah, well! They're having a sweet time. Lovely! Nothing for a lonely vagabond like me! Gad, I'd never in my life leave a woman like that if I had her! Hang it, I'd squeeze the life out of her if I got her in my hands. There! That's the way I love you—let her know it.... Hell! I've got no luck with women.... Looks like they don't take to ginger fellows. M'yes. She a capricious bit—that one is. A proper minx! She's out for a good time, Mitya! Hi, are you asleep?"

"No," Mitya answered softly.

"Good for you! How d'you intend to go through life, brother? Come to think of it, you're all alone in the blessed world. That ain't very cheerful! What d'you intend to do with yourself? You won't be able to live among people. You're a poor fish of a man. What's the use of a man who can't stand up for himself! What you need in life, brother, are fangs and claws. Everyone'll try to worst you. Now, tell me, can you stick up for yourself? I'd like to see you doing it! Bah! You're a poor fish!"

"D'you mean me?" Mitya came out of his reveries with a start. "I'll go away. This very autumn—to the Caucasus—and that's all! God! Only to get away from you people! Soulless people! Godless men you are—only to get away from you is salvation! What are you living for? Where's your God? It's a mere word to you.... D'you live according to Jesus Christ? You—you're wolves! People over there are different, their souls live in that of Christ, and their hearts are filled with love and they yearn for the world's salvation.... And you? Oh, you! Beasts, sinks of corruption! There are different people. I've seen them. They've called me. I'll go to them. They brought me the holy book of scriptures. Read it, man of God, they said, dear brother of ours, read the word of truth!... And I read it, and my soul was reborn by this word of God. I'll go away. I'll run away from you mad wolves, who feed on each other's flesh. May you be damned!"

Mitya uttered all this in a passionate whisper, choking with wrath and withering scorn towards these mad wolves, overcome by a sudden hungering for the people whose souls yearned for the salvation of the world.

Sergei was astounded. He stood silent for a while with his mouth agape and his pipe in his hand. Then, after a moment's thought, he glanced round and said in a hollow, sullen voice:

"Fancy going off the deep end like that! ... You're pretty fierce too. You shouldn't ha' read that book. Who knows what kind o'book it is? Oh, well ... go ahead, clear out, or you may get spoilt altogether. Go along with you, before you get real wild.... What kind of people are they down in the Caucasus? Monks? Or maybe the Old Believers? What are they—Molokans, perhaps? Eh?"

But Mitya had gone out as quickly as he had kindled. He plied his oar, gasping with the effort, and muttered something rapidly and nervously under his breath.

Sergei waited long and in vain for a response. His robust simple nature was oppressed by the grim, deathly-still night. He wanted to be reminded of life, to waken the hushed world with sound, to stir up and frighten the lurking rapt stillness of these ponderous masses of water slowly winding to the sea, and those inert mountains of cloud hanging drearily in the air. Life was being lived at the other end of the rafts, and that roused him to life.

From there now and again came floating a soft thrilling laugh and snatches of exclamations, muffled by the silence and darkness of a night saturated with the fragrance of spring, a night that stirred a passionate longing to live.

"Stop it, Mitya—what you tacking for? The old man'll start swearing, you watch," he said, no longer able to endure the silence, and noticing that Mitya was stabbing the water with his oar in a desultory fashion. Mitya stopped, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and froze motionless on his oar, breathing hard.

"Very few steamboats about today somehow.... Been sailing so long and only came across one of 'em."

And seeing that Mitya evinced no intention of replying, he went on argumentatively:

"I suppose that's because navigation hasn't started yet. It's only just beginning. We'll make Kazan in fine time—the Volga's pulling grand. Got a giant's spine, she has—lift anything on earth. What's the matter with you? Got the wind up, Mitya, or what? Eh?"

"What do you want?" answered Mitya irritably.

"Nothing. Funny chap you are.... Why don't you say something? Thinking all the time? Chuck it. It ain't good for a man. Oh, you wiseacre—you think you're wise, but that you haven't a ha'porth of wisdom—that you can't see! Ha-ha!"

Giving himself a laugh in the knowledge of his own superiority, Sergei followed it up with a deep grunt, then fell silent for a while, broke off a whistle he had started, and pursued his train of thought.

"Thinking! That ain't a pastime for a common man. Look at your father—he doesn't worry his head, yet he lives. Spooning with your wife and making fun o' you, the two of 'em, you wise chump. Yes! That's the stuff! I bet you Masha's pregnant already, what? Don't get scared, the kid won't take after you. He'll be a sturdy bounder like Silan Petrov—you can take that from me. He'll be registered as yours, you know. Some business, let me tell you! Ha! Call you 'daddy.' And you won't be his daddy but his brother, by the looks o' it. His daddy'll be his grandpa! How do you like that! Gad, what a dirty bunch o'sinners! A dare-devil lot! Isn't that so, Mitya?"

"Sergei!" came a passionate, agitated, almost sobbing whisper. "For Christ's sake, don't tear my heart, don't torture me, leave me alone! Be quiet! In the name of God, I beg you not to speak to me: stop tormenting me, stop sucking my blood. I'll throw myself in the river, and a great sin will lie on you. I'll destroy my soul—leave me in peace! I swear by God—please!..."

The silence of the night was rent by a painfully shrill cry, and Mitya dropped on the logs as though struck down by something heavy that had fallen out of the sullen clouds poised above the black river.

"There, there!" muttered a dismayed Sergei, watching the figure of his companion writhing on the logs, as though seared by a burning flame. "You're a funny chap! If you take it so bad why didn't you ... er ... why didn't you say so, silly...."

"You've been tormenting me all the way. Why? What am I—your enemy? eh? your enemy?" Mitya whispered passionately....

"Funny chap you are! Really, you are!" stammered Sergei in a flustered and injured tone. "How's I to know? I don't know what's going on in your soul!"

"I want to forget it all, don't you understand! Forget it for all time! My disgrace ... the terrible anguish.... You're savages! I'll go away! I'll go for ever.... I can't stand it any more!..."

"Yes, go away!..." bellowed Sergei in a voice that reverberated over the river, and followed up the exclamation with a thun-

derous cynical invective. But the words suddenly died on his lips and he seemed to shrink as he squatted down, apparently stunned at the human drama that had unfolded before him and to which he could no longer shut his eyes.

"Hey, you!" the voice of Silan Petrov came floating over the river. "What's up there? What's the barking about? Eh-ho-o?"

Silan Petrov seemed to like making a noise, wakening the heavy silence of the river with his deep, powerful lungs. His shouts followed one another in quick succession, rending the warm damp air with a lusty vitality that seemed to crush the puny figure of Mitya who was again at his oar. Sergei answered his employer at the top of his voice, while in an undertone he cursed him in picturesque, spicy Russian terms. Two voices split the silence of the night, tore it and shook it in a tumult of sound that now mingled in a deep rich note like the tone of a brass trumpet, now rose to a shrill falsetto, floated in the air, faded, and died. Then silence reigned once more.

Yellow patches of moonlight fell upon the water from out the rifts in the clouds and vanished with a brief gleam into the smudgy greyness around.

The rafts drifted on amid the darkness and silence.

II

At one of the fore oars stood Silan Petrov in a red shirt open at the throat, revealing a powerful neck and a strong hairy chest, as hard as an anvil. A mop of raven-black hair tumbled over his brows, and from under them gleamed a pair of smiling hazel eyes. His sleeves, rolled up to the elbows, bared his muscular hands that were gripping the oar. Leaning slightly forward, he peered intently into the murky distance.

Masha stood within three paces of him, sideways to the current, and regarded the broad-chested figure of her man with a smile. Both were silent, engrossed with their observations—he gazing into the distance, she studying the play of his vivacious bearded face.

"A fisherman's campfire, I suppose!" he said at length, facing her. "It's all right then. We're keeping straight! Oo-ooch!" he puffed.

sending out a column of hot air, as he dipped his oar to larboard and gave a powerful tug.

"Don't overdo it, Masha dear!" he observed, seeing her make the same dexterous movement with her oar.

Plump and round, with black impudent eyes and rosy cheeks, barefooted, wearing only a wet sarafan that clung to her body, she turned her face to Silan and said with a tender smile:

"You take too much care of me. I'm pretty strong, thank God!"

"I don't when I kiss you," said Silan with a shrug.

"You shouldn't!" she whispered provokingly.

They said nothing for a while, devouring each other with hungry eyes.

The water rippled dreamily beneath the rafts. Somewhere far away on the lee the cocks began to crow.

The rafts sailed on with a faint rocking motion towards the thinning, melting darkness, where the clouds now stood out in sharper contours and lighter shades.

"Silan! D'you know what they were squealing about there? I know, honestly I do! Mitya must have been complaining about us to Sergei, and started whining for misery, and Sergei swore at us."

Masha searched his face, which at her words had grown grim, cold and hard.

"Well, what of it?" he asked drily.

"Oh, nothing."

"If it's nothing, there was nothing to talk about."

"Don't be angry!"

"What, at you? I'd like to at times, but I just couldn't."

"Do you love your Masha?" she whispered playfully, bending towards him.

"Oo-ooch!" he ejaculated with an expressive grunt, and holding out his powerful arms to her, he said between clenched teeth:

"Come here.... Don't tease...."

She curved her lithe body like a cat and slipped softly into his arms.

"We'll throw the rafts off the course again!" he whispered, kissing her face that flamed under his lips.

"Enough! It's getting light.... They can see us from the other end."

She tried to wriggle free, but his arm tightened about her.

"Can they? Let 'em see! Let everybody see! To hell with them all. I'm committing a sin, that's a fact. I know it. What of it? I'll answer for it before God. You haven't been his wife anyway. That means you're free to do anything you like with yourself. It's hard on him? I know it is. What about me? D'you think there's anything flattering in living with a son's wife? Though, it's true, you're not his wife.... Still! Taking my social position, what do I look like now? And isn't it a sin before God? It is! I know it all! And I've gone against it all. And damme, it's worth it! We live once on this earth, and may die any day. Ah, Maria! If only I'd have waited another month before marrying off Mitya! Things would ha' been different. As soon as Anfisa died, I'd have sent a matchmaker down to you—and the thing's done! All lawful and proper! No sin and no shame! It was my mistake. It'll eat the heart out o' me for five or ten years, that mistake will. Kill you before you die...."

"Oh, come, drop it, don't worry about it. We've talked it over plenty and enough." whispered Masha, and gently twisting out of his arms, she went back to her oar. He began jerkily and violently plying his oar as if desirous of shaking off the weight that pressed on his chest and cast a sudden shadow across his handsome face.

Day was breaking.

The clouds, growing thinner, straggled across the sky as if reluctant to make way for the rising sun. The water assumed the cold tint of steel.

"He mentioned it again the other day, 'Dad,' he says, 'isn't t a shame and disgrace for both you and me? Give her up' - neaning you," said Silan Petrov with a wry smile. " 'Give her up nd come to your senses.' 'My son,' I says, 'my dear son, get out ' the way if you wish to keep alive! I'll tear you to pieces like rotten rag. There'll be nothing left of your virtue. Cursed be e day that I brought such a degenerate like you into the world.' e stood trembling. 'Dad, is it my fault?' he says. 'It is your ult, you whimpering mongrel, 'cause you're a stone in my path. s your fault 'cause you can't stand up for yourself. You're just rrion, that's what you are—a stinking garbage. At least if you re strong one could kill you—but one can't even do that to you, 1 miserable scarecrow.' He started howling! Ah, Maria! Men

haven't got any gumption nowadays! Another fellow in my place—ugh! We'd soon shake off the noose! And we're only putting our heads into it! Who knows but we'll draw it tight about each other."

"What do you mean?" Masha asked timidly, gazing fearfully at the grim face of the man, whose whole personality emanated a cold tremendous force.

"I mean if he died . . . that's what I mean. If only he'd die . . . wouldn't it be wonderful! Everything'd drop into its rut. I'd give your folks the land—that would keep their mouths shut—and you and I'd go to Siberia . . . or to the Kuban! Who's she? She's my wife. D'you get me? We'd obtain the necessary document . . . I'd open a shop in some village. And we'd live our lives together, and pray off our sin to God. We don't need much. We'd help people, and they'd help us to ease our conscience. . . . How'd you like it? Eh? Masha?!"

"Y-yes," she sighed, and with eyes tightly screwed up, she became lost in thought.

They were silent for a while. . . . There was no sound but the rippling of the water. . . .

"He's a sickly fellow. . . . Maybe he'll die soon. . ." said Silan Petrov in a muffled voice.

"I hope to God it happens soon!" murmured Masha in a fervid voice, and made a sign of the cross.

The beams of the spring sun streamed in a flood of sparkling gold and rainbow on the water. A wind rose, and everything quivered into life, stirred and smiled. . . . The blue sky amid the clouds smiled too at the sun-kissed waters. The clouds were now left behind the rafts.

There, gathered in a dark heavy cluster, they hung irresolute and motionless over the broad river, as if contemplating a way of escape from the living spring sun, rich with joy and lustre, the inveterate enemy of these mothers of winter blizzards who had tarried before the onset of spring.

In front of the rafts the clear blue sky shone brightly, and the sun, still matutinally fresh but vernally brilliant, mounted majestically into the azure depths of the heavens out of the purple-gold waves of the river.

To the right loomed the tawny ridge of the hilly bank in a green girdle of forests, and to the left the pale emerald carpet of the meadows gleamed in a diamond spangle of dew.

The succulent smell of the earth, of new-born grass and the resinous odours of the pine were wafted on the air.

Silan Petrov threw a look at the oarsmen behind.

Sergei and Mitya stood motionless at their oars, but it was too far to discern the expression on their faces.

He shifted his glance to Masha.

She was chilled. Standing by her oar, she shrank into a small round ball. All bathed in sunlight, she gazed before her with wistful eyes, her lips parted in that elusive alluring smile that makes even an unattractive woman seem fascinating and adorable.

"Keep a lookout there, lads! Oho!" roared Silan Petrov with all the power of his lungs, feeling a mighty surge of elation rising in his broad chest.

His shout seemed to send everything rocking, and long did the startled echoes resound over the hilly bank.

TWENTY-SIX MEN AND A GIRL

WE WERE TWENTY-SIX MEN, twenty-six living machines cooped up in a dark hole of a basement where from morn till night we kneaded dough, making pretzels and cracknels. The windows of our basement faced a sunken area lined with bricks that were green with slime; the windows outside were encased in a close-set iron grating, and no ray of sunshine could reach us through the panes which were covered with meal. Our boss had fenced the windows off to prevent any of his bread going to beggars or to those of our comrades who were out of work and starving—our boss called us a bunch of rogues and gave us tainted tripe for dinner instead of meat. . . .

Stuffy and crowded was life in that stony dungeon beneath a low-hanging ceiling covered by soot and cobwebs. Life was hard and sickening within those thick walls smeared with dirt stains and mildew. . . . We got up at five in the morning, heavy with lack of sleep, and at six, dull and listless, we sat down to the table to make pretzels and cracknels out of the dough our comrades had prepared while we were sleeping. And all day long, from morning till ten o'clock at night some of us sat at the table kneading the stiff dough and swaying the body to fight numbness, while others were mixing flour and water. And all day long the simmering water in the cauldron where the pretzels were cooking gurgled pensively and sadly, and the baker's shovel clattered angrily and swiftly on the hearthstone, throwing slippery cooked pieces of dough onto the hot bricks. From morning till night the wood burned at one end of the oven, and the ruddy glow of the flames flickered on the bakery walls, as though grinning at us. The huge oven resembled the ugly head of some fantastic monster thrust up from under the floor, its wide-open jaws ablaze with glowing fire breathing incandescent flames and heat at us, and watching our ceaseless toil through two sunken air-holes over its forehead. These

two hollows were like eyes—the pitiless impassive eyes of a monster; they looked at us with an invariable dark scowl, as though weary with looking at slaves of whom nothing human could be expected, and whom they despised with the cold contempt of wisdom.

Day in, day out, amid the meal dust and the grime that we brought in on our feet from the yard, in the smelly stuffiness of the hot basement, we kneaded the dough and made pretzels which were sprinkled with our sweat, and we hated our work with a fierce hatred, and never ate what our hands had made, preferring black rye bread to pretzels. Sitting at a long table facing one another—nine men on each side—our hands and fingers worked mechanically through the long hours, and we had grown so accustomed to our work that we no longer watched our movements. And we had grown so accustomed to one another that each of us knew every furrow on his comrades' faces. We had nothing to talk about, we were used to that, and were silent all the time—unless we swore, for there is always something one can swear at a man for, especially one's comrade. But we rarely swore at each other—is a man to blame if he is half-dead, if he is like a stone image, if all his senses are blunted by the crushing burden of toil? Silence is awful and painful only for those who have said all there is to say; but to people whose words are still unspoken, silence is simple and easy.... Sometimes we sang, and this is how our song would begin: during the work somebody would suddenly heave a deep sigh, like a weary horse, and begin softly to sing one of those long-drawn songs whose mournfully tender melody always lighten the heavy burden of the singer's heart. One of the men would sing while we listened in silence to the lonely song, and it would fade and die away beneath the oppressive basement ceiling like the languishing flames of a campfire in the steppe on a wet autumn night, when the grey sky hangs over the earth like a roof of lead. Then another singer would join the first, and two voices would float drearily and softly in the stuffy heat of our crowded pen. And then suddenly several voices at once would take up the song—it would be lashed up like a wave, grow stronger and louder, and seem to break open the damp, heavy walls of our stony prison....

All the twenty-six are singing; loud voices, brought to harmony by long practice, fill the workshop; the song is cramped for room; it breaks against the stone walls, moaning and weeping, and stirs the heart with a gentle prickly pain, reopening old wounds and wakening anguish in the soul.... The singers draw deep and heavy sighs; one will suddenly break off and sit listening for a long time to his comrades singing, then his voice will mingle again in the general chorus. Another will cry out dismally: "Ach!" singing with closed eyes, and maybe he sees the broad torrent of sound as a road leading far away, a wide road lit up by the brilliant sun, and he himself walking along it....

The flames in the oven still flicker, the baker's shovel still scrapes on the brick, the water in the cauldron still bubbles and gurgles, the firelight on the wall still flutters in silent laughter.... And we chant out, through words not our own, the dull ache within us, the gnawing grief of living men deprived of the sun, the grief of slaves. And so we lived, twenty-six men, in the basement of a big stone house, and so hard was our life, that it seemed as though the three stories of the house were built on our shoulders....

Besides our songs there was something else that we loved and cherished, something that perhaps filled the place of the sun for us. On the second floor of our house there was a gold embroidery workshop, and there, among many girl hands, lived sixteen-year old Tanya, a housemaid. Every morning a little pink face with blue merry eyes would be pressed to the pane of the little window cut into the door of our workshop leading into the passage, and a sweet ringing voice would call out to us:

"Jail-birdies! Give me some pretzels!"

We would all turn our heads to the sound of that clear voice and look kindly and joyfully at the pure girlish face that smiled at us so sweetly. We liked to see the nose squashed against the glass, the little white teeth glistening from under rosy lips parted in a smile. We would rush to open the door for her, jostling each other, and there she would be, so winsome and sunny, holding out her apron, standing before us with her little head slightly tilted, and her face all wreathed in smiles. A thick long braid of

chestnut hair hung over her shoulder on her breast. We grimy, ignorant, ugly men look up at her—the threshold rises four steps above the floor—look up at her with raised heads and wish her good morning, and our words of greeting are special words, found only for her. When we speak to her our voices are softer, our joking lighter. Everything we have for her is special. The baker draws out of the oven a shovelful of the crustiest browned pretzels and shoots them adroitly into Tanya's apron.

"Mind the boss doesn't catch you!" we warn her. She laughs roguishly and cries merrily:

"Good-bye jail-birdies!" and vanishes in a twinkling like a little mouse.

And that is all.... But long after she has gone we talk about her—we say the same things we said the day before and earlier, because she, and we, and everything around us are the same they were the day before and earlier.... It is very painful and hard when a man lives, and nothing around him changes, and if it doesn't kill the soul in him, the longer he lives the more painful does the immobility of things surrounding him become.... We always talked of women in a way that sometimes made us feel disgusted with ourselves and our coarse shameless talk. That is not surprising, since the women we knew did not probably deserve to be talked of in any other way. But of Tanya we never said a bad word; no one of us ever dared to touch her with his hand and she never heard a loose joke from any of us. Perhaps it was because she never stayed long—she would flash before our gaze like a star falling from the heavens and vanish. Or perhaps it was because she was small and so very beautiful, and everything that is beautiful inspires respect, even with rough men. Moreover, though hard labour was turning us into dumb oxen, we were only human beings, and like all human beings, could not live without an object of worship. Finer than she there was nobody about us, and nobody else paid attention to us men living in the basement—though there were dozens of tenants in the house. And finally—probably chiefly—we regarded her as something that belonged to us, something that existed thanks only to our pretzels; we made it our duty to give her hot pretzels, and this became our daily sacrifice to the idol, almost a holy rite, that endeared her to us ever

more from day to day. Besides pretzels we gave Tanya a good deal of advice—to dress warmly, not to run quickly upstairs, not to carry heavy bundles of firewood. She listened to our counsels with a smile, retorted with a laugh and never obeyed them, but we did not take offence—we were satisfied to show our solicitude for her.

Often she asked us to do things for her. She would, for instance, ask us to open a refractory door in the cellar or chop some wood, and we would gladly and with a peculiar pride do these things for her and anything else she asked.

But when one of us asked her to mend his only shirt, she sniffed scornfully and said:

"Catch me! Not likely!"

We enjoyed a good laugh at the silly fellow's expense, and never again asked her to do anything. We loved her—and there all is said. A man always wants to foist his love on somebody or other, though it frequently oppresses, sometimes sullies, and his love may poison the life of a fellow creature, for in loving he does not respect the object of his love. We had to love Tanya, for there was no one else we could love.

At times one of us would suddenly begin to argue something like this:

"What's the idea of making such a fuss over the kid? What's there so remarkable about her anyway?"

We'd soon brusquely silence the fellow who spoke like that—we had to have something we could love: we found it, and loved it, and what we twenty-six loved stood for each of us, it was our holy of holies, and anybody who went against us in this matter was our enemy. We love, perhaps, what is not really good, but then there are twenty-six of us, and we therefore want the object of our adoration to be held sacred by others.

Our love is no less onerous than hate ... and, perhaps, that is why some stiff-necked people claim that our hate is more flattering than love.... But why do they not shun us if that is so?

In addition to the pretzel bakehouse our boss had a bun bakery. It was situated in the same house, and only a wall divided it from our hole. The bun bakers, however, of whom there were four, held themselves aloof from us, considered their work cleaner

than ours, and themselves, therefore, better men; they never visited our workshop, and treated us with mocking scorn whenever they met us in the yard. Neither did we visit them—the boss banned such visits for fear we would steal buns. We did not like the bun bakers, because we envied them—their work was easier than ours, they got better wages, they were fed better, they had a roomy, airy workshop, and they were all so clean and healthy, and hence so odious. We, on the other hand, were all a yellow grey-faced lot; three of us were ill with syphilis, some were scabby, and one was crippled by rheumatism. On holidays and off-days they used to dress up in suits and creaking high boots, two of them possessed accordions, and all used to go out for a stroll in the park, whilst we were dressed in filthy tatters, with rags or bast shoes on our feet, and the police wouldn't let us into the park —now, could we love the bun bakers?

And one day we learned that their chief baker had taken to drink, that the boss had dismissed him and taken on another in his place, and that the new man was an ex-soldier who went about in a satin waistcoat and had a watch on a gold chain. We were curious to have a look at that dandy, and every now and then one of us would run out into the yard in the hope of seeing him.

But he came to our workshop himself. Kicking open the door he stood in the doorway, smiling, and said to us:

"Hullo! How do you do, boys!"

The frosty air rushing through the door in a smoky cloud eddied round his feet, while he stood in the doorway looking down at us, his large yellow teeth flashing from under his fair swaggering moustache. His waistcoat was indeed unique—a blue affair, embroidered with flowers, and all glittering, with buttons made of some kind of red stone. The chain was there too....

He was a handsome fellow, was that soldier—tall, strong, with ruddy cheeks and big light eyes that had a nice look in them—a kind, clean look. On his head he wore a white stiffly starched cap, and from under an immaculately clean apron peeped the pointed toes of a highly polished pair of fashionable boots.

Our chief baker politely asked him to close the door. He complied unhurriedly and began questioning us about the boss. We fell over each other telling him that the boss was a skinflint, a

crook, a scoundrel and a tormentor—we told him everything there was to tell about the boss that couldn't be put in writing here. The soldier listened, twitching his moustache and regarding us with that gentle, clear look of his.

"You've a lot of girls around here..." he said suddenly.

Some of us laughed politely, others pulled sugary faces, and some one informed the soldier that there were nine bits in the place.

"Use 'em?" asked the soldier with a knowing wink.

Again we laughed, a rather subdued, embarrassed laugh.... Many of us would have liked to make the soldier believe they were as gay lads as he was, but they couldn't do it, none of us could do it. Somebody confessed as much, saying quietly:

"How comes we...."

"M'yes, you're a long way off!" said the soldier convincedly, subjecting us to a close scrutiny. "You're not ... er, up to the mark.... Ain't got the character... the proper shape ... you know, looks! Looks is what a woman likes about a man! Give her a regular body ... everything just so! Then of course she likes a bit of muscle.... Likes an arm to be an arm, here's the stuff!"

The soldier pulled his right hand out of his pocket, with the sleeve rolled back to the elbow, and held it up for us to see.... He had a strong, white arm covered with shining golden hair.

"The leg, the chest—everything must be firm.... And then a man's got to be properly dressed ... in shipshape form.... Now, the women just fall for me. Mind you, I don't call 'em or tempt 'em—they hang about my neck five at a time...."

He sat down on a sack of flour and spent a long time in telling us how the women loved him and how dashingly he treated them. Then he took his leave, and when the door closed behind him with a squeak, we sat on in a long silence, meditating over him and his stories. Then suddenly everybody spoke up at once, and it transpired that we had all taken a liking to him. Such a simple, nice fellow, the way he came in, sat down, and chatted. Nobody ever came to see us, nobody talked to us like that, in a friendly way.... And we kept on talking about him and his future success with the seamstresses, who, on meeting us in the yard, either steered clear of us with lips offensively pursed, or bore straight down

on us as though we did not stand in their path at all. And we only admired them, in the yard or when they passed our windows, dressed in cute little caps and fur coats in the winter, and in flowery hats with bright coloured parasols in the summer. But among ourselves we spoke of these girls in a way that, had they heard us, would have made them mad with shame and insult.

"I hope he doesn't ... spoil little Tanya!" said the chief baker suddenly in a tone of anxiety.

We were all struck dumb by this statement. We had somehow forgotten Tanya—the soldier seemed to have blotted her out with his large, handsome figure. Then a noisy argument broke out: some said that Tanya would not stand for it, some asserted that she would be unable to resist the soldier's charms, and others proposed to break the fellow's bones in the event of him making love to Tanya. Finally, all decided to keep a watch on the soldier and Tanya, and warn the kid to beware of him.... That put a stop to the argument.

About a month passed. The soldier baked buns, went out with the seamstresses, frequently dropped in to see us, but never said anything about his victories—all he did was to turn up his moustache and lick his chops.

Tanya came every morning for her pretzels and was invariably gay, sweet and gentle. We tried to broach the subject of the soldier with her—she called him "a pop-eyed dummy" and other funny names and that set our minds at rest. We were proud of our little girl when we saw how the seamstresses clung to the soldier. Tanya's attitude towards him bucked us all up, and under her influence as it were, we ourselves began to evince towards him an attitude of scorn. We loved her more than ever, and greeted her more gladly and kindly in the mornings.

One day, however, the soldier dropped in on us a little the worse for drink, sat down and began to laugh, and when we asked him what he was laughing at, he explained:

"Two of them have had a fight over me.... Lida and Grusha... You should have seen what they did to each other! A regular scream, ha-ha! One of 'em grabbed the other by the hair, dragged her all over the floor into the passage, then got on top of her ...

ha-ha-ha! Scratched each other's mugs, tore their clothes.... Wasn't that funny! Now, why can't these females have a straight fight? Why do they scratch, eh?"

He sat on a bench, looking so clean and healthy and cheerful, laughing without a stop. We said nothing. Somehow he was odious to us this time.

"Why am I such a lucky devil with the girls? It's a scream! Why, I just wink my eye and the trick's done!"

He raised his white hands covered with glossy hairs and brought them down on his knees with a slap. He surveyed us with a look of pleased surprise, as though himself genuinely astonished at the lucky turn of his affairs with the ladies. His plump ruddy physiognomy shone with smug pleasure and he repeatedly passed his tongue over his lips.

Our chief baker angrily rattled his shovel on the hearth and suddenly said sarcastically:

"It's no great fun felling little fir trees—I'd like to see what you'd do with a pine!"

"Eh, what? Were you talking to me?" asked the soldier.

"Yes, you...."

"What did you say?"

"Never mind.... Let it lay...."

"Here, hold on! What's it all about? What d'you mean—pine?"

Our baker did not reply. His shovel moved swiftly in the oven, tossing in boiled pretzels and discharging the baked ones noisily onto the floor where boys sat threading them on bast strings. He seemed to have forgotten the soldier. But the latter suddenly got excited. He rose to his feet and stepped up to the oven, exposing himself to the imminent danger of being struck in the chest by the shovel handle that whisked spasmodically in the air.

"Now, look the—who d'you mean? That's an insult.... Why, there ain't a girl that could resist me! No fear! And here are you, hinting things against me...."

Indeed, he appeared to be genuinely offended. Evidently the only source of his self-respect was his ability to seduce women: perhaps this ability was the only living attribute he could boast, the only thing that made him feel a human being.

There are some people for whom life holds nothing better or higher than a malady of the soul or flesh. They cherish it throughout life, and it is the sole spring of life to them. While suffering from it they nourish themselves on it. They complain about it to people and in this manner command the interest of their neighbours. They exact a toll of sympathy from people, and this is the only thing in life they have. Deprive them of that malady, cure them of it, and they will be utterly miserable, because they will lose the sole sustenance of their life and become empty husks. Sometimes a man's life is so poor that he is perforce obliged to cultivate a vice and thrive on it. One might say that people are often addicted to vice through sheer boredom.

The soldier was stung to the quick. He bore down on our baker, whining:

"No, you tell me—who is it?"

"Shall I tell you?" said the baker, turning on him suddenly.

"Well?"

"D'you know Tanya?"

"Well?"

"Well, there you are! See what you can do there. . . ."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Her? Easier'n spitting!"

"We'll see!"

"You'll see! Ha-a!"

"Why, she'll. . . ."

"It won't take a month!"

"You're cocky, soldier, ain't you?"

"A fortnight! I'll show you! Who did you say? Tanya? Pshaw!"

"Come on, get out, you're in the way!"

"A fortnight, and the trick's done! Oh, you!. . ."

"Get out!"

The baker suddenly flew into a rage and brandished his shovel. The soldier fell back in amazement, then regarded us all for a while in silence, muttered grimly "All right!" and went out.

All through this argument we had kept our peace, our interest having been engaged in the conversation. But when the soldier left we all broke out into loud and animated speech.

Somebody cried out to the baker:

"That's a bad business you've started, Pavel!"

"Get on with your work!" snapped the baker.

We realized that the soldier had been put on his high ropes and that Tanya was in danger. Yet, while realizing this, we were all gripped by a tense but thrilling curiosity as to what would be the outcome of it. Would Tanya hold her own against the soldier? We almost unanimously voiced the conviction:

"Tanya? She'll hold her ground! She ain't easy prey!"

We were terribly keen on testing our idol; we assiduously tried to convince each other that our idol was a staunch idol and would come out on top in this engagement. We ended up by expressing our doubts as to whether we had sufficiently goaded the soldier, fearing that he would forget the wager and that we would have to prick his conceit some more. Henceforth a new exciting interest had come into our lives, something we had never known before. We argued among ourselves for days on end; we all somehow seemed to have grown cleverer, spoke better and more. It seemed as though we were playing a sort of game with the devil, and the stake on our side was Tanya. And when we had learned from the bun bakers that the soldier had started to "make a dead set for Tanya" our excitement rose to such a furious pitch and life became such a thrilling experience for us that we did not even notice how the boss had taken advantage of our wrought up feelings to throw in extra work by raising the daily knead to fourteen poods of dough. We didn't even seem to tire of the work. Tanya's name was all day long on our lips. And we awaited her morning visits with a peculiar impatience. At times we fancied that when she came in to see us it would be a different Tanya, not the one we always knew.

We told her nothing, however, about the wager. We never asked her any questions and treated her in the same good-natured loving way. But something new had crept into our attitude, something that was alien to our former feelings for Tanya—and that new element was keen curiosity, keen and cold like a blade of steel....

"Boys! Time's up today!" said the baker one morning as he began work.

We were well aware of it without his reminder. Yet we all started.

"You watch her.... She'll soon come in!" suggested the baker. Some one exclaimed in a tone of regret:

"It's not a thing the eye can catch!"

And again a lively noisy argument sprang up. Today, at length, we would know how clean and incontaminate was the vessel in which we had laid all the treasure that we possessed. That morning we suddenly realized for the first time that we were gambling for high stakes, that this test of our idol might destroy it for us altogether. All these days we had been hearing that the soldier was doggedly pursuing Tanya with his attentions, but for some reason none of us asked her what her attitude was towards him. She continued regularly to call on us every morning for her pretzels and was always her usual self.

On that day, too, we soon heard her voice:

"Jail-birdies! I've come...."

We hastened to let her in, and when she came in we greeted her, contrary to our custom, with silence. We looked hard at her and were at a loss what to say to her, what to ask her. We stood before her in a silent sullen crowd. She was obviously surprised at the unusual reception, and suddenly we saw her turn pale, look anxious and stir restlessly. Then in a choky voice she asked:

"Why are you all so ... strange!"

"What about you?" threw in the baker in a grim tone, his eyes fixed on her face.

"What about me?"

"Nothing....."

"Well, give me the pretzels, quick...."

"Plenty of time!" retorted the baker without stirring, his eyes still glued on her face.

She suddenly turned and disappeared through the door.

The baker picked up his shovel, and turning to the oven, let fall calmly:

"Well—she's fixed! The soldier's done it... the blighter!..."

We shambled back to the table like a herd of jostling sheep, sat down in silence and apathetically set to our work. Presently some one said:

"Maybe it isn't...."

"Shut up! Enough of that!" shouted the baker.

We all knew him for a clever man, cleverer than any of us. And that shout of his we understood as meaning that he was convinced of the soldier's victory.... We felt sad and perturbed....

At twelve o'clock—the lunch hour—the soldier came in. He was, as always, clean and spruce and—as always—looked us straight in the eyes. We felt too ill at ease to look at him.

"Well, my dear sirs, d'you want me to show you what a soldier can do?" he said with a proud sneer. "You go out into the passage and peep through the cracks ... get me?"

We trooped into the passage, and tumbling over each other, pressed our faces to the chinks in the wooden wall looking onto the yard. We did not have to wait long. Soon Tanya came through the yard with a hurried step and anxious look, skipping over puddles of thawed snow and mud. She disappeared through the door of the cellar. Presently the soldier sauntered past whistling, and he went in too. His hands were thrust into his pockets and he twitched his moustache....

It was raining and we saw the drops falling into the puddles which puckered up at the impacts. It was a grey wet day—a very bleak day. Snow still lay on the roofs, while on the ground dark patches of slush stood out here and there. On the roofs too the snow was covered with a brownish coating of dirt. It was cold and disagreeable, waiting in that passage....

The first to come out of the cellar was the soldier. He walked leisurely across the yard, twitching his moustache, his hands deep in his pockets—much the same he always was.

Then Tanya came out. Her eyes ... her eyes shone with joy and happiness, and her lips smiled. And she walked as though in a dream, swaying, with uncertain gait....

It was more than we could endure. We all made a sudden rush for the door, burst into the yard and began yelling and whistling at her in a fierce, loud, savage uproar.

She started when she saw us and stood stock-still, her feet in a dirty puddle. We surrounded her and cursed her with a sort of malicious glee in a torrent of profanity and shameless taunts.

We did it unhurriedly, quietly, seeing that she had no way of escape from the circle around her and that we could jeer at her to our heart's content. It is strange, but we did not hit her.

She stood amid us and turned her head from side to side, listening to our insults. And we ever more fiercely, ever more furiously, flung at her the dirt and poison of our wrath.

Her face drained of life. Her blue eyes, which the moment before had looked so happy, were dilated, her breath came in gasps and her lips quivered.

And we, having surrounded her, were wreaking our vengeance on her—for had she not robbed us? She had belonged to us, we had spent our best sentiments on her, and though that best was a mere beggar's pittance, we were twenty-six and she was one, and there was no anguish we could inflict that was fit to meet her guilt! How we insulted her!... She said not a word, but simply gazed at us with a look of sheer terror and a long shudder went through her body.

We guffawed, we howled, we snarled.... Other people joined us.... One of us pulled the sleeve of Tanya's blouse....

Suddenly her eyes blazed: she raised her hands in a slow gesture to put her hair straight, and said loudly but calmly, straight into our faces:

"Oh, you miserable jail-birds!..."

And she bore straight down on us, just as if we had not been there, had not stood in her path. Indeed, that is why none of us proved to be in her path.

When she was clear of our circle she added just a loudly without turning round, in a tone of scorn and pride:

"Oh, you filthy swine.... You beasts...." And she departed—straight, beautiful, and proud.

We were left standing in the middle of the yard amid the mud, under the rain and a grey sky that had no sun in it....

Then we too shuffled back to our damp stony dungeon. As of old, the sun never peered through our window, and Tanya came never more!...

MALVA

THE SEA—was laughing.

Stirred by the light sultry breeze it quivered, and covered with tiny ripples which reflected the sun's rays with dazzling brilliance it smiled at the blue sky with a thousand silvery smiles. The vast space between the sea and the sky rang with the merry sounds of splashing waves as they raced, one behind the other, towards the sloping beach of the spur. The splashing waves and the glint of the sun reflected by the thousands of ripples on the sea merged harmoniously in continuous movement, full of animation and joy. The sun was happy because it was shining, and the sea—because it reflected the sun's jubilant light.

The wind fondly stroked the silky breast of the sea, the sun warmed it with its burning rays, and the sea, sighing drowsily under these tender caresses, filled the hot air with a salty fragrance. The greenish waves breaking on the yellow beach bespattered it with white foam, which melted on the hot sand with a soft sigh and kept it moist.

The long, narrow spur looked like an enormously tall tower which had fallen from the shore into the sea. Its slender spire cut into the limitless expanse of sparkling water, its base was lost in the distant sultry haze which concealed the mainland, whence, wafted by the wind, came a repugnant smell that was inexplicable and offensive here, in the midst of the immaculate sea, under the bright blue dome of the sky.

On the beach, which was strewn with fish scales, a fishing net hung on poles driven into the ground, casting spider-web shadows on the sand. Several large boats and a small one were lying in a row, and the waves, running up the beach, seemed to beckon to them. Boat hooks, oars, baskets and barrels lay scattered in disorder, and among them stood a shack built of willow branches and reeds, and covered with bast matting. Before the entrance of the

shack a pair of felt boots were stuck, soles upward to the sky, on a couple of gnarled sticks. Above this chaos towered a tall mast with a red rag at its head, fluttering in the wind.

In the shade of one of the boats lay Vassili Legostyev, the watchman on the spur, which was the outpost of Grebenshchikov's fisheries. Vassili was lying on his stomach, supporting his chin on the palms of his hands, gazing into the distant sea at the barely visible strip of shore of the mainland. His eyes were fixed on a tiny black speck on the water, and it was with infinite pleasure that he watched it growing larger and larger as it drew near.

Screwing up his eyes to shield them from the dazzling sun rays reflected in the water, he smiled with satisfaction—this was Malva coming! She will come and laugh, and her breasts will quiver enticingly. She will embrace him with her round soft arms, greet him with a resounding kiss that will frighten the sea-gulls, and tell him all the news about what is going on over there, on shore. Together they will cook some excellent chowder, drink vodka, stretch out on the sand, talk and fondle each other, and then, when the shadow of evening falls, they will put the kettle on, drink tea with tasty pretzels and then go to sleep.... That is what happened every Sunday and on every holiday. Early in the morning he, as usual, will take her to the mainland, across the still sleepy sea, in the fresh twilight of the dawn. She will sit dozing in the stern of the boat and he will gaze at her as he rowed. How funny she looked at such times, funny and yet lovable, like a well-fed cat. Perhaps she will slip from the seat to the bottom of the boat, curl up and fall fast asleep. She often did that....

That day even the seagulls were dazed by the heat. Some were sitting on the sand in a row with drooping wings and open beaks; others were lazily rocking on the waves, making no sound, and desisting from their customary rapacious activity.

It seemed to Vassili that there was somebody else in the boat besides Malva. Had that Seryozhka hooked on to her again? Vassili turned heavily over on the sand, sat up, and shading his eyes with his hand, peered anxiously across the sea, trying to make out who else was in the boat. Malva was sitting in the stern and steering. The man at the oars was not Seryozhka. He was obviously not used to rowing. Malva wouldn't have to steer if Seryozhka were with her.

"Ahoy!" Vassili shouted impatiently.

Startled by the cry, the sea-gulls on the sand rose to their feet and stood on the alert.

"A-h-o-o-y!" came Malva's ringing voice from the boat.

"Who's that with you?"

A laugh came in reply.

"She-devil!" muttered Vassili, swearing under his breath and spitting in disgust.

He was dying to know who was in the boat with Malva. Rolling a cigarette, he gazed intently at the neck and back of the oarsman. He could distinctly hear the splash of the water at the stroke of the oars; the sand crunched under his bare feet.

"Who's that with you?" he shouted when he discerned a queer, unfamiliar smile on Malva's handsome face.

"Wait and see!" she shouted back with a laugh.

The oarsman turned his face to the beach and glancing at Vassili also laughed.

The watchman frowned, trying to think who the stranger could be. His face seemed familiar.

"Pull hard!" Malva commanded.

The waves carried the boat almost half length up the beach. It heeled over on its side and struck fast while the waves slipped back into the sea. The oarsman jumped out of the boat and said:

"Hello, father!"

"Yakov!" exclaimed Vassili in a choking voice, more amazed than pleased.

The two embraced and kissed each other, three times, on the lips and cheeks. The expression of Vassili's face was a mixture of pleasure and embarrassment.

"... I looked and looked ... and felt a tickling in my heart. I wondered what it was.... So it was you? Who could have thought it? At first I thought it was Seryozhka, but then I saw it wasn't. And it turns out to be you!"

As he spoke Vassili stroked his beard with one hand and gesticulated with the other. He was dying to look at Malva, but the smiling eyes of his son were turned on his face and their brightness confused him. The satisfaction he felt at having such a fine, strapping lad for a son was marred by the embarrassment he felt at the pres-

ence of his mistress. He stood in front of Yakov, stepping from one foot to the other, and fired question after question at him without waiting for an answer. Everything was mixed up in his head and he almost got a shock when he heard Malva say mockingly:

"Don't stand there jumping for joy! Take him into the shack and treat him to something!"

He turned to her. A mocking smile played on her lips. He had never seen her smile like that before; and her whole body—round, soft and fresh as always—looked different somehow; it looked strange. She shifted her greenish eyes from father to son, cracking melon seeds with her small white teeth. Yakov looked from one to the other with a smile, and for several moments, unpleasant for Vassili, the three remained silent.

"Yes, in a minute!" Vassili said suddenly, starting for the shack. "You get out of the sun while I go and get some water.... We'll cook some chowder.... I'll treat you to some chowder, Yakov, such as you've never tasted before! In the meantime, you two, make yourselves comfortable. I'll be back in a minute."

He picked up a kettle from the ground near the shack, walked briskly towards the net and was soon hidden in its grey folds.

Malva and Yakov stepped towards the shack.

"Here you are, my handsome lad! I've brought you to your father!" said Malva, casting a sidelong glance at Yakov's sturdy figure, at his face framed in a short, brown curly beard, and at his sparkling eyes.

"Yes, we've arrived," he answered, turning his face towards her eagerly. "How good it is here! And the sea! Isn't it fine!"

"Yes, it's a wide sea.... Well, has your father aged much?"

"No, not very much. I expected to find him much greyer. He has only a few grey hairs.... And how hale and hearty he still looks!"

"How long is it you haven't seen him, you say?"

"About five years, I think.... Since he left home. I was getting on for seventeen then...."

They entered the shack. It was stuffy in there and the bast sacks lying on the ground smelt of fish. They sat down—Yakov on a thick tree stump, and Malva on a heap of sacking. Between them stood a sawn off barrel, the upturned bottom of which served as a table. They sat gazing at each other in silence.

"Well . . . I don't know. . . . I'd like to if I could get a job here."

"You'll get a job here all right," said Malva confidently, probing him with her greenish, enigmatically half-closed eyes.

Yakov, keeping his eyes off the woman, wiped the perspiration from his face with the sleeve of his blouse.

Suddenly she laughed.

"I suppose your mother must have sent greetings and a message to your father," she said.

Yakov glanced at her, frowned and answered curtly:

"Of course. . . . Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just like that!"

Yakov didn't like that laugh—it was so tantalizing. He turned away from the woman and tried to remember the message his mother had given him.

His mother had seen him off to the outskirts of the village. Leaning against a wattle fence she had said, speaking rapidly, and rapidly blinking her dry eyes:

"Tell him, Yasha. . . . For the sake of Christ, tell him that after all he is a father! . . . Your mother is all alone, tell him. . . . She's been all alone for five long years! Tell him she is getting old! For God's sake, tell him that, Yasha! Your mother will be an old woman soon. . . . And she's all alone! Working hard. For the sake of Christ, tell him that! . . ."

And she had wept silently, hiding her face in her apron.

Yakov had not felt sorry for her then, but he felt so now.

He glanced at Malva and frowned.

"Well, here I am!" exclaimed Vassili, appearing in the shack with a fish in one hand and a knife in the other.

He had got rid of his embarrassment, concealing it deep down his bosom, and now looked at the two quite calmly, except that his movements betrayed a fussiness that was unusual for him.

"I'll go and light the fire and then I'll come in and we'll have a long talk, eh, Yakov?" he said.

With that he left the shack again.

Malva continued to crack melon seeds, quite unceremoniously staring at Yakov; but he, although dying to look at her, studiously kept his eyes off her.

After a time the silence became oppressive to him and he said:

"Oh, I've left my knapsack in the boat. I'll go and get it."

He got up leisurely and left the shack. Soon after Vassili returned. Leaning over towards Malva he demanded in a hurried and angry tone:

"Why did you come with him? What shall I tell him about you? What are you to me?"

"I came, and that's all there is to it!" Malva answered curtly.

"Oh, you ... silly woman! What shall I do now? Tell him right in his face? Spit it right out? I have a wife at home! His mother.... You ought to have understood that!"

"What's it got to do with me? Do you think I'm afraid of him? Or of you?" Malva asked contemptuously, screwing up her greenish eyes. "How funny you looked skipping in front of him! I could barely keep from laughing!"

"It may seem funny to you! But what am I going to do?"

"You should have thought of that before!"

"How was I to know that the sea would throw him up on to this shore like this?"

The crunching of sand underfoot told them of Yakov's approach and they cut the conversation short. Yakov brought in a light knapsack, threw it into a corner and glanced angrily at the woman out of the corner of his eye.

She went on zestfully cracking melon seeds. Vassili sat down on the tree stump and rubbing his knees with the palms of his hands he said with a smile:

"Well, so you're here.... What made you think of coming?"

"Oh, just like that.... We wrote to you...."

"When? I never got the letter!"

"Is that so? But we wrote...."

"The letter must have gone astray," said Vassili in a disappointed tone. "Devil take it! What do you think of it, eh? Just when you want it it goes astray!"

"So you don't know what's happened at home?" Yakov enquired, glancing at his father distrustfully.

"How should I know? I didn't get your letter."

Yakov then told him that their horse had died, that their stock of grain was all gone by the beginning of February, that he hadn't been able to get any work, that the hay had run out and the cow

had nearly died. They had dragged on somehow until April and then decided that he, Yakov, should go to his father, after the ploughing, for about three months, to earn some money. They wrote to the father telling him of their decision and then they sold three sheep, bought some grain and hay and ... well ... here he was!

"So that's how it is, is it?" exclaimed Vassili. "Humph.... But ... how's that? I sent you some money, didn't I?"

"It wasn't much, was it? We did some repairs to the house.... Maria got married and that cost us a bit.... We bought a plough.... Why, it's five years since you've been away!"

"Y-e-es! Th-a-at's so! It wasn't enough, you say?... Hey! The chowder's running over!"

With that Vassili dashed out of the shack.

Squatting down in front of the fire over which the chowder was boiling, Vassili absent-mindedly skimmed the chowder and threw the scum into the fire. He was lost in deep reflection. What Yakov had told him had not moved him very much, but it had roused in him a feeling of hostility towards his wife and son. In spite of all the money he had sent them during the five years, they had allowed the farm to go to rack and ruin. Had Malva not been there he would have given Yakov a piece of his mind. He had sense enough to leave home without his father's permission, but he hadn't sense enough to manage the farm! The farm, which Vassili had thought of very rarely during the free and easy life he had been leading here, suddenly leapt into his mind as a bottomless pit into which he had been throwing his money during the past five years, as something superfluous in his life, as something he had no use for. He stirred the chowder with a spoon and sighed.

The small yellow flames of the fire looked pale and feeble in the brilliant light of the sun. Blue wreaths of transparent smoke stretched from the fire to the sea to meet the surf. Watching the smoke, Vassili thought bitterly of the turn for the worse his life would take now; it would be less free. Yakov had no doubt guessed that Malva....

Malva was sitting in the shack confusing the lad with her mocking, challenging eyes, in which a smile played all the time.

"I suppose you've left a sweetheart at home," she said suddenly, looking Yakov straight in the face.

"Perhaps I have," answered Yakov reluctantly.

"Is she pretty?" Malva asked in a careless tone.

Yakov made no reply.

"Why don't you answer?... Is she better-looking than me?"

Involuntarily he raised his eyes and looked the woman in the face. He saw her dark, round cheeks and full, moist, trembling lips, parted in a mocking smile. Her pink cotton blouse fitted her exceptionally well and outlined her well-rounded shoulders and high, supple breasts. But he took a dislike to her sly, half-closed, greenish, laughing eyes. He heaved a sigh.

"Why do you talk like that?" he said in a pleading voice, although he wanted to talk to her sternly.

"What other way should I talk?" she answered with a laugh.

"And you laugh.... Why?"

"I'm laughing at you!"

"Why? What have I done to you?" he asked angrily and cast his eyes down again.

She did not answer.

Yakov guessed what her relations with his father were, and this prevented him from speaking to her freely. His surmise did not surprise him. He had heard that men who go to work away from home have a good time, and he understood that a hale and hearty man like his father would find it hard to live without a woman for long. But for all that, he felt awkward in this woman's presence, and in his father's, too. Then he thought of his mother—a weary, complaining woman, slaving out there, in their village, knowing no rest....

"Supper's ready!" announced Vassili appearing in the shack.

"Get the spoons, Malva!"

Yakov glanced at his father and thought to himself:

"She must come here often since she knows where the spoons are kept."

Malva got the spoons and said she must go and wash them. There was also a bottle of vodka in the boat that she said she would go and fetch.

Father and son watched her leave the shack and when she was gone they sat together in silence. After a while Vassili asked Yakov:

"How did you come to meet her?"

"I went to the office to ask about you and she was there.... She says to me, she says: 'Why walk all that way along the sand? Let's go by boat. I'm going across to him too.' So we came."

"Aa-a-ah!... I often used to think to myself: 'I wonder what Yakov is like now?' "

The son looked into his father's face with a good-natured smile, and this smile lent Vassili courage.

"A nice little woman, isn't she... eh?" he asked.

"Not so bad," Yakov answered indefinitely, blinking his eyes.

"What the hell can a man do, little brother?" Vassili exclaimed, waving his arms. "I bore it patiently at first, but I couldn't stand it any longer! It's a habit.... I'm a married man! And besides, she mends my clothes, and one thing and another. Dear, oh dear! You can't escape from a woman any more than you can escape from death!" he concluded fervently.

"What's it got to do with me?" said Yakov. "It's your business. It's not for me to judge you."

But to himself he said:

"You can't tell me a woman like that would sit around and mend pants."

"Besides," said Vassili, "I'm only forty-five.... I don't spend much on her. She's not my wife."

"Of course not," Yakov agreed, and thought to himself: "But she empties your pockets all the same, I bet!"

Malva came back with a bottle of vodka and a string of pretzels. They sat down to eat the chowder. They ate in silence, sucking the fishbones with a loud noise and spitting them out on the sand near the door. Yakov ate a lot, and ate greedily. Evidently this pleased Malva, for her face lit up with a kindly smile as she watched him blow out his tanned cheeks and rapidly work his thick, moist lips. Vassili ate little, although he tried to appear as if his mind was concentrated on his food. He was obliged to do this so as to be able without interruption, and unperceived by his son and Malva, to think out a plan of action.

The soft music of the waves was interrupted by the rapacious screeching of the sea-gulls. The heat had become less oppressive and now and again a stream of cool air, impregnated with the smell of the sea, blew into the shack.

After the savoury chowder and the vodka Yakov's eyes became heavy. A vacuous smile mounted his lips, he began to hiccough and yawn, and he loked at Malva in a way that compelled Vassili to say to him:

"Go and lie down a bit, Yakov, my boy. Take a nap until the tea is ready. We'll wake you when it is."

"Yes.... I think I will," said Yakov, readily dropping down on a heap of sacks. "But... where are you two going? Ha-ha-ha!"

Embarrassed by that laugh, Vassili hastily left the shack; but Malva pursed her lips, raised her brows and said in answer to Yakov's query:

"Where we are going is no business of yours! What are you? You're only a boy! You don't understand these things yet!"

"What am I? All right! You wait... I'll show you! You think you're smart..." said Yakov in a loud voice as Malva left the shack.

He kept on mumbling for a little while longer and then fell asleep with a drunken, sated smile on his flushed face.

Vassili stuck three sticks into the ground, tied them together at the top, threw some bast sacking over them, lay down in the shade thus made with his arms under his head, and gazed into the sky. When Malva dropped down on the sand beside him he turned his face towards her. She saw that he was displeased and offended.

"What's the matter, aren't you glad to see your son?" she asked laughing.

"There he is... laughing at me.... Because of you!" growled Vassili.

"Oh! Because of me?" Malva asked in mock surprise.

"What do you think?"

"You miserable old sinner! What do you want me to do now? Stop coming to see you? All right. I won't!"

"Aren't you a witch!" said Vassili reproachfully. "Eh! You're all alike! He's laughing at me, and so are you.... And yet you are the closest friends I have! What are you laughing at me for, you devils?" With that he turned away from Malva and remained silent.

Clasping her knees and slowly swaying her body Malva gazed at the merrily sparkling sea with her greenish eyes and smiled one

of those triumphant smiles which women who are conscious of their beauty possess in such abundance.

A sailing boat was gliding over the water like a large, clumsy, grey-winged bird. It was a long way from the shore, and was receding still further from it to where the sea and the sky merged in blue infinity.

"Why don't you say something?" said Vassili.

"I'm thinking," answered Malva.

"What about?"

"Oh, nothing particular," answered Malva twitching her brows. After a pause she added: "Your son's a fine lad."

"What's that got to do with you?" exclaimed Vassili jealously.

"A lot!"

"Take care!" said Vassili casting at her a look of anger and suspicion. "Don't play the fool! I'm a quiet chap, but I'm a devil when I'm aroused. So don't tease me, or you'll be sorry for it!"

Doubling his fists he added through his clenched teeth:

"You were up to something as soon as you got here this morning.... I don't know what it is yet.... But take care, it'll go hard with you when I find out! And that smile of yours.... And everything else.... I know how to hand'e your kind, don't you worry!"

"Don't try to frighten me, Vassya," said Malva in an impassive tone without even looking at Vassili.

"Don't get up to any tricks then...."

"And don't you threaten me...."

"I'll give you a good thrashing if you get up to any of your larks," said Vassili flaring up.

"What? You'll thrash me?" said Malva, turning to Vassili and looking curiously into his excited face

"Who do you think you are, a duchess? Yes, I'll thrash you!"

"And who do you think I am—your wife?" Malva asked calmly, and without waiting for a reply continued: "Because you're in the habit of beating your wife for no reason at all you think you'll do the same to me, don't you? But you're mistaken. I am my own mistress and I'm not afraid of anybody. But you—you're afraid of your son! It was a disgrace to see the way you danced in front of him this morning. And yet you dare threaten me!"

She tossed her head contemptuously and fell silent. Her cold contemptuous words quenched Vassili's anger. He had never seen her so beautiful before.

"There you go, off the deep end . . ." he growled. He was angry with her, but he could not help admiring her.

"And I'll tell you another thing!" Malva burst out. "You boasted to Seryozhka that you were like bread to me, that I couldn't live without you! You're wrong!. . . Perhaps it's not you that I love, and not you that I come to see, but this spot!" and with that she made a wide sweep with her hand. "Perhaps I like this place because it is deserted—nothing but sea and sky, and no disgusting people around. The fact that you are here makes no difference. . . . It's what I have to pay to come here. . . . If Seryozhka were here I'd come to him. If your son's here I shall go to him. . . . It would be better if nobody were here. . . . I'm sick of you all! . . . With my beauty I can always get a man when I want one, and I can choose the one I want."

"Is that so?" hissed Vassili, suddenly clutching Malva by the throat. "Is that the idea?"

He shook her, but she did not struggle, although her face was almost livid and her eyes were bloodshot. She merely placed her hands on Vassili's that were squeezing her throat, and stared into his face.

"So that's the sort you are?" said Vassili hoarsely, his rage gaining mastery over him. "You kept quiet about it up till now, you slut. . . . Cuddled me. . . . Petted me. . . . I'll show you!"

He forced her head down and with the utmost zest punched her in the neck—two heavy, swinging blows with his tightly clenched fist; it gave him the greatest pleasure to feel his fist come down upon her soft neck.

"Take that . . . you snake!" he said triumphantly, flinging her away from him.

She sank to the ground without even a gasp, and lay there on her back, silent and calm, dishevelled, flushed, but beautiful. Her greenish eyes flashed cold hatred at him from under their lashes, but he, panting from excitement, and conscious of a pleasant feeling of satisfaction at having given vent to his anger, failed to catch her glance, and when he looked at her triumphantly she smiled—

her full lips twitched, her eyes flashed, dimples appeared on her cheeks. Vassili looked at her in amazement.

"What is it, you she-devil?" he shouted, roughly pulling her arm.

"Vaska!" said Malva almost in a whisper. "Was it you who beat me?"

"Of course, who else?" answered Vassili, looking at Malva in perplexity, and not knowing what to do. Hit her again? But his anger had subsided, and he could not bear the thought of raising his hand against her again.

"That means you love me, doesn't it?" Malva whispered again, and that whisper sent a hot wave surging through his body.

"All right," he growled. "You didn't get half you deserved!"

"I thought you didn't love me any more.... I thought to myself: 'Now his son's come, he'll drive me away.'"

She burst into a queer laugh: it was much too loud.

"You little fool!" said Vassili, also laughing in spite of himself. "What's my son? He can't tell me what to do!"

He felt ashamed of himself and sorry for her, but remembering what she had said he added in a stern voice:

"My son has nothing to do with it. If I hit you, it's your own fault. You shouldn't have teased me."

"But I did it on purpose—to try you," she said, rubbing against his shoulder.

"To try me! What for? Well, now you know!"

"Never mind!" said Malva confidently, half closing her eyes. "I'm not angry with you. You beat me for love, didn't you? Well, I'll repay you for it...."

She lowered her voice, and staring him straight in the face she repeated:

"Oh, how I'll repay you!"

To Vassili these words sounded like a promise, a pleasant one, and it stirred him sweetly. Smiling he asked:

"How? How will you repay?"

"Wait and see," said Malva very calmly, but her lips twitched.

"Oh, you sweet darling!" exclaimed Vassili, grasping her in the tight embrace of a lover. "Do you know," he added, "you've become dearer to me since I beat you! I mean it! I feel we are now of the same flesh and blood!"

The sea-gulls soared over their heads. The wind from the sea caressed them and carried the surf from the waves almost to their feet, and the irrepressible laughter of the sea rolled on and on....

"Yes, that's how things are," said Vassili, sighing with relief and pensively caressing the woman pressing against him. "How funny everything in this world is arranged—what is sinful is sweet! You don't understand anything.... But sometimes I think about life and it scares me! Especially at night... when I can't sleep.... You look and you see the sea in front of you, the sky over your head and all around darkness, such black darkness that it gives you the creeps.... And you are all alone! You feel so small, ever so small. The earth is trembling under your feet and there's nobody on it except yourself. I often wish you were with me then.... At least, there'd be two of us."

Malva lay silent across his knee; her eyes were closed. Vassili's coarse but kind face, tanned by sun and wind, bent over her, his large, bleached beard tickled her neck. The woman did not move, only her breast rose and fell evenly. Vassili's eyes now wandered out to sea and now tarried on this breast, that was so close to him. He kissed her on the lips, slowly, without haste, smacking his own lips loudly, as if he were eating hot and thickly buttered porridge.

About three hours passed in this way. When the sun began to sink into the sea Vassili said in a dull voice:

"I'll go and put the kettle on for tea. Our guest will wake up soon."

Malva moved away from him, lazily like a pampered cat. He rose reluctantly and went into the shack. The woman watched him go through her slightly raised eyelashes and sighed, as one sighs when throwing off a heavy burden.

Later on the three sat around the fire drinking tea.

The setting sun tinted the sea with animated colours, the greenish waves were shot with purple and pearl.

Vassili, sipping his tea from a white mug, questioned his son about what was going on in their village, and he in his turn gave his recollections of it. Malva listened to their drawling conversation without intervening.

"So the old muzhiks at home are still carrying on, you say?" Vassili enquired.

"Yes, one way or another," answered Yakov.

"We muzhiks don't want much, do we? A roof over our heads, enough bread to eat, and a glass of vodka on holidays.... But we don't even get that. D'you think I'd have left home if we had been able to make a living? At home I'm my own master, the equal to everybody else in the village. But what am I here?... A servant!..."

"But you get more to eat here, and the work's easier...."

"Well, I wouldn't say that! Sometimes you work so hard that all the bones in your body ache. The main thing though, is that you work for a master. At home, you work for yourself."

"But you earn more," retorted Yakov.

In his heart of hearts Vassili agreed with his son. At home, in the village, life and work were harder than here, but for some reason he didn't want Yakov to know that. So he answered sternly:

"Have you counted the money we earn here? Now at home, in the village, my boy...."

"It's like in a pit, dark and crowded." Malva interrupted with a smile. "Especially for us women.... Nothing but tears."

"It's the same for women everywhere... and the light is the same... the same sun shines everywhere!" answered Vassili, looking at Malva with a frown.

"You're wrong there!" exclaimed Malva animatedly. "In the village I've got to marry whether I like it or not, and a married woman is an eternal slave: reap, spin, tend the cattle and bear children.... What's she got left for herself? Nothing but her husband's curses and blows...."

"It's not all blows," interrupted Vassili.

"But here I don't belong to anybody," said Malva, ignoring the interruption. "I'm as free as the sea-gull and can fly wherever I want to. Nobody can bar my way.... Nobody can touch me!"

"And if they do touch you?" asked Vassili with a smile, recalling what happened earlier in the day.

"If they do.... I will repay," Malva answered in a low voice. The light in her eyes died out.

Vassili laughed indulgently.

"Eh!... You're a game cat, but weak! You're a woman, and you talk like a woman. At home, in the village, a man needs a

woman as part of his life ... but here she exists only to play with." After a slight pause he added: "To sin with."

They stopped talking.... Yakov said with a pensive sigh:

"The sea looks as if there's no end to it!"

All three gazed at the vast expanse of water stretching before them.

"If only it were all land!" exclaimed Yakov, spreading his arms out wide. "And black earth! And if we could plough it all!"

"Oh, that's what you'd like, is it?" said Vassili laughing good-naturedly and looking approvingly at his son, whose face was flushed with the desire he had expressed. It pleased him to hear the lad express this love for the land. Perhaps it would soon call him back to the village, away from the temptations that would beset him here. And he, Vassili, would then be left alone with Malva, and everything would go on as before.

"Yes, you are right, Yakov! That's what the peasant wants. The peasant is strong on the land. As long as he is on the land he's alive; once he gets off it—he's done for! A peasant without land is like a tree without roots. It may be useful in some ways, but it can't live long—it must rot! It has even lost its forest beauty—all bare and stripped, a miserable looking thing!... What you said was right, Yakov."

The sea, taking the sun in its embrace, greeted it with the welcoming music of its waves, which the parting rays of the sun had tinted with the most gorgeous colours. The divine source of light, the creator of life, bid the sea farewell in an eloquent harmony of colour in order to waken the slumbering land, far away from the three who were watching it set, with the joyous rays of the radiant dawn.

"By God, my heart seems to melt when I see the sun go down!" said Vassili to Malva.

Malva made no reply. Yakov's blue eyes smiled as they swept the sea to the distant horizon; and all three sat for a long time gazing pensively in the direction where the last moments of the day were passing away. In front of them gleamed the embers of the fire. Behind, the night was unfolding its shadows around them. The yellow sand assumed a darker hue. The sea-gulls had vanished. Everything around became quiet and dreamingly caressing.... Even

the irrepressible waves racing to the beach seemed less merry and noisy than they had been in the daytime.

"Why am I sitting here? It's time to go," said Malva suddenly.

Vassili shivered and glanced at his son.

"What's the hurry?" he grumbled. "Wait until the moon rises," he added.

"Why should I? I'm not afraid. This won't be the first time I've gone from here at night!"

Yakov glanced at his father, lowered his head to conceal a mocking smile, and then looked at Malva. She returned his stare, and he felt awkward under her gaze.

"All right then, go!" said Vassili, feeling displeased and sad.

Malva got up, said good night, and walked slowly along the beach. The waves rolled right up to her feet as if they were playing with her. In the sky the stars—its golden flowers—twinkled. Malva's bright-coloured blouse faded in the gloom as she proceeded further and further away from Vassili and his son who were following her with their eyes.

Darling, my darling,
Quickly come to me.
How I long to have you pressed
Close against my breast!

sang Malva in a high-pitched voice. It seemed to Vassili that she had halted and was waiting. He spat angrily and thought to himself: "She's doing that to tease me, the she-devil!"

"Hark at her singing!" said Yakov with a smile.

To them she was only a grey patch in the gloom. Her voice rang over the sea again:

Do not spare my breasts,
These two white swans!

"D'ye hear that!" exclaimed Yakov, starting in the direction from which the tempting words had come.

"So you couldn't manage the farm?" he heard Vassili's stern voice ask.

Yakov looked at his father with bewildered eyes and remained at his side.

Drowned by the sound of the waves only fragments of this tantalizing song now reached their ears:

...Oh, I cannot close my eyes
...Alone ... this ... night!

"It's hot!" said Vassili in a dull voice, lolling on the sand. "It's night, but it's hot all the same! What an accursed country!"

"It's the sand.... It got hot during the day ..." said Yakov in a faltering voice, turning over on the other side.

"Here, you! What are you laughing at?" his father demanded sternly.

"I? What is there to laugh at?" Yakov asked innocently.

"I should say there wasn't!..."

Both fell silent.

Above the noise of the waves sounds reached their ears that were either sighs or tenderly calling cries.

Two weeks passed. Sunday came again, and again Vassili Legostyev was lying on the sand next to his shack, looking across the sea and waiting for Malva. The deserted sea was laughing, playing with the reflection of the sun, and legions of waves were born to race up the sand, sprinkle it with their spray and slip back into the sea and merge with it. Everything was the same as it had been fourteen days ago, except that on the previous occasion Vassili had waited for his mistress with calm confidence; now he was waiting with impatience. She had not come on the preceding Sunday—she must come today! He had no doubt about it, but he was already dying to see her. Yakov would not intrude today. Two days ago he had come for the net with some other fishermen and had said that he was going into town on Sunday to buy himself some shirts. He had got a job as a fisherman at fifteen rubles a month, had been out fishing several times, and now looked lively and cheerful. Like all the fishermen, he smelt of salt fish, and, like the rest, he was dirty and in rags. Vassili sighed as he thought of his son.

"I hope he comes to no harm," he said to himself. "He'll get spoiled, and then, perhaps, he won't want to go home.... In that case I'll have to go...."

The sea was deserted except for the sea-gulls. Now and again several tiny black specks moved along the narrow strip of sandy shore that separated the sea from the sky and disappeared, but not a boat came in sight, although the sun's rays were already striking the sea almost perpendicularly. As a rule Malva arrived long before this.

Two sea-gulls were fighting in the air so furiously that their feathers flew, and their fierce screeching introduced a discordant note in the merry song of the waves which merged so harmoniously with the solemn silence of the radiant sky that it sounded like the joyous playing of the sunbeams on the vast expanse of sea. The sea-gulls swooped down into the water, still pecking at each other and screeching from pain and anger, and again rose into the air in pursuit of one another.... And their friends—a whole flock—voraciously hunted the fish, tumbling in the greenish translucent restless waters, as if oblivious to the struggle.

The sea remained deserted. The familiar dark speck failed to appear on the distant shore....

"You're not coming?" said Vassili aloud. "Well, don't! What did you think?..."

And he spat contemptuously in the direction of the shore.

The sea laughed.

Vassili got up and went into the shack with the intention of cooking some dinner, but he felt no desire for food, so he returned to the old spot and lay down again.

"If Seryozhka would come at least!" he mentally exclaimed, and forced himself to think of Seryozhka. "He's a real terror, is that fellow! Laughs at everybody. Always ready for a fight. He's as strong as a bull. Got some learning too. Has been to lots of places ... but he's a drunkard. He's good company, though.... All the women have lost their hearts to him, and although he hasn't been here long, they're all running after him. Only Malva keeps away from him.... She hasn't turned up here! What a stubborn wench she is! Perhaps she's angry with me because I beat her? But was that new for her? Others must have beaten her.... And how! And won't I give it to her now!"

And so, thinking of his son one moment and of Seryozhka another, but most of the time of Malva, Vassili lay on the sand and

waited. His anxiety gradually grew into a dark, suspicious thought, but he kept driving it away. And so, concealing this suspicion from himself, he waited until evening, now getting up and pacing up and down the sand, and now lying down again. Darkness had already spread over the sea, but he still gazed into the distance, waiting for the arrival of the boat.

Malva did not come that day.

On turning in Vassili gloomily cursed his fate, which forbade him to go to the mainland. Over and over again, just as he was dozing off, he thought he heard the distant splash of oars. He jumped up and dashed out of the shack. Shading his eyes with his hand he stared out into the dark troubled sea. On shore, at the fisheries, two fires were burning, but the sea was deserted.

"All right, you witch!" he muttered threateningly, and then turned in and fell fast asleep.

But here is what happened at the fisheries that day.

Yakov rose early in the morning, when the sun was not yet so hot and a fresh breeze was blowing from the sea. He went down to the sea to bathe and on the beach he saw Malva. She was sitting in the stern of a fishing boat that was moored to the beach and combing her wet hair; her bare feet were dangling over the boat's side.

Yakov stopped short and gazed at her curiously.

Malva's cotton blouse, unbuttoned at the breast, had slipped down one shoulder, and that shoulder looked so white and tempting.

The waves beat against the stern of the boat causing it to pitch, so that Malva now rose high above the sea and now dropped so low that her bare feet almost touched the water.

"Did you bathe?" Yakov shouted to her.

She turned her face to him, gave him a quick glance and answered, continuing to comb her hair:

"Yes.... Why are you up so early?"

"You were up before me."

"Do you have to follow my example?"

Yakov made no reply.

"If you follow my example," she said, "you may lose your head!"

"Oh! Isn't she terrible!" retorted Yakov with a laugh, and squatting down he began to wash.

He scooped up the water in his hands and splashed his face, grunting with pleasure at its freshness. After drying his face and hands with the hem of his blouse he asked Malva:

"Why do you keep trying to frighten me?"

"And why do you keep staring at me?" Malva retorted.

Yakov couldn't recollect having eyed Malva more than he had the other women around the fisheries, but suddenly he blurted out:

"You look so tempting, I can't help staring at you!"

"If your father hears about your goings on, he'll wring your neck for you!" said Malva, shooting a sly and challenging glance at him.

Yakov laughed and climbed into the boat. He did not know what Malva meant by his "goings-on," but since she had said it, he must have been staring at her pretty hard. He began to feel quite cocky.

"What about my father?" he said, sitting down beside her on the gunwale. "Has he bought you, or what?"

Sitting beside Malva he ran his eyes over her bare shoulder, her half-exposed breast, her whole body—so fresh and strong, and fragrant of the sea.

"My, aren't you a beauty!" he exclaimed in admiration.

"But not for you!" she answered curtly without looking at him, nor did she trouble to adjust her clothing.

Yakov heaved a deep sigh.

Before them stretched the sea, inexpressibly beautiful in the rays of the morning sun. Small, playful waves, brought into being by the tender breath of the breeze, softly beat against the hull. Far out at sea loomed the spur, like a scar on its silky breast, and against the soft background of the blue sky the mast stood like a thinly drawn line, and the red rag at its head could be seen fluttering in the wind.

"Yes, my lad!" said Malva without looking at Yakov. "I may be tempting, but I'm not for you.... Nobody has bought me, and I'm not beholden to your father either. I live in my own way.... But don't you try to make up to me, because I don't want to stand between you and Vassili... I don't want any squabbling and quarrelling.... Do you understand me?"

"Why do you say that to me?" Yakov asked in amazement. "I haven't touched you, have I?"

"You wouldn't dare!" retorted Malva.

There was such a note of contempt in her voice that Yakov felt humiliated both as a male and a human being. A mischievous almost vicious feeling overcame him and his eyes flashed.

"Oh, I wouldn't dare, eh?" he exclaimed, shifting closer to her.

"No, you wouldn't!"

"But suppose I do?"

"Try!"

"What will happen?"

"I'll give you one in the neck that will send you flying into the water!"

"Go on, do it!"

"Dare to touch me!"

He fixed his burning eyes upon her and suddenly flung his powerful arms around her, crushing her breast and back. The touch of her strong, hot body, set his own on fire, and he felt a choking in the throat as if he were being strangled.

"There you are! . . . Go on! . . . Hit me! . . . You said you would!" he gasped.

"Let me go, Yashka!" said Malva, calmly trying to release herself from his trembling arms.

"But you said you'd give it me in the neck, didn't you?"

"Let go! You'll be sorry for it!"

"Don't try to frighten me! . . . Oh! . . . Aren't you sweet!"

He held her still tighter and pressed his thick lips against her ruddy cheek.

Malva laughed mischievously, took Yakov's arms in a powerful grip and jerked her whole body forward. The two, held tightly in each other's embrace, shot overboard, plunged into the water with a heavy splash and soon were lost to view amidst a whirlpool of foam and spray. A little later Yakov's head appeared above the surging water with dripping hair and frightened face, and then Malva dived up beside him. Waving his arms desperately and splashing the water around him, Yakov roared and howled, while Malva, laughing heartily, swam round him, splashing the salty water in his face and diving to get out of the way of the broad sweep of his arms.

"You she-devil!" roared Yakov, blowing the water from his nose and mouth. "I'll drown!. . . That's enough of it. . . . By

God.... I'll drown! Ah!... The water's bitter.... I'm d-r-o-w-n-i-n-g!"

But Malva had already left him and was swimming to the shore, striking out like a man. On reaching the shore she climbed into the barge with remarkable agility, stood in the stern and laughed as she watched Yakov plunging and gasping in the water, trying to reach her. Her wet clothing clung to her body and outlined its form from her shoulders to her knees, and Yakov, reaching the boat at last and clinging to its side stared hungrily at this almost naked woman who was laughing merrily at him.

"Come on! Get out of the water, you porpoise!" she said between her chuckles, and going down on her knees she extended one hand to Yakov and grasped the gunwale of the boat with the other. Yakov caught her hand and exclaimed excitedly:

"Now look out! I'll give you a ducking!"

With that, standing up to his shoulders in the water, he pulled Malva down towards him. The waves dashed over his head, broke against the hull and splashed into Malva's face. Malva frowned and then laughed. Suddenly she shrieked and jumped into the water, knocking Yakov off his feet with the impact of her body.

And again they began to play in the greenish water like two porpoises, splashing each other, shrieking, spluttering and snorting.

The sun laughed as it watched them playing, and the glass in the windows of the fishery buildings also laughed as it reflected the sun. The water surged and gurgled as it was beaten up by their powerful arms, and the sea-gulls, alarmed by the two people struggling in the water, circled with piercing shrieks over their heads which vanished now and again under the incoming waves....

At last, weary and puffed up with the sea water they had swallowed they crawled on the beach and sat in the sun to rest.

"Phew!" ejaculated Yakov, spitting out with a grimace.

"This water is awful stuff! No wonder there's such a lot of it!"

"There's plenty of awful stuff of all kinds in the world. Young fellows, for example. Good Lord, how many' of them there are!" said Malva with a laugh, wringing the water out of her hair.

Her hair was dark and, though not very long, was thick and wavy.

"No wonder the old man fell in love with you," said Yakov with a sly smile, nudging Malva with his elbow.

"Sometimes an old man is better than a young one."

"If the father is good the son must be better!"

"Is that so? Where did you learn to boast like that?"

"The girls in our village often told me that I am not at all bad-looking."

"What do girls know? You ask me."

"But aren't you a girl?"

Malva stared at him, laughed mischievously, and then, becoming grave she said in an earnest tone:

"I had a child once."

"Damaged goods—eh?" said Yakov bursting into a loud laugh.

"Don't be silly!" snapped Malva, turning away from him.

Yakov was cowed. He pursed his lips and said no more.

Both remained silent for about half an hour, basking in the sun to dry their clothes.

The fishermen in the long, filthy sheds which served as their living quarters, awoke from their slumber. From a distance they all looked alike—ragged, unkempt and barefooted.... Their hoarse voices were wafted to the beach. Somebody was hammering on the bottom of an empty barrel and the hollow sounds came over like the beating of a big drum. Two women were quarrelling in shrill voices. A dog barked.

"They're waking up," said Yakov. "I wanted to go to town early today ... but here I am, larking about with you."

"I told you you'd be sorry if you made up to me," answered Malva, half in jest and half seriously.

"Why do you keep frightening me?" Yakov asked with a perplexed smile.

"Mark my words. As soon as your father gets to hear of this...."

Yakov flared up on hearing his father mentioned again.

"What about my father?" he demanded angrily. "Suppose he does hear? I'm not a kid.... He thinks he's the boss, but he can't boss me here.... We're not at home in the village.... I'm not blind. I can see he's no saint.... He does as he likes here.... Let him not interfere with me!"

Malva looked into his face mockingly and asked in a tone of curiosity:

"Not interfere with you? Why, what do you intend to do?"

"I!" answered Yakov, puffing out his cheeks and sticking out his chest as if he were lifting a heavy weight. "What I intend to do? I can do a lot! The fresh air has blown all the village dust off me. I can tell you!"

"Quick work!" said Malva ironically.

"I'll tell you what! I bet I'll win you from my father!"

"Well! You don't say?"

"Do you think I'm afraid?"

"N-o-o?"

"Look here!" Yakov blurted out impulsively. "Don't tease me.... Or else ... I'll...."

"What?" Malva asked coolly.

"Nothing!"

He turned away from her and said no more, but he looked brave and self-confident.

"Aren't you cocky!" said Malva. "The agent here has a black pup. Have you seen it? It's like you. It barks and threatens to bite when you're at a distance. But when you go near it runs away with its tail between its legs!"

"All right!" exclaimed Yakov angrily. "You wait! I'll show you the stuff I'm made of!"

Malva laughed in his face.

A tall wiry man with a tanned face and a thick thatch of unkempt, fiery red hair slowly approached them with a swaggering step. His red cotton blouse, which he wore without a belt, was torn at the back almost up to the collar, and to prevent the sleeves from slipping down he had them rolled up to his shoulders. His pants were nothing but a collection of rents of the most diverse shapes and sizes. His feet were bare. His face was densely freckled, his large blue eyes flashed insolently, and his broad upturned nose gave him an appearance of reckless impudence. On reaching them he halted. The patches of his bare body visible through the innumerable rents in his clothing gleamed in the sun. He sniffed loudly, stared enquiringly at them and pulled a funny face.

"Seryozhka had a drink or two yesterday and today his pocket is like a bottomless basket," he said. "Lend me twenty kopecks! You can be sure I'll not repay you...."

Yakov laughed heartily at this insolent speech. Malva gazed at the ragged figure with a smile.

"I'll tell you what, you devils! I'll marry you two for twenty kopecks! Do you want to?"

"Oh you clown! Are you a priest?" enquired Yakov with a grin.

"Idiot! I worked as a janitor for a priest in Uglich.... Give me twenty kopecks!"

"I don't want to get married!" said Yakov.

"Never mind—give me the money. I won't tell your father that you're larking about with his tart," persisted Seryozhka, licking his dry, cracked lips.

"He wouldn't believe you if you did tell him!"

"He will if I tell him!... And won't he wallop you!"

"I'm not afraid!" said Yakov.

"In that case I'll wallop you myself!" said Seryozhka, calmly screwing up his eyes.

Yakov begrudged the twenty kopecks, but he had already been warned to avoid quarrelling with Seryozhka and to yield to his demands. He never asked for much, but if it was not given him he would get up to some mischief at work, or give his victim a thrashing for no reason at all. Yakov remembered this warning and put his hand to his pocket with a sigh.

"That's right!" said Seryozhka encouragingly, dropping down on the sand beside him. "Always listen to what I tell you and you'll become a wise man. And you," he continued, turning to Malva. "Are you going to marry me soon? Make up your mind quickly. I don't intend to wait long!"

"You're nothing but a bundle of rags.... Sew the holes up in your clothing first and then we'll talk about it," answered Malva.

Seryozhka gazed at the rents in his pants critically, shook his head and said:

"It would be better if you gave me one of your skirts."

"What!" exclaimed Malva.

"Yes, I mean it! You surely have an old one you don't want!"

"Buy yourself a pair of pants," Malva advised him.

"No. I'd rather buy drink with the money."

"You'd rather do that!" said Yakov laughing, holding four five-kopeck pieces in his hand.

"Yes, why not? A priest told me that a man must take care of his soul and not of his body, and my soul demands vodka, not pants. Give me the money! ... Now I'll go and have a drink.... I'll tell your father about you all the same."

"Tell him!" said Yakov with a wave of the hand, and winking impudently at Malva he nudged her shoulder.

Seryozhka noticed this. Spitting out, he said threateningly:

"And I'll not forget that thrashing I promised you.... I'll give you such a thick ear as soon as I get some spare time!"

"What for?" Yakov asked, somewhat alarmed.

"I know what for!... Well, are you going to marry me soon?" Seryozhka asked Malva again.

"Tell me what we shall do when we're married, how we're going to live, and then I'll think about it," she answered gravely.

Seryozhka stared out at the sea, screwed up his eyes and licking his lips he said:

"We won't do nothing. We'll have a good time."

"But where shall we get the money from?"

"Ekh!" ejaculated Seryozhka, waving his arm in disgust. "You argue like my old mother—what? and where? and how? How do I know?... I'll go and get myself a drink."

He got up and left them. Malva watched him go with a queer smile playing on her lips; Yakov sent hostile glances after him.

"A regular bully, isn't he!" said Yakov when Seryozhka had got out of earshot. "If he lived in our village they'd soon put a curb on him.... They'd give him a good licking and that would put a stop to his tricks. But they're afraid of him here!"

Malva looked at him and muttered between her clenched teeth:

"You puppy! You don't understand his worth!"

"What's there to understand? He's worth five kopecks a bunch, and then only if there's a hundred to the bunch!"

"You ought to talk!" exclaimed Malva. "That's no more than you are worth.... But he.... He's been everywhere, all over the country, and he's afraid of nobody!"

"Am I afraid of anybody?" demanded Yakov boastfully.

Malva did not answer him but pensively watched the play of

the waves that were racing up the beach and rocking the heavy boat. The mast swung from side to side, the stern rose and fell, splashing the water with a loud sound like that of vexation, as if the boat wanted to break away from the beach and slip out into the broad, green sea, and was angry with the cable that was holding it fast.

"Well, why don't you go?" Malva asked Yakov.

"Where to?" he asked in reply.

"You said you wanted to go to town."

"I won't go!"

"Then go to your father."

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Will you go too?"

"No."

"Then I won't go."

"Do you intend to hang around me all day long?" Malva asked coolly.

"Oh yes! I need you very much!" answered Yakov contemptuously, getting up and going off in a huff.

But he was wrong in saying that he did not need her. He found things dull without her. A strange feeling had arisen within him since his conversation with her: a vague feeling of discontent with, and protest against, his father. He had not felt this the day before, and he had not felt it earlier that day, before he met Malva.... But now it seemed to him that his father was a hindrance to him, although he was far out at sea, on that barely perceptible strip of sand.... Then it seemed to him that Malva was afraid of his father. If she were not afraid things would be altogether different between him and her.

He roamed about the fisheries gazing at the people there. Seryozhka was sitting on an upturned barrel in the shade of a hut, strumming a balalaika and singing, pulling funny faces the while:

Oh Mr. Policeman
Be very kind to me.
Take me to the station
I've been on the spree....

He was surrounded by a score or so of people as ragged as himself, all smelling of salt fish, like everything else in the place. Four women, ugly and dirty, were sitting on the sand drinking tea, pouring it out of a large tin kettle. A fisherman, already drunk, although it was still early morning, was rolling on the sand, trying to rise to his feet and falling down again. Somewhere a woman was shrieking and wailing. The strains of an out-of-tune accordion were heard, and everywhere fish scales glistened.

At noon Yakov found a shady spot among a number of empty barrels. He lay down here and slept until the evening. When he awoke he wandered around the fisheries again vaguely conscious that something was drawing him somewhere.

After wandering about for a couple of hours he found Malva lying in the shade of a young willow a long way from the fisheries. She was lying on her side, holding a tattered book of some kind. On seeing him approach she smiled.

"So this is where you got to!" he said, sitting down beside her.

"Have you been searching for me long?" she asked in a tone that suggested that she was confident that he had been searching for her.

"I haven't been searching for you at all!" exclaimed Yakov, suddenly realizing what the vague feeling had been, that he had been longing for her, and he shook his head in perplexity.

"Can you read?" Malva asked him.

"Yes ... but not very well. I have forgotten...."

"I don't read well either.... Did you go to school?"

"Yes, to the village school."

"I taught myself."

"Is that so?"

"Yes.... I served as a cook for a lawyer in Astrakhan. His son taught me to read."

"You didn't teach yourself then!" said Yakov.

She looked hard at him and then asked:

"Do you want some books to read?"

"Me? No.... What for?"

"I love reading. Look! I asked the agent's wife to lend me this book and I am reading it."

"What's it about?"

"It's about St. Alexei."

And she went on to tell him in a pensive voice how a young lad, the son of wealthy and distinguished parents, left home, abandoning all the comforts of life, and later returned, poor and in rags, and lived with the dogs in the courtyard of his parents' house without revealing his identity until the day of his death. When she finished the story Malva asked Yakov in a low voice:

"Why did he do that?"

"Who knows?" answered Yakov in a tone of complete indifference.

The sand dunes swept up by the wind and waves surrounded them. Vague, muffled noises were wafted to them from the distance—the sounds of revelry in the fisheries. The sun was setting, tinting the sand a rosy hue with its rays. The sparse leaves on the stunted branches of the willow trees fluttered feebly in the light breeze that was blowing from the sea. Malva was silent; she appeared to be listening intently for something.

"Why didn't you go over there, to the spur, today?" Yakov suddenly asked her.

"What's that to you?"

Yakov looked hungrily at the woman out of the corner of his eye, trying to think how to say what he was yearning to say.

"When I am alone, and it's quiet," said Malva pensively, "I want to cry ... or sing. Only I don't know any good songs, and I'm ashamed to cry...."

Yakov heard her voice, it was low and tender, but what she said touched no string in his heart, it merely sharpened his desire for her.

"Now listen to me," he said in a low voice, drawing closer, but keeping his eyes away from her. "Listen to what I'll tell you.... I am young...."

"And foolish, very foolish!" said Malva interrupting him, speaking very earnestly, and shaking her head.

"Well, suppose I am foolish?" retorted Yakov in a tone of vexation. "Does one have to be clever for this sort of thing? All right—say I'm foolish! But this is what I've got to say: Would you like...."

"No, I wouldn't!"

"What?"

"Nothing!"

"Here, don't be a fool!" said Yakov, gently taking Malva by the shoulders. "Try and understand...."

"Go away, Yashka!" she said sternly, pushing his hands away. "Go away!"

He rose to his feet and looked around.

"All right.... If that's the case, I don't give a damn! There's lots like you around here.... D'you think you're better than the others?"

"You're a pup," she said coolly, rising to her feet and shaking the sand from her skirt.

They walked side by side to the fisheries. They walked slowly, because their feet sank in the sand.

Yakov crudely tried to persuade her to yield to his desires, but she coolly laughed at him and parried his pleadings with cruel jests.

Just before they reached the hutments Yakov suddenly stopped, grasped Malva by the shoulders and said between his clenched teeth:

"You are only teasing me... working me up... aren't you? Why are you doing this? Take care or I'll make you sorry for it!"

"Leave me alone, I tell you!" said Malva, releasing herself from his grasp and walking away.

Seryozhka appeared round the corner of a hutment. On catching sight of them he strode towards them and said with a sinister smile, shaking his unkempt, fiery head:

"Been for a walk, eh? All right!"

"Go to hell, all of you!" Malva screamed angrily.

Yakov halted in front of Seryozhka and gazed at him sullenly. They were about ten paces away from each other.

Seryozhka returned Yakov's stare. They stood for about a minute like two rams ready to charge one another and then silently parted, each going in a different direction.

The sea was calm but was lit up with a lurid glare from the sunset. Muffled sounds came from the fisheries, and above those

sounds was distinctly heard the drunken voice of a woman hysterically screeching the nonsensical words:

... Ta—agarga, matagarga,
My matanichka ... ka!
D-r-unk, and knocked about am I,
Tousled, ruffled and rumpled—ah!

And these words, as disgusting as lice, overran the fisheries that were reeking of saltpeter and decaying fish, an offence to the music of the waves.

The distant sea dozed calmly in the tender light of dawn, reflecting the pearly clouds. On the spur, sleepy fishermen were busy loading tackle into a fishing boat.

A grey mass of netting crept along the sand to the boat and lay in folds in its bottom.

Seryozhka, bareheaded and half naked as usual, stood in the stern hurrying up the fishermen in his hoarse drunken voice. The wind played among the rents in his blouse and ruffled his red, unkempt hair.

"Vassili! Where's the green oars?" somebody shouted.

"Vassili, frowning like an October day, was piling the net in the boat, while Seryozhka stared at his bent back licking his lips—a sign that he wanted a drink to drive away his hangover.

"Have you any vodka?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Vassili sullenly.

"In that case I won't go out.... I'll stay here at the dry end."

"Ready!" somebody shouted from the beach.

"Cast off! Lively now!" commanded Seryozhka and then climbed out of the boat. "You go along," he said to the men. "I'll stay here. See that you spread the net out wide, and don't get it tangled! And fold it evenly. Don't fasten the loop."

The boat was pushed into the water, the fishermen climbed into it and picking up their oars held them raised, waiting for the order to start.

"One!"

The oars struck the water with a single stroke and the boat shot out into the broad expanse of the sea now lit up by the dawn.

"Two!" commanded the man at the tiller and the oars rose and stuck out on each side of the boat like the paws of a gigantic turtle. "One!... Two!..."

Five men remained at the dry end of the net on the beach: Seryozhka, Vassili, and three others. One of them dropped down on the sand and said:

"I'll have a little more sleep!"

Two others followed his example, and three bodies clothed in filthy rags curled up on the sand.

"Why didn't you come on Sunday?" Vassili asked Seryozhka as they walked to the shack.

"I couldn't."

"Why, were you drunk?"

"No. I was keeping an eye on your son, and also on his stepmother," Seryozhka answered coolly.

"A nice job you've found for yourself!" said Vassili with a wry smile. "What! Are they little children?"

"Worse.... One's a fool and the other... a saint..."

"What! Malva a saint?" Vassili asked, his eyes flashing anger. "Has she been like that long?"

"Her soul doesn't fit her body, brother!"

"She has a wicked soul!"

Seryozhka glanced at Vassili out of the corner of his eye and snorted contemptuously.

"Wicked! Ekh! You ... dull clodhoppers! You don't understand anything.... All you want a woman to have is fat tits.... You don't give a damn for her character.... But all the spice in a woman is her character.... A woman without character is like bread without salt. Can you get any pleasure out of a balalaika which has no strings? ... Dolt!"

"Gee! What fine talk you drank yourself into yesterday!" sneered Vassili.

He was dying to ask Seryozhka where he had seen Yakov and Malva, and what they were doing, but he was too ashamed.

On entering the shack he poured out a tumblerful of vodka

for Seryozhka, hoping that this dose would loosen his tongue and that he would tell him about the two of his own accord.

But Seryozhka drained the glass, grunted and, quite sobered up, sat down at the door of the shack, stretched himself and yawned.

"A drink like that is like swallowing fire," he said.

"And can't you drink!" exclaimed Vassili, amazed at the speed with which Seryozhka had gulped down the tumblerful of vodka.

"Yes, I can!" said the hobo, nodding his red head and wiping his moist whiskers with the palm of his hand. "Yes, I can, brother! I do everything quickly, and straight off the bat, without any higgledy-piggledy. Go straight on, is my motto! What does it matter where you get to? We've all got to go the same road—from dust unto dust.... And you can't get away from it!"

"You wanted to go to the Caucasus, didn't you?" Vassili asked, cautiously leading up to his subject.

"I'll go when I feel like it. And when I do feel like it I'll go straight off—one, two, three, and off! I either get my way or get a big bump on my head.... It's all very simple!"

"Nothing could be simpler! You seem to be living without using your head."

Seryozhka looked at Vassili with mocking eyes and said:

"You think you're clever, don't you? How many times have you been flogged at the volost police station?"

Vassili returned Seryozhka's stare, but said nothing

"Is it good to have the police knock sense into your head through your backside?... Ekh, you! What can you do with your head? Where do you think it will take you to? What can you think up with it? Ain't I right? But I push right on without using my head, and I don't give a damn! And I bet I'll get further than you," said the hobo boastfully.

"Yes, I believe you will!" answered Vassili with a laugh. "You'll get as far as Siberia!"

Seryozhka burst into a hearty chuckle.

Contrary to Vassili's expectations the vodka had no effect upon Seryozhka, and this made him angry. He could have offered him another glassful, but he grudged the vodka. On the other hand, as long as Seryozhka was sober he would get nothing out of him.... But the hobo opened the subject without further prompting.

"How is it you're not asking about Malva?" he enquired.

"Why should I?" Vassili answered in a tone of indifference, but trembling from a sort of premonition nevertheless.

"She wasn't here last Sunday, was she? Why don't you ask what she's been doing these past few days?... You're jealous about her, aren't you, you old devil!"

"There's lots like her!" said Vassili with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

"Lots like her!" retorted Seryozhka. "Ekh, you country bumpkin! You can't tell the difference between honey and tar!"

"What are you boosting her up like that for? Have you come here as a matchmaker? You're too late! The match came off a long time ago!" Vassili jeered.

Seryozhka looked at him in silence for a while and then, placing his hand on his shoulder, he said very earnestly:

"I know she's living with you. I didn't interfere—there was no need.... But now Yashka, that son of yours, is hanging round her. Give it to him red-hot! Do you hear what I say? If you don't—I will.... You're a good sort.... Only you're as dense as a block of wood.... I didn't interfere with you.... I want you to remember that."

"So that's how the land lies! You are after her too, is that it?" said Vassili in a hollow voice.

"Too!... If I had wanted to, I'd have gone straight for her, and would have shoved you all out of my way!... But what good am I to her?"

"Then why are you sticking your nose into it?" Vassili asked suspiciously.

This simple question must have astonished Seryozhka, for he looked at Vassili with wide open eyes, laughed heartily and said:

"Why am I sticking my nose in? The devil only knows!... But what a woman she is! Plenty of spice in her!... I like her.... Perhaps I'm sorry for her...."

Vassili looked at him distrustfully, but something in his heart told him that Seryozhka was speaking sincerely.

"If she'd have been an untouched virgin I could understand you being sorry for her. As it is ... it seems funny to me!" he said.

Seryozhka remained silent, watching the fishing boat far out at sea describing a wide circle as it turned its nose to the shore. His eyes were frank and wide open, his face was simple and kind. Vassili softened towards him as he gazed at him.

"Yes, what you say is true. She's a fine woman... only she's a bit loose!... As for Yashka, I'll give him hell ... the pup!"

"I don't like him," said Seryozhka.

"And you say he's making up to her?" hissed Vassili through his clenched teeth, stroking his beard.

"He'll come between you and her, take my word for it! Seryozhka said emphatically.

The rays of the rising sun burst over the horizon like an open fan. Above the sound of the waves a faint hail reached their ears from the boat far out at sea:

"A-h-o-o-y!... Pull her in!"

"Get up, lads! Hey! To the net!" commanded Seryozhka.

The men jumped to their feet and soon all five had chosen the part of the net each was to take. A long cable, taut and as flexible as steel, stretched from the water to the shore, and the fishermen, twisting it into loops round their bodies, grunted and gasped as they hauled it on to the beach.

Meanwhile, the fishing boat, gliding over the waves, was hauling in the other end of the net.

The sun, bright and magnificent, rose over the sea.

"If you see Yakov, tell him to come and see me tomorrow," Vassili requested Seryozhka.

"All right!"

The boat slipped on to the beach and the fishermen, jumping out of her, grabbed hold of their respective parts of the net and hauled it in. The two groups gradually drew closer to each other and the cork floats of the net, bobbing up and down in the water, formed a perfect semicircle.

Late that evening, when the men at the fisheries were having their supper, Malva, tired and pensive, was sitting on a damaged upturned boat and gazing out at the sea, now enveloped in gloom. Far away a light glimmered. Malva knew that it was the fire that Vassili had lit. Like a lone spirit lost in the dark expanse of the

sea, the light now flared up brightly and now subsided as if in agony. It made Malva feel sad to watch this red speck lost in the wilderness, flickering feebly amidst the ceaseless booming of the waves. Suddenly she heard Seryozhka's voice behind her:

"What are you sitting here for?"

"What's it to do with you?" she retorted without turning round.

"I'm just interested!"

He said no more, but looked her up and down, rolled a cigarette, lit it, and sat astride the upturned boat. After a little while he said in a friendly tone:

"You're a funny woman! You hide from everybody one minute and hang on nearly everybody's neck the next!"

"I don't hang on your neck, do I?" she said in a dispassionate tone.

"No, not on mine, but on Yashka's."

"And are you jealous?"

"Humph! ... Let's talk straight, from the bottom of the heart, eh?" suggested Seryozhka, patting Malva on the shoulder. She was sitting sideways to him, so he could not see the expression on her face when she said curtly:

"All right!"

"Tell me, have you dropped Vassili?"

"I don't know," answered Malva. After a brief pause she added: "Why do you ask?"

"Just like that."

"I'm angry with him."

"Why?"

"He beat me."

"You don't say!... What, he? And you let him! Oh! oh!"

Seryozhka was amazed. He glanced sideways at her and clicked his tongue ironically.

"I wouldn't have let him if I had not wanted to," she said fervidly.

"Why didn't you stop him then?"

"I didn't want to."

"That shows you are head over heels in love with the old tomcat," said Seryozhka mockingly, blowing his cigarette smoke at her. "I'm surprised! I didn't think you were one of that sort!"

"I don't love any of you," she answered in a dispassionate voice, waving the smoke away.

"That's a lie!"

"Why should I lie?" she asked, and by the tone of her voice Seryozhka realized that she really was not lying.

"If you don't love him, why did you allow him to beat you?" he asked her in an earnest tone.

"Do I know?... What are you pestering me for?"

"Funny!" said Seryozhka, shaking his head.

Both remained silent for a long time.

Night drew in. The clouds, moving slowly across the sky, cast shadows on the sea. The waves murmured.

The light from Vassili's fire on the spur had gone out, but Malva was still gazing in that direction. And Seryozhka gazed at her.

"Tell me," he said. "Do you know what you want?"

"If only I knew!" Malva answered in a very low voice, heaving a deep sigh.

"So you don't know? That's bad!" Seryozhka said emphatically. "I always know what I want!" And he added with a touch of sadness in his voice: "The trouble is I rarely want anything."

"I am always wanting something," said Malva pensively, "but what it is... I don't know. Sometimes I feel I'd like to get into a boat and go out to sea ... far, far out, and never see anybody again. And sometimes I feel I'd like to turn every man's head and make him spin like a top around me. And I would look at him and laugh. Sometimes I feel so sorry for them all, and most of all for myself; and sometimes I want to kill them all, and then die a frightful death myself.... Sometimes I feel sad and sometimes happy.... But all the people around me seem so dull, like blocks of wood."

"You are right, the people are no good," Seryozhka agreed. "More than once I've looked at you and thought to myself: 'You're neither fish, flesh nor fowl'... but for all that there's something about you ... you're not like other women."

"And thank God for that!" said Malva with a laugh.

The moon rose up from the dunes on their left and shed its silvery light upon the sea. Large and mild, it floated slowly

across the blue vault of heaven, and the bright light of the stars paled and vanished in its even dreamy light.

Malva smiled and said:

"Do you know what?... Sometimes I think what fun it would be to set fire to one of the huts. What a hullabaloo there'd be!"

"I should say so!" Seryozhka exclaimed with admiration, and suddenly slapping Malva on the shoulder he said: "Do you know what? I'll teach you an amusing game, and we'll play it. Would you like to?"

"Rather!" said Malva burning with curiosity.

"You've set Yashka's heart on fire, haven't you?"

"It's burning like a furnace," answered Malva with a chuckle.

"Set him against his father! By God it'll be funny!... They'll go for each other like a couple of bears.... You tease the old man up a bit, and the young one too ... and then we'll set them against each other. What do you think of it, eh?"

Malva turned and gazed intently at Seryozhka's red, jolly smiling face. Lit up by the moon, it looked less blotched than in the bright light of the sun in the daytime. It bore no trace of anger, it bore nothing but a good-natured and somewhat mischievous smile.

"What makes you dislike them?" Malva asked him suspiciously.

"I?... Oh, Vassili is all right. He's a good chap. But Yasha ... he's no good. You see, I dislike all muzhiks.... They're rotters! They pretend to be poor and destitute ... and get bread, and everything, given them. They have Zemstvo, you see, and the Zemstvo does everything for them.... They have their farms, their land and cattle.... I once served as a coachman to a Zemstvo doctor and I saw quite enough of them.... And later I was on the road for a long time. Sometimes you'd go into a village and beg for a piece of bread and they'd nab you in a jiffy!... Who are you? What are you? Where's your passport?... That's happened to me lots of times.... Sometimes they take you for a horse thief, and sometimes they put you in the stone jug just for nothing.... They're always snivelling and pretending they're poor, but they know how to live! They have something to hold on to—land. What am I compared to them?"

"Aren't you a muzhik?" Malva asked interrupting him.

"No!" answered Seryozhka with a touch of pride. "I'm town-bred. I'm a citizen of the town of Uglich."

"And I come from Pavlish." Malva told him in a pensive voice.

"I have nobody to stand up for me!" continued Seryozhka. "But the muzhiks ... they can live, the devils! They have the Zemstvo, and all that sort of thing!"

"What's the Zemstvo?" Malva enquired.

"What's the Zemstvo? The devil knows! It was set up for the muzhiks. It's their administration.... But to hell with it.... Let's get down to business—shall we arrange this little joke, eh? It won't do any harm. They'll just have a fight, that's all!... Vassili beat you, didn't he? Well, let his own son pay him out for it."

"*It's not a bad idea,*" *said Malva smiling.*

"Just think ... isn't it a pretty sight to see other people busting each other's ribs for your sake? And only at a word from you! You wag your tongue once or twice... and they go for each other hammer and tongs."

Speaking half in jest and half in earnest Seryozhka explained to Malva at great length, and with equally great zeal, the attractions of the role she was to play.

"Oh, if only I were a good-looking woman! Wouldn't I cause some trouble in the world!" he exclaimed in conclusion, putting his hands to his head and closing his eyes tight as if in ecstasy.

The moon was already high in the sky when they parted, and with their departure the beauty of the night increased. Now only the limitless solemn sea, the silvery moon, and the blue star-spangled sky remained. There were also the sand dunes, the willow bushes among them, and the two, long, dilapidated buildings in the sand, looking like two, huge, roughly made coffins. But all this seemed petty and insignificant compared with the sea; and the stars which looked down upon this shined with a cold light.

Father and son sat opposite each other in the shack drinking vodka. The son had brought the vodka so that the visit to his father should not be dull, and also to soften his father's heart towards him. Seryozhka had told him that his father was angry with him over Malva, that he had threatened to beat Malva almost to

death, that Malva knew about this, and that was why she was not yielding herself to him. Seryozhka had said to him mockingly:

"He'll pay you out for your tricks! He'll pull your ears until they are over a yard long. You had better not let him set eyes on you!"

The jeering of this red-haired, repulsive fellow had roused in Yakov's heart a feeling of burning rage against his father, and on top of this was Malva's behaviour: The way she looked at him tantalizingly at one moment and longingly another inflamed his desire to possess her until it was too painful to bear.

And so, on visiting his father, he regarded him as an obstacle in his path, an obstacle which you could neither climb over nor go around. But he felt not the slightest trace of fear of his father. He sat opposite him and looked at him confidently with a sullen angry stare as much as to say:

"Dare to touch me!"

They had already had two drinks but had not yet said a word to each other, except for an insignificant remark or two about things concerning the fisheries. Facing each other alone in the midst of the sea they sat there accumulating anger in their hearts against each other. Both were aware that soon this anger would boil over and scald them.

The bast matting which covered the shack rustled in the wind, the reeds knocked against each other, the red rag at the masthead fluttered, making a chattering noise; but all these sounds were subdued and resembled distant whispering voices, incoherently and timidly begging for something.

"Is Seryozhka still on the booze?" Vassili asked in a glum voice.

"Yes, he gets drunk every night," said Yakov, pouring out some more vodka.

"It'll be the death of him.... So that's what it is, this free life ... without fear! And you'll be like that too...."

Yakov answered curtly:

"No, I won't!"

"You won't?" said Vassili frowning. "I know what I'm talking about.... How long have you been here? This is the third month. It'll be time for you to go home soon. Will you have much money

to take with you?" He picked up his cup angrily, shot the vodka into his mouth, gathered his beard into the palm of his hand and tugged it so vigorously that his head went down with it.

"I couldn't have saved much in the short time I've been here." said Yakov.

"If that's the case, it's no use you gallivanting here. Go back home to the village!"

Yakov smiled but said nothing.

"What are you pulling a face for?" Vassili exclaimed angrily, irritated by his son's coolness. "How dare you laugh when your father is talking to you! Take care! You've started taking liberties far too early! I shall have to put a curb on you!"

Yakov poured out some more vodka and drank it. His father's reproaches provoked him to anger, but he restrained himself, trying not to say what he was thinking in order to avoid exciting his father still more. To tell the truth, he was somewhat frightened by the stern and even cruel light in his father's eyes.

Seeing that his son had taken another drink without offering him one, Vassili flared up still more.

"Your father tells you to go home, but you laugh at him, eh?" he demanded. "Take your discharge on Saturday and ... quick march home! Do you hear what I tell you?"

"I won't go!" said Yakov firmly, obstinately shaking his head.

"You won't, eh?" roared Vassili, and resting his hands on the barrel he rose from his seat. "Who do you think you are talking to? Are you a dog to bark at your father? Have you forgotten what I can do to you? Have you forgotten?"

His lips trembled, his face twitched convulsively, the veins stood out on his temples.

"I haven't forgotten anything," answered Yakov in a low voice without looking at his father. "But do you remember everything? You'd better look out!"

"Don't dare teach me! I'll smash you to a pulp! ..."

Yakov dodged his father's arm as it rose over his head and muttered through his clenched teeth:

"Don't dare touch me.... You're not at home in the village."

"Silence! I'm your father no matter where we are!"

"You can't get me flogged at the volost police station here! There ain't no volost here!" said Yakov laughing in his father's face and also rising from his seat.

Vassili stood with bloodshot eyes, head thrust forward and fists clenched, breathing hot breath mixed with vodka fumes into his son's face. Yakov stepped back and with lowering brow, watched every movement his father made, ready to parry a blow. Outwardly he was calm, but hot perspiration broke out over his whole body. Between them stood the barrel which served them as a table.

"I can't flog you, you say?" Vassili asked hoarsely, arching his back like a cat ready to spring.

"Everybody's equal here.... You are a labourer and so am I."

"Is that what it is?"

"What do you think? Why are you mad with me? Do you think I don't know? You started it...."

Vassili emitted a roar and swung his arm with such swiftness that Yakov was unable to avoid it. The blow came down on his head. He staggered and snarled into the angry face of his father.

"Take care!" he warned him, clenching his fists, as Vassili raised his arm again.

"I'll show you take care!"

"Stop, I tell you!"

"Aha!... You're threatening your father!... Your father!... Your father!..."

The small shack hemmed them in and hampered their movements. They stumbled over the salt bags, the overturned barrel and the tree stump.

Parrying the blows with his fists, Yakov, pale and perspiring, teeth clenched and eyes blazing like a wolf's, slowly retreated before his father, while the latter followed him up, waving his fists in his blind fury, and suddenly becoming strangely dishevelled, like a bristling wild boar.

"Leave off! That's enough! Stop it!" said Yakov in a calm and sinister voice, passing through the door of the shack into the open.

His father roared still louder and followed him, but his blows only encountered his son's fists.

"Aren't you mad.... Aren't you mad," said Yakov teasingly, realizing that he was far more agile than his father.

"You wait.... You only wait...."

But Yakov skipped aside and ran towards the sea.

Vassili went after him with lowered head and outspread arms, but he stumbled over something and fell flat on the ground. He quickly rose to his knees and then sat down on the sand, propping his body up with his arms. He was exhausted by the scuffle, and he positively howled from a burning sense of unavenged wrong and the bitter consciousness of his weakness.

"May you be accursed!" he shouted hoarsely, stretching his neck in the direction Yakov had gone and spitting the foam of madness from his trembling lips.

Yakov leaned against a boat and closely watched his father while rubbing his injured head. One of the sleeves of his blouse had been torn out and was hanging by a single thread. The collar was also torn, and his white perspiring chest glistened in the sun as if it had been smeared with grease. He now felt contempt for his father. He had always thought of him as being stronger than himself, and seeing him now sitting on the sand, dishevelled and pitiful, threatening him with his fists, he smiled the condescending, offensive smile of the strong contemplating the weak.

"Curse you!... May you be accursed forever!"

Vassili shouted his curses so loudly that Yakov involuntarily glanced out at sea, towards the fisheries, as if afraid that somebody out there might hear these cries of impotence. But out there there was nothing but the waves and the sun. He then spat out and said:

"Go on, shout!... Whom do you think you are hurting? Only yourself.... And since this has happened between us I'll tell you what I think...."

"Shut up!... Get out of my sight!... Go away!" roared Vassili.

"I won't go back to the village," said Yakov, keeping his eyes on his father and watching every movement he made. "I shall stay here for the winter. It's better for me here. I'm no fool. I understand that. Life's easier here.... At home you'd do as you like with me, but here ... look!"

With that he doubled up his fist, showed his father a fico and laughed, not loudly, but loud enough to make Vassili jump to his feet again mad with rage. He picked up an oar and made a dash for Yakov shouting hoarsely:

"Your father? Do that to your father? I'll kill you!"

By the time he reached the boat, blind with fury, Yakov was already far away, running with his torn-out sleeve flapping behind him.

Vassili hurled the oar after him, but it dropped short, and, again exhausted, the old man leaned his chest against the side of the boat and madly scratched at the wood as he gazed after his son.

The latter shouted at him from a distance:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You've got grey hairs already, and yet you go mad like that over a woman! Ekh, you! But I'm not going back to the village.... Go back yourself.... You've no business to be here!"

"Yashka! Shut up!" roared Vassili drowning Yashka's voice. "Yashka! I'll kill you!... Get out of here!"

Yakov strolled off at a leisurely pace.

His father watched him go with dull, insane eyes. He already looked shorter, his feet seemed to have sunk into the sand.... He had sunk up to the waist... up to the shoulder... to the neck ... he was gone! A moment later, however, somewhat further from the spot where he had vanished, his head reappeared, then his shoulders, and then his whole body ... but he was smaller now. He turned round, looked in Vassili's direction and shouted something.

"Curse you! Curse you! Curse you!" shouted Vassili in reply.

His son made a gesture of disgust, turned round and went off, and ... again vanished behind the sand dunes.

Vassili gazed for a long time in the direction his son had gone until his back ached from the awkward posture of his body as he lay leaning against the boat. He rose to his feet and staggered from the pain he felt in every limb. His belt had slipped up to his armpits. He unfastened it with his numbed fingers, brought it close to his eyes and threw it on the sand. Then he went into the shack and halted in front of a hollow in the sand and remembered that that was where he had stumbled, and that had

he not fallen he would have caught his son. The shack was in utter disorder. Vassili looked round for the vodka bottle. He saw it lying among the sacks and picked it up. The bottle was tightly corked and the vodka had not been spilt. Vassili slowly prized the cork out and putting the mouth of the bottle to his lips he wanted to drink, but the bottle rattled against his teeth and the vodka flowed out of his mouth on to his beard and chest.

Vassili heard a ringing in his ears, his heart throbbed violently, his back ached unbearably.

"After all I am old!" he said aloud and sank down on the sand at the entrance of the shack.

The sea stretched out before him. The waves laughed, noisily and playfully as always. Vassili gazed for a long time at the water and remembered the yearning words his son had uttered:

"If only all this was land! Black earth! And if we could plough it all!"

A bitter feeling overcame this muzhik. He vigorously rubbed his chest, looked around and heaved a deep sigh. His head drooped low and his back bent as if under the weight of a heavy burden. His throat worked convulsively as if he were choking. He coughed hard to clear his throat and crossed himself, looking up into the sky. Gloomy thoughts descended upon him.

... For the sake of a loose woman he had abandoned his wife, with whom he had lived in honest toil for over fifteen years ... and for this the Lord had punished him by the rebellion of his son. That was so, oh Lord!

His son had mocked at him, had torn his heart.... Death would be too good for him for having vexed his father's soul in this way! And what for! For a loose woman who was living in sin.... It had been a sin for him, an old man, to forget his wife and son and to associate with this woman....

And so the Lord in His holy wrath had reminded him of his duty and through his son had struck at his heart in just punishment.... That was so, oh Lord!

Sitting huddled up on the sand Vassili crossed himself and blinked his eyes, brushing away with his eyelashes the tears that were blinding him.

The sun sank into the sea. The lurid glare of the sunset slow-

ly faded away. A warm wind from the silent distance fanned the muzhik's face that was wet with tears. Absorbed in his thoughts of repentance, he sat there until he fell asleep.

Two days after his quarrel with his father, Yakov, with a number of other fishermen, went off in a large boat towed by a steam tug to a spot thirty versts from the fisheries to catch sturgeon. Five days later he returned to the fisheries alone in a sailing boat—he had been sent back for provisions. He arrived at midday, when the fishermen were resting after dinner. It was unbearably hot, the scorching sand burnt one's feet, and the fish scales and fishbones pricked them. Yakov cautiously made his way to the hutments, cursing himself for not having put his boots on. He felt too lazy to go back to the boat to get them and, besides, he was hurrying to get a bite and also to see Malva. He had often thought of her during the dull time he had spent at sea, and now he wanted to know whether she had seen his father and what he had told her.... Perhaps he had beaten her. That wouldn't be a bad thing—it would knock the starch out of her a bit! As it was, she was far too perky and impudent!

The fisheries were quiet and deserted. The windows of the hutments were wide open, and these large wooden boxes also seemed to be gasping from the heat. In the agent's office, which was hidden among the huts, an infant was bawling with all its might. Low voices were heard behind a pile of barrels.

Yakov boldly stepped up to the barrels, he thought he heard Malva's voice. On reaching them, however, and looking behind them, he started back, frowned and halted.

Behind the barrels, in their shade, red-haired Seryozhka was lying on his back, his hands under his head. On one side of him sat his father, on the other side was Malva.

"What's he doing here?" said Yakov to himself, thinking of his father. "Has he given up his quiet job to come here so as to be nearer to Malva and to keep him away from her? Oh hell! What if mother heard about all his goings-on?... Shall I go to him or not?"

"Well!" he heard Seryozhka say. "So it's good-bye, eh? All right! Go and grub the soil!"

Yakov blinked his eyes with joy.

"Yes, I'll go!" his father said.

Yakov then boldly stepped forward and exclaimed merrily:

"Greetings to an honest company!"

His father shot a rapid glance at him and turned away. Malva did not turn an eyelash, but Seryozhka jerked his leg and said in a deep bass voice:

"Lo! Our beloved son Yashka hath returned from distant lands!" And then he continued in his usual voice: "He deserves to be flayed and his skin used for a drum like a sheepskin!"

Malva laughed softly.

"It's hot!" said Yakov sitting down.

Vassili glanced at him again and said:

"I've been waiting for you, Yakov."

Yakov thought his voice was softer than usual and his face looked younger.

"I've come back for provisions," he announced, and then he asked Seryozhka to give him some tobacco for a cigarette.

"You'll get no tobacco from me, you young fool!" said Seryozhka without moving a muscle.

"I'm going home, Yakov," said Vassili impressively, making marks on the sand with his finger.

"Is that so?" answered Yakov, looking innocently at his father. "What about you... are you remaining here?"

"Yes, I'll remain.... There's not enough work for both of us at home."

"Well.... I won't say anything. Do as you please.... You're no longer a child.... Only remember this—I won't last much longer. Perhaps I shall live ... but as for being able to work—I'm not sure about that.... I've got unused to the land.... So don't forget —you've got a mother back home."

He must have found it hard to talk; his words seemed to stick in his teeth. He stroked his beard and his hand trembled.

Malva stared at him. Seryozhka screwed up one eye and with the other, large and round, looked hard into Yakov's face. Yakov was bubbling over with joy, but fearing to betray it he sat silently staring at his feet.

"So don't forget your mother... remember you're her only son!" said Vassili.

"You needn't tell me that, I know!" said Yakov shrinking.

"All right, since you know!" said his father, eyeing him distrustfully. "All I say is—don't forget!"

Vassili heaved a deep sigh. For several moments all four remained silent. Then Malva said:

"The bell will go soon!"

"Well, I'll go along!" said Vassili, rising to his feet. The other three did the same.

"Good-bye, Sergei! . . . If ever you are on the Volga, perhaps you'll look me up? Simbirsk Uyezd, Village of Mazlo, Nikolo-Lykovskaya Volost."

"All right!" said Seryozhka shaking Vassili's hand, holding it tight in his sinewy paw that was overgrown with red hair and smiling into his sad, grave face.

"Lykovo-Nikolskaya is a fairly large place. . . . It's known all over the countryside, and we live about four versts from it," Vassili explained.

"All right, all right. . . . I'll look in if ever I'm that way!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, old man!"

"Good-bye, Malva," said Vassili in a choking voice without looking at her.

Malva unhurriedly wiped her lips on her sleeve and placing her white hands on Vassili's shoulders silently and gravely kissed him three times on his cheeks and lips.

Vassili was confused and muttered something incoherently. Yakov dropped his head to conceal an ironic smile, while Seryozhka looked up into the sky and yawned softly.

"You'll find it hot work walking," he said.

"Oh, that's nothing. . . . Well, good-bye, Yakov!"

"Good-bye!"

They stood opposite each other not knowing what to do. The sad phrase "good-bye," which had rung out so often and monotonously during these few seconds, awakened a tender feeling for his father in Yakov's heart, but he did not know how to express it: to embrace him as Malva had done, or to shake hands with him as Seryozhka had done. Vassili was vexed by the irresolution expressed in his son's posture and face, and he still felt something that was

akin to shame in Yakov's presence. This feeling had been roused by his recollection of the scene on the spur and by Malva's kisses.

"And so—don't forget your mother!" he said at last.

"All right, all right!" exclaimed Yakov with a cordial smile, "Don't worry... I'll do the right thing!"

He nodded his head.

"Well... that's all! Farewell. May the Lord send you all the best.... Think of me kindly.... Oh Seryozhka! I buried the tea can in the sand under the stern of the green boat!"

"What's he want the tea can for?" Yakov enquired hastily.

"He's taken over my job ... out there on the spur," explained Vassili.

Yakov looked at Seryozhka, glanced at Malva and dropped his head to conceal the joyous sparkle in his eyes.

"Well, good-bye, friends.... I'm going."

Vassili bowed all round and went off. Malva went with him.

"I'll see you off a little way," she said.

Seryozhka dropped down on the sand and caught hold of Yakov's foot just as Yakov was about to step out after Malva.

"Whoa! Where you off to?"

"Wait! Let me go!" cried Yakov, trying to tear his foot free.

But Seryozhka caught him by the other foot too and said:

"Sit down next to me for a while!"

"Hey! Stop playing the fool!"

"I'm not playing the fool.... But you sit down!"

Yakov sat down.

"What do you want?" he demanded through his clenched teeth.

"Wait! Shut up for a minute! Let me think and then I'll tell you!"

Seryozhka looked threateningly at Yakov with his insolent eyes and Yakov yielded to him.

Malva and Vassili walked on in silence for a little while. She cast sidelong glances at his face and her eyes glistened strangely. Vassili frowned and said nothing. Their feet sank in the loose sand and they walked very slowly.

"Vassya!"

"What?"

He glanced at her and at once turned his eyes away.

"I made you quarrel with Yashka on purpose.... You could have lived here together without quarrelling," she said in a calm and even voice.

"Why did you do that?" Vassili asked after a brief pause.

"I don't know.... Just like that!"

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"A nice thing to do! Ekh, you!" he said reproachfully in an angry voice.

She remained silent.

"You'll spoil that boy of mine, spoil him completely! Ekh! You are a witch, a witch! You don't know the fear of God! You have no shame! What are you doing?"

"What ought I to do?" she asked, and there was a note either of anxiety or of vexation in her voice, it was difficult to say which.

"What you ought to do? Ekh, you!" exclaimed Vassili, feeling anger welling up in his heart against her.

He passionately wanted to strike her, to knock her down at his feet and trample upon her on the sand, to kick her in the breast and face with his heavy boots. He clenched his fist and looked round.

Near the barrels he could see the figures of Yakov and Seryozhka, their faces were turned towards him.

"Go away, go away! I could smash you, you...."

He hissed the abusive word almost in her face. His eyes were bloodshot, his beard quivered and his hands involuntarily stretched towards her hair, which had slipped from under her kerchief.

She, however, gazed at him calmly with her greenish eyes.

"I ought to kill you, you slut! Wait ... you'll get what's coming to you! Somebody'll wring your neck yet!"

She smiled, said nothing, and then, heaving a deep sigh, she said curtly:

"Well, that's enough! Good-bye!"

And turning on her heel she went back.

Vassili roared after her and ground his teeth. But Malva walked on, trying to step into the distinct and deep traces of Vassili's footsteps in the sand, and each time she succeeded she carefully obliterated them with her foot. And so she proceeded, slowly, until she reached the barrels, where Seryozhka greeted her with the question:

"Well, so you saw him off?"

Malva nodded in the affirmative and sat down beside him. Yakov looked at her and smiled tenderly, moving his lips as if he were whispering something which he alone heard.

"Now that you've said good-bye you feel sorry he's gone, eh?" Seryozhka asked again, quoting the words of the song.

"When are you going out there, to the spur?" asked Malva by way of reply, nodding in the direction of the sea.

"This evening."

"I'll go with you."

"You will! Now that's what I like!"

"And I'll go!" said Yakov emphatically.

"Who's inviting you?" Seryozhka asked, screwing up his eyes.

The sound of a cracked bell was heard calling the men back to work, the strokes hastily following one another and dying away in the merry surge of the waves.

"She is!" said Yakov, looking at Malva challengingly.

"I?" she exclaimed in surprise. "What do I want you for?"

"Let's talk straight, Yashka!" said Sergei sternly, rising to his feet. "If you start pestering her... I'll smash you to a pulp! And if you put a finger on her ... I'll kill you as I would a fly! One crack on the head—and you'll be a goner! It's very simple with me!"

His face, his whole figure and knotty hands stretching towards Yakov's throat, all very convincingly testified that it was very simple with him.

Yakov stepped back a pace and said in a choking voice:

"Wait a bit! Why, she herself...."

"Now then—that's enough! Who do you think you are? Mutton's not for you to eat, you dog! Be grateful if you get a bone to gnaw.... Well ... what are you glaring at?"

Yakov glanced at Malva. Her green eyes were laughing in his face, an offensive, humiliating mocking laugh, and she pressed against Seryozhka's side so lovingly that the sweat broke out all over Yakov's body.

They walked away from him, side by side, and when they had gone a little distance they both laughed out loudly. Yakov dug his right foot deeply into the sand and stood as if petrified, breathing heavily.

In the distance, over the yellow, deserted, undulating sand, a small dark human figure was moving. On its right the merry mighty sea glistened in the sun, and on its left, right up to the horizon, stretched the sand—a dreary, monotonous desert. Yakov looked at the lonely figure and blinked his eyes, which were full of vexation and perplexity, and vigorously rubbed his chest with both his hands.

The fisheries were humming with activity.

Yakov heard Malva shouting in a resonant throaty voice:

"Who took my knife?"

The waves were splashing noisily, the sun was shining, the sea was laughing....

SONG OF THE STORMY PETREL

O'ER THE silver plain of ocean winds are gathering the storm-clouds, and between the clouds and ocean proudly wheels the Stormy Petrel, like a streak of sable lightning.

Now his wing the wave caresses, now he rises like an arrow, cleaving clouds and crying fiercely, while the clouds detect a rapture in the bird's courageous crying.

In that crying sounds a craving for the tempest! Sounds the flaming of his passion, of his anger, of his confidence in triumph.

The gulls are moaning in their terror—moaning, darting o'er the waters, and would gladly hide their horror in the inky depths of ocean.

And the grebes are also moaning. Not for them the nameless rapture of the struggle. They are frightened by the crashing of the thunder.

And the foolish penguins cower in the crevices of rocks, while alone the Stormy Petrel proudly wheels above the ocean, o'er the silver-frothing waters!

Ever lower, ever blacker, sink the storm-clouds to the sea, and the singing waves are mounting in their yearning toward the thunder.

Strikes the thunder. Now the waters fiercely battle with the winds. And the winds in fury seize them in unbreakable embrace, hurling down the emerald masses to be shattered on the cliffs.

Like a streak of sable lightning wheels and cries the Stormy Petrel, piercing storm-clouds like an arrow, cutting swiftly through the waters.

He is coursing like a Demon, the black Demon of the tempest, ever laughing, ever sobbing—he is laughing at the storm-clouds, he is sobbing with his rapture.

In the crashing of the thunder the wise Demon hears a murmur of exhaustion. He is certain that the clouds will not obliterate the sun; that the storm-clouds never, never, will obliterate the sun.

The waters roar.... The thunder crashes....

Livid lightning flares in storm-clouds o'er the vast expanse of ocean, and the flaming darts are captured and extinguished by the waters, while the serpentine reflections writhe, expiring, in the deep.

The storm! The storm will soon be breaking!

Still the valiant Stormy Petrel proudly wheels among the lightning, o'er the roaring, raging ocean, and his cry resounds exultant, like a prophecy of triumph—

Let it break in all its fury!

COMRADE

A TALE

I

EVERYTHING in this town was strange and incomprehensible. Its many churches raised their varicoloured cupolas skywards, but the walls and chimneys of the factories rose above the bell towers, and the churches, obscured by the heavy façades of business houses, were submerged in the lifeless labyrinth of stone walls like fantastic blossoms amid a heap of dust and debris. And when the church bells summoned to prayers, their metallic cries fell upon the iron of the roofs and were lost amid the narrow canyons between the houses.

The buildings were immense and frequently handsome, but the people were ugly and always contemptible; from morning till night they bustled about like grey mice, scurrying along the narrow, crooked streets of the town and searching with avid eyes, some for bread, others for amusement. Still others, standing on the crossroads, kept a hostile and watchful eye on the weak to see that they humbly submitted to the strong. The strong were the wealthy and everyone believed that money alone gave man power and freedom. All of them desired power, for all were slaves, the luxury of the rich evoked the envy and hatred of the poor, and for no one was there sweeter music than the clink of gold, and hence every man was another man's enemy and one and all were ruled by cruelty.

Sometimes the sun shone over the town, but the life was always dark and the people were like shadows. At night they lighted a myriad of bright lights, but then the hungry women came onto the street to sell their caresses for money, the odour of diverse rich foods assailed the nostrils and everywhere silently, hungrily blazed the resentful eyes of the starving, and a muffled moan of misery, too weak to cry aloud in anguish echoed faintly over the town.

Life was dreary and full of anxiety, all men were enemies and all men were in the wrong, only a few felt righteous but they were as coarse as animals, they were crueller than all the others....

Everyone wanted to live and no one knew how, no one could freely follow the path of his desires, and every step into the future caused an involuntary glance back at the present, which with the powerful, relentless hands of a greedy monster halted man in his tracks and enmeshed him in its viscid embrace.

Man paused helplessly in pain and bewilderment as he beheld the ugly grimace on life's face. Life gazed into his heart with thousands of sad, helpless eyes and beseeched him wordlessly, whereupon the bright images of the future died in his soul and man's groan of impotence was submerged in the uneven chorus of groans and cries of miserable, wretched people tortured on the rack of life.

There was always dreariness and anxiety, sometimes terror, and the dark gloomy city, with its revoltingly symmetrical heaps of stone that blotted out the temples, stood motionless, surrounding the people like a prison and giving back the sun's rays.

And life's music was a muffled cry of anguish and wrath, a soft hiss of hidden hatred, a menacing roar of cruelty, a sensual scream of violence....

II

Amid the gloomy turmoil of sorrow and misfortune, in the convulsive grappling of greed and want, in the morass of pitiful egotism, a few solitary dreamers went unnoticed about the basements where dwelt the poor who had created the wealth of the city; spurned and derided, yet full of faith in man they preached revolt, they were rebellious sparks of the distant flame of truth. Secretly they brought with them into the basements small but always fruitful seeds of a simple yet great teaching, and now sternly with a cold glitter in their eyes, now gently and lovingly, planted this bright burning truth in the heavy hearts of the slave-men, the men turned by the will of the brutal and avaricious into blind and dumb tools of acquisition.

And these dark, downtrodden people listened distrustfully to the music of the new words, a music their weary hearts had desired

dimly for so long, and gradually they raised their heads, extricating themselves from the web of cunning lies with which their powerful and greedy tormentors had entangled them.

Into their lives so full of a dull, suppressed resentment, into hearts poisoned by so many wrongs, into minds muddled by the flashy wisdom of the powerful—into this hard and miserable existence saturated with the bitterness of humiliation—a simple radiant word was flung.

"Comrade!"

It was not new to them, they had heard it and uttered it themselves, but until then it had had the same empty, dull sound as all the familiar, hackneyed words which to forget is to lose nothing.

But now it had a new ring, strong and clear, it sang with a new meaning and there was something as hard, sparkling and many-faceted about it as a diamond.

They accepted it and uttered it cautiously, gently, cherishing it tenderly in their hearts as a mother her babe she rocks in its cradle.

And the deeper they penetrated into the radiant soul of the word, the brighter and finer it seemed to them.

"Comrade!" they said.

And they felt that this word had come to unite the whole world, to raise all men to the summits of freedom and weld them with new bonds, the firm bonds of respect for one another, respect for man's freedom.

When this word took root in the hearts of the slaves, they ceased to be slaves and one day they declared to the city and all its mighty:

"Enough!"

Whereupon life stopped, for they were the force that set it in motion, they and none other. The water ceased to flow, the fires died, the city was plunged in darkness and the powerful were as helpless as infants.

Fear possessed the souls of the oppressors and suffocating in the stench of their own excrement, they stifled their hatred of the rebels in fear and amazement at their power.

The spectre of hunger haunted them, and their children wailed piteously in the darkness.

Houses and churches, enveloped in gloom, merged in a soulless chaos of stone and iron; an ominous stillness held the streets

in the grip of death; life stood still, for the power that gave it birth had grown aware of itself and the slave-man had found the magic, invincible word to express his will—he had freed himself from oppression and had seen his own power—the power of the creator.

Those were days of misery for the mighty, for those who had believed themselves to be the masters of life; the night was as a thousand nights, so thick was the gloom, so pitifully meagre and timid the lights that flickered in the dead city, and that city built in the course of centuries, the monster that had sucked the blood of men, rose before them in all its abominable ugliness, a pitiful heap of stone and wood. The sightless windows of houses looked out hungrily and gloomily onto the streets, where the true masters of life now walked with a new vigour. They too were hungry, hungrier indeed than the others, but the sensation was a familiar one, and the suffering of their bodies was not as acute as the suffering of the masters of life, nor did it dim the flame that burned brightly in their souls. They burned with a knowledge of their own power, the promise of coming victory shone in their eyes.

They walked the streets of the city, this dismal cramped prison of theirs where they had been scorned and derided, where so many injuries had been heaped upon their souls, and they saw the great significance of their labour, and this made them conscious of their sacred right to be the masters of life, the makers of its laws, its creators. And then with a new force, with a dazzling radiance the life-giving, unifying word sounded:

"Comrade!"

It rang out among the false words of the present as glad tidings of the future, of the new life that awaited all and everyone. Was it far or near, that life? They felt it was for them to decide; they were approaching freedom and they themselves were postponing its coming.

III

The prostitute, but yesterday a half-starved animal, waiting wearily on the squalid street for someone to come to her and cruelly purchase her caresses for a pittance—the prostitute too heard that word, but smiling embarrassedly she did not dare to repeat it. A

man came up to her, one of those who had never crossed her path before this, he laid his hand on her shoulder and spoke to her as one would speak to a kinsman:

"Comrade!" he said.

And she laughed softly and shyly so as not to weep with gladness such as her bruised heart had never known before. Tears, the tears of a pure, new-born joy glistened in her eyes that had yesterday stared brazenly and hungrily at the world. This joy of the outcasts who had been admitted into the great family of the world's toilers shone everywhere on the streets of the city, and the dim eyes of its houses looked on with growing malevolence and coldness.

The beggar to whom but yesterday the sated had flung a miserable coin to rid themselves of him and salve their conscience, he too heard this word, which was for him the first alms that had caused his poor poverty-corroded heart to beat with joy and gratitude.

The cabby, an absurd fellow whom customers had prodded in the back so that he might pass on the blow to his starved, exhausted nag—this man accustomed to blows, his senses dulled by the rattle of wheels on the stone pavements, he too, smiling broadly, said to a passer-by:

"Want a lift... Comrade?"

Whereupon, frightened by the sound of the word, he gathered up the reins ready to drive quickly away, and gazed down at the passer-by, unable to wipe the happy smile from his broad, red face.

The passer-by returned his look kindly and said with a nod:

"Thanks, Comrade! I have not far to go."

Still smiling and blinking his eyes happily, the cabby turned in his seat and set off with a loud clatter down the street.

People walked in compact groups on the pavements, and like a spark the great word that was destined to unite the world was tossed back and forth among them:

"Comrade!"

A policeman, bewhiskered, grave and important approached a crowd gathered around an old man addressing them on a street corner, and after listening to him for a few moments, said slowly:

"It's against the law to hold street meetings... disperse, gentlemen...."

And, pausing for a second, he lowered his eyes and added softly:

"Comrades...."

On the faces of those who bore this word in their hearts, who had invested it with flesh and blood and the strident sound of a clarion call to unity—on their faces glowed the pride of youthful creators, and it was clear that the strength they so lavishly invested in this word was indestructible, inexhaustible.

Against them grey, blind mobs of armed men were already being mustered, forming themselves silently into even lines—the wrath of the oppressors was about to descend upon the rebels who were fighting for justice.

And in the crooked, narrow streets of the great city, among its chill, silent walls built by the hands of unknown builders, a great faith in the brotherhood of man was spreading and maturing.

"Comrades!"

Here and there fire burst forth that was destined to flare up into the flame that would envelop the earth with the strong bright feeling of the kinship of all men. It will envelop the earth and sear it, reducing to ashes the malice, hatred and cruelty that disfigure us, melting all hearts and merging them in a single heart, the heart of upright, noble men and women linked in a closely-knit friendly family of free workers.

On the streets of the dead city the slaves had built, on the streets of the city where cruelty had reigned, faith in man, in his victory over himself and the evil of the world, grew and gathered strength.

And in the chaos of uneasy, joyless existence, like a bright, merry star, a torchlight into the future, shone that simple, heartfelt word:

"Comrade!"

THE NINTH OF JANUARY

THE CROWD reminded one of the dark swell of the ocean, scarcely roused by the first gust of a storm. It rolled on sluggishly; the grey faces of the people looking like murky foam on the crest of a wave.

Eyes sparkled with excitement, but the people looked wonderingly at each other, as if they could not believe their own determination. Words circled over the crowd like tiny grey birds.

They spoke in low voices, gravely, as if trying to justify themselves to each other.

"It's impossible to bear it any longer, that's why we've come...."

"People wouldn't have come out without a reason...."

"Won't 'He' understand?..."

They talked most of all about "Him," telling each other that "He" was good and kind-hearted, and would understand everything.... But there was no colour in the words with which they depicted him. One felt that they had not thought of "Him" seriously, or pictured him as a real live person for quite a long time, if ever at all; that they did not know what "He" was, and did not even understand what "He" was for, or what "He" could do. But today "He" was needed. All were eager to understand him, and not knowing the one who actually existed, they involuntarily pictured him as something great. Great were their hopes, and they needed something great to sustain them.

Now and again a bold voice was heard among the crowd saying:

"Comrades! Don't let yourselves be deceived...."

But it was self-deception that they wanted, and the voice was drowned by frightened and angry cries.

"We want to come out openly...."

"You keep quiet, brother...."

"Besides, isn't Father Gapon with us?"

"He knows...."

The crowd flowed sluggishly down the canal-like street, breaking up into eddies, murmuring, arguing and discussing, swerving against the house walls and again filling the middle of the street, a dark, fluid mass. A vague ferment of doubt seemed to pervade it, an obvious, intense expectation of something that would light up the path to the goal with belief in success, so that this belief could bind, merge all the fragments in one, strong and harmonious body. They tried to conceal their lack of belief, but could not do so, and a vague feeling of anxiety, and a particularly acute sensitiveness to sound, was observed among them. They shuffled along cautiously, pricking up their ears, staring ahead, persistently searching for something with their eyes. The voices of those who believed in the strength within them and not in a strength outside of them, imbued the crowd with a sense of fear and irritation far too acute for one who was convinced that he had a right to contend in open dispute against the power he wished to see.

As it poured from street into street, however, the crowd rapidly grew, and this outward growth gradually created a feeling of inner growth, awakened the consciousness that the slave-people had a right to call upon the government to pay attention to its needs.

"Say what you like, but we, too, are human...."

"'He' will understand that we are only asking...."

"He must understand!... We are not rebels...."

"Then, again, there's Father Gapon...."

"Comrades! One doesn't ask for freedom...."

"Oh, Lord!..."

"You wait, brother!"

"Chase him away, the devil!"

"Father Gapon knows best...."

A tall man in a black overcoat with a yellow patch on the shoulder got up on the curb and, removing his cap from his bald head, began to talk loudly and solemnly, with flashing eyes and trembling voice. He talked about "Him," about the tsar.

At first there was an artificial exaltation in his words and tone of voice; they lacked the emotion, which, by infecting others, can almost perform miracles. It seemed as though the man was straining himself in an effort to awaken and conjure up an image that had

long been impersonal, lifeless, and obliterated by time. All his life "He" had been remote from men; but now men needed "Him," men were reposing all their hopes in "Him."

And they gradually revived the corpse. The crowd listened attentively—the speaker was expressing what it wished, it felt this; and although the power which they had fantastically conjured up in their minds obviously did not merge with "His" image, all knew that such a power existed, that it must exist. The speaker identified this power with the being with whom all were familiar from calendar portraits and linked it with the image which they knew from legends; and in the legends this image was human. The words the speaker uttered, loud and intelligible, clearly depicted a being that was powerful, benevolent, and just, and who displayed paternal interest in the needs of the people.

Belief came and enveloped the people, excited them, and drowned the low whisperings of doubt.... The people hastened to yield to the mood they had long been waiting for. They pressed close together, a huge, compact mass of unanimous bodies, and the density, the closeness of shoulders and hips, warmed the heart with comforting confidence, of hope of success.

"We don't want any red flags!" shouted the bald man. Waving his cap, he stepped out in front of the crowd, his bald pate glistening dully, swaying before the eyes of the people and attracting their attention.

"We are going to our father!"

"He'll not do us any wrong!"

"Red is the colour of our blood, comrades!" a determined voice rang out over the heads of the crowd.

"No power can liberate the people except the power of the people themselves!"

"Stop that!"

"Agitators! We want none of that!"

"Father Gapon is carrying a cross, but he comes along with a flag!"

"You're too young to take command yet!"

Those who were the least confident walked in the heart of the crowd, and from there shouted out angrily and apprehensively:

"Chase him away, that one with the flag!"

They now walked at a more rapid pace, without hesitation, and with each step they took, they infected each other with this unity of mood, with the intoxication of self-deception. The "He" which they had just created persistently roused in their minds the shades of the ancient, benevolent heroes, echoes of the legends they had heard in childhood; and absorbing the vital strength of the human desire to believe, "He" grew and grew in their imagination....

Somebody shouted:

"'He' loves us...."

And there can be no doubt that this mass of people sincerely believed in the love of the being whom they had just created.

When the crowd poured from the street onto the embankment a long, crooked line of soldiers barred its way to the bridge, but the people were not daunted by this thin grey barrier. There was nothing menacing in the figures of the soldiers that were distinctly drawn against the light blue background of the broad river. They were skipping to warm their frozen feet, flapping their arms, and pushing each other about. On the other side of the river the people saw a large, gloomy house. That was where "He," the tsar, the master of this house, lived. Great and strong, kind and loving, he could not, of course, have ordered his soldiers to prevent the people from going to the one they loved, and to whom they wished to speak about their needs.

Still, a shadow of perplexity appeared on many faces, and the people in front reduced their pace. Some looked back, others left the crowd and stepped onto the sidewalk, but all tried to show that they were aware of the presence of the soldiers and that it did not surprise them. Some calmly gazed at the golden angel that glistened high in the sky above the gloomy fortress, others smiled. A voice said commiseratingly:

"It's cold for the soldiers...."

"Rather...."

"But still they've got to stand there!"

"The soldiers are here to keep order."

"Quiet now, fellows!... Keep calm!"

"Three cheers for the soldiers!" somebody shouted.

An officer, wearing a yellow hood thrown back on his shoulders, drew his sword from its scabbard and, brandishing the curved

steel blade, shouted something to the crowd. The soldiers sprang to attention and stood motionless, shoulder to shoulder.

"What are they doing?" a rather plump woman asked.

Nobody answered her. Suddenly everybody found it difficult to walk.

"Stand back!" they heard the officer shout.

Some of the people looked behind and saw a dense mass of bodies into which a dark human river was continuing to flow in an endless stream. Yielding to the pressure of this river the crowd moved on and filled the open space in front of the bridge. Several people stepped forward, and, waving white handkerchiefs, went out to meet the officer, shouting:

"We are going to our tsar!"

"In a perfectly orderly manner!"

"Go back! If you don't, I shall order my men to shoot!"

When the officer's voice reached the crowd it was echoed by a buzz of amazement. Some of the people had said that they would not be allowed to go to "Him," but this threat to shoot at the people who were going to "Him" in a perfectly orderly manner, believing in his power and benevolence, distorted the image they had created. "He" was a power above all powers and had no reason to fear anybody, had no reason to repulse his people with bayonets and bullets....

A tall, gaunt man, with a starved face and black eyes suddenly shouted out:

"Shoot? You won't dare!"

And turning to the crowd he continued loudly and angrily:

"Well? Didn't I tell you they wouldn't let us through?"

"Who? The soldiers?"

"Not the soldiers, but them, over there...."

And he waved his arm into the distance.

"Those higher up.... Ah! I told you so, didn't I?"

"We don't know yet...."

"When they hear what we've come for, they'll let us through!"

The noise increased. Angry exclamations and sarcastic remarks were heard. Common sense had been shattered against this silly barrier and was now silent. The gestures of the people became more nervous and agitated. A raw, cold wind blew from the river. The rigid bayonets glistened.

Bandying remarks and yielding to the pressure from behind, the people pushed forward. Those who had been waving handkerchiefs turned aside and disappeared in the crowd; but those in front, men, women and children, were all waving white handkerchiefs now.

"Shoot? What are you talking about? Why should they?" said an elderly man with a beard streaked with grey. "It's simply that they won't let us cross by the bridge and want us to go straight over the ice."

Suddenly a dry, uneven rattle broke out, and it seemed as though the crowd had been lashed by scores of invisible whips. For a moment all voices seemed to have been frozen, but the mass of people continued slowly to push forward.

"Blank shot," said somebody in a colourless voice, whether enquiring or stating a fact was not clear.

But here and there groans were heard, and several bodies lay at the feet of people in the crowd. A woman, wailing loudly and holding her hand to her breast, rapidly stepped out of the crowd towards the bayonets which were thrust out to meet her. Several people hurried after her, and then some more, sweeping round her and running ahead of her.

Again came the rattle of rifle fire, louder, but more ragged than before. The people standing near the fence heard the boards crunch, as if they were being fiercely gnawed by invisible teeth. One bullet scraped along the wooden fence and knocked small chips from it, scattering them into the faces of the people. People fell to the ground in twos and threes; some sank to the ground clutching their abdomens, others hastened away limping, still others crawled across the snow, and everywhere bright scarlet patches appeared on the snow, spreading, giving off vapour, and attracting everybody's eyes.... The crowd swept back, halted for a moment as if petrified, and then a savage nerve-racking howl rose from hundreds of throats. It rose and floated in the air like a continuous, intensely vibrating and discordant combination of cries of acute pain, horror, protest, mournful perplexity and cries for help.

Groups of people, bending low, ran forward to pick up the killed and wounded. The wounded too were shouting and shaking their fists. The faces of all had suddenly changed, and there was

a glint of something akin to madness in their eyes. There were no signs of panic, of that state of universal horror which suddenly overcomes people, sweeps bodies into a heap like dry leaves and blindly drags and drives everybody in an unknown direction in a wild whirlwind of desire to hide. But there was every sign of horror, horror that burned like the touch of frozen iron; it froze the heart, held the body as in a vice, and compelled one to stare with wide-open eyes at the blood that was spreading over the snow, at the blood-stained faces, hands and clothing, and at the corpses which were lying so calmly amidst the pandemonium of the living. There was every sign of burning indignation, of mournful, impotent rage, of much perplexity; there were numerous strangely motionless eyes, brows drawn in an angry frown, tightly clenched fists, convulsive gestures, and anger expressed in strong language. But it seemed as though it was cold, soul-crushing, bewilderment that filled people's breasts most. Only a few short moments before they had marched along, clearly seeing their object before them; before their eyes had hovered that majestic, legendary image which they had admired, had loved, and which had sustained their hearts with great hope. Two volleys, blood, corpses, groans and—they all found themselves standing before a grey vacuum, impotent, and with hearts torn to shreds.

They kept moving about in one spot as if riveted to it with fetters, which they were unable to break. Some silently and mournfully carried away the wounded and picked up the dead, while others watched them doing this as if in a dream, stunned, in a strange state of apathy. Many shouted words of complaint and reproach at the soldiers, swore at them, shook their fists at them, took their caps off and bowed for some reason, and threatened them with the terrible wrath of someone or other....

The soldiers stood motionless, with ordered arms. Their faces were rigid too; the skin on their cheeks seemed taut and their cheekbones stood out prominently. It looked as though all the soldiers had white eyes, and that their lips were frozen together....

Somebody in the crowd cried out hysterically:

"It's a mistake! They made a mistake, brothers! They are taking us for somebody else! Don't believe it! Go, brothers—go and explain it to them!"

A boy who had climbed up a lamppost shouted out:

"Gapon is a traitor!"

"Do you see the reception they are giving us, comrades?..."

"No! It's a mistake! Things like this can't happen! Try and understand!"

"Make way for the wounded!"

Two working men and a woman were leading the tall, gaunt man. He was all covered with snow, and blood was dripping from the sleeve of his overcoat. His face was livid, his nose was sharper, and his dark lips moved feebly as he whispered:

"I told you they wouldn't let us through! ... They are keeping him away from us. What do they care about the people!"

"Cavalry!"

"Run!"

The wall of soldiers shook and then opened like the two leaves of a wooden gate; and through the opening, on prancing, snorting horses, filed a troop of cavalrymen. The sharp command of an officer rang out, and above the heads of the horsemen sabres flashed like silver ribbons, cleaving the air and sweeping in one direction. The crowd stood swaying, excited, waiting, not believing.

Silence reigned. Suddenly a frenzied shout was heard:

"M-a-r-ch!"

It seemed as though a whirlwind struck the faces of the people and as if the ground heaved under their feet. Then commenced a mad stampede. People ran, pushing and knocking each other down, dropping the wounded they were carrying, and jumping over dead bodies. The heavy clatter of horses' hoofs reached them. The horsemen yelled, their horses leaped over the wounded, the fallen and the dead, sabres flashed, cries of horror and pain went up and now and again the swish of steel and its impact with bone was heard. The cries of the injured merged in a prolonged, hollow groan....

"A-a-a-h!"

The horsemen swung their sabres and brought them down on the heads of the people, their bodies lurching over their horses' sides with every blow. Their faces were flushed and looked sightless. The horses neighed, bared their teeth ferociously and wildly tossed their heads....

The people were driven back into the street from which they had come, and no sooner had the clatter of horses' hoofs died away in the distance than they began to look at each other, gasping for breath, their eyes bulging with astonishment. A guilty smile appeared on many faces. Somebody laughed and said:

"Oh, didn't I run!"

"It was enough to make anybody run!" answered another.

Suddenly cries of amazement, fright and anger rose on all sides....

"What's the meaning of this, brothers, eh?"

"It's murder, that's what it is, fellow Christians!"

"What for?"

"There's a government for you!"

"Hack us to pieces, eh? Trample upon us with horses...."

And so they stood there in bewilderment, expressing their indignation to each other. They did not know what to do. Nobody went away. They pressed against each other, trying to find a way out of this motley confusion of feeling, they looked at each other with anxious curiosity and yet, more surprised than frightened, waited for something, pricked up their ears, looked around expectantly. But all were crushed and stunned by amazement; this was the feeling that was uppermost in their hearts and prevented their mood from merging into something more natural in this unexpected, frightful, idiotically uncalled for moment, impregnated with the blood of the innocent....

A young voice called out energetically:

"Hey! Come and pick up the wounded!"

Everybody awoke from their torpor and proceeded quickly towards the river. From the opposite direction came injured people covered with blood and snow, some crawling over the snow and others staggering on their feet. These were picked up and carried. Izvozchiks were stopped, their passengers were ordered to get out and the wounded were put in their place and driven away. Everybody became careworn, gloomy and silent. They looked at the wounded with appraising eyes, silently measured things, compared them, and pondered deeply to find an answer to the frightful question which confronted them like a vague, formless black shadow. It obliterated the image of the hero, the tsar, the fount of charity

and goodness which they had so recently conjured up. But only a few dared audibly confess that this image was now destroyed. It was hard to confess this, for it meant abandoning one's only hope....

The bald man in the overcoat with the yellow patch passed by. His dully shining skull was now stained with blood. His head and shoulders drooped and his knees seemed to be giving way. He was supported by a broad-shouldered, hatless lad with curly hair, and by a woman in a torn fur coat whose face was dull and lifeless.

"Wait a minute, Mikhailo. How can this be?" mumbled the wounded man. "Shoot the people? That's not allowed!... It ought not to be, Mikhailo."

"But that's what's happened!" shouted the lad.

"They shot... and they hacked..." observed the woman despondently.

"Then they must have had orders to do so. Mikhailo..."

"Of course!" the boy answered angrily. "Did you think they'd come out and talk to you? Bring you out a glass of wine?"

"Wait a minute, Mikhailo...."

The wounded man halted, leaned his back against the wall and shouted:

"Fellow Christians!... Why are they killing us? Under what law?... By whose orders?"

People walked past, hanging their heads.

Further down, at the street corner, next to a fence several score of people had gathered, and in the middle of the crowd somebody was saying in an alarmed and angry voice, gasping for breath as he spoke:

"Gapon went to see the Minister last night. He must have known what would happen today. That shows he has betrayed us. Led us to death!"

"What good would that do him?"

"How do I know?"

The excitement spread. Everybody was faced with questions that were still unclear, but everybody felt that these questions were important, profound, stern, and imperatively demanded an answer. In the fire of this excitement, belief in assistance from outside, the hope of a miraculous saviour from want, perished.

A rather stout, poorly-clad woman, with a kind, motherly face and large sad eyes, walked down the middle of the street. She was weeping and supporting her blood-stained left hand with her right.

"How shall I be able to work now?" she wailed. "How shall I feed my children? To whom can I go to complain?... Fellow Christians, who is to protect the people if the tsar, too, is against us?"

Her questions, loud and clear, awakened the people, roused and stirred them. People ran up to the woman from all sides, halted in front of her and listened to what she said, gloomily, but attentively.

"So it means that there is no law for the people?"

Sighs broke from the lips of some of the people around her. Others swore under their breath.

A shrill angry voice shouted out from somewhere in the crowd:

"I got assistance.... They broke my son's leg!"

"My Peter was killed!" another voice shouted.

Numerous cries of a similar kind went up. They lashed the ear and more and more often called forth a vengeful echo, whipped up the feeling of rage, and stimulated the consciousness that something had to be done to protect oneself against the murderers. Something like a decision appeared on the people's pale faces.

"Comrades! Let's go into town.... After all, perhaps we'll get some explanation of this.... Let's go, a few at a time!"

"They'll slaughter us...."

"Let's talk to the soldiers. Perhaps they'll understand that there's no law which permits the killing of people!"

"Perhaps there is such a law. How do you know?"

The mob slowly but steadily underwent a change: it became transformed into the people. The young people went away in small groups, but all went in one direction, back to the river. Meanwhile, more and more wounded and killed were being carried away. The smell of warm blood pervaded the air, and groans and exclamations rent the air.

"Yakov Zimin was shot right through the forehead...."

"Thanks to the Little Father, the tsar!"

"Y-e-s! He gave us a nice reception!"

Several strong oaths were uttered. Only a quarter of an hour before the crowd would have torn to pieces anybody who had uttered only one like them.

A little girl ran down the street loudly asking everybody:

"Have you seen my mummy?"

The people looked at her silently and made way for her.

Later, the woman with the shattered hand was heard crying out:

"I'm here, I'm here!"

The street became deserted. The young people dispersed more and more quickly, while the older ones moved off in twos and threes, gloomily and unhurriedly, casting furtive glances at the young people who were hurrying away. They spoke little. Only now and again somebody, unable to restrain his bitter feelings, exclaimed in a low voice:

"So they have cast off the people. . ."

"Damned murderers!"

They expressed pity for those who were killed; and they had an inkling that a certain strong, slavish prejudice was killed too, but they prudently said nothing about it, they no longer pronounced "His" name, which now jarred on their ears, so as not to stir up the sorrow and anger that smouldered in their hearts. . . .

But perhaps they said nothing about it because they feared that another prejudice would come to take the place of the dead one. . . .

. . . A close, unbroken cordon of soldiers was drawn round the tsar's house. Cavalry were posted in the palace square, right under the windows, to which rose the smells of hay, horse dung and horse sweat, and the sounds of rattling sabres, clinking spurs, commands and stamping feet.

A dense mass of people, tens of thousands, with cold anger gnawing at their breasts, bore down upon the soldiers from all sides. They spoke calmly, but with a new emphasis, new words and with new hope, which they themselves scarcely understood. A company of soldiers, one flank resting against the wall of the building and the other against the iron railings of the park, barred the way to the palace square. Close up against them, face to face, stood the crowd, immeasurably large, mute and black.

"Move along, please!" said the sergeant-major in an undertone, as he passed down the line, pushing the people away from the soldiers with his arms and shoulders and trying not to look into their faces.

"Why don't you let us through?" he was asked.

"Where to?"

"To the tsar!"

The sergeant-major halted for a moment and in a tone that sounded like boredom he exclaimed:

"But I'm telling you he's not here!"

"What, the tsar's not here?"

"No, I'm telling you he's not. So go away!"

"Do you mean he's gone for good?" enquired a sarcastic voice.

The sergeant-major halted again, raised his hand warningly and said:

"Take care, now! You know what you'll get for saying things like that!"

And then he went on to explain in a different tone:

"He's not in town."

To this came responses from the crowd:

"He's not anywhere!"

"He's dead!"

"You've shot him, you devils!"

"Did you think you could kill the people?"

"You can't kill the people! . . . There's too many of us. . . ."

"You have killed the tsar—do you understand?"

"Move along, I tell you, and stop that talk!"

"What are you? A soldier? What's a soldier?"

At another part of the line a little old man with a pointed beard was saying animatedly to the soldiers:

"You are human. So are we! Just now you are in uniform, but tomorrow you will be in civvies. You'll want a job, because you have to eat. You'll have no job, and you'll have nothing to eat. And so, boys, you'll have to do what we here are doing now. . . . And they'll have to shoot at you, is that it? To kill you, because you are hungry, eh?"

The soldiers felt cold. They hopped from foot to foot, stamped their feet and rubbed their ears, passing their rifles from one hand

to the other. Hearing this talk they sighed heavily, looked this way and that, and smacked their frozen lips. Their faces, livid with cold, all bore the uniform impress of despondency, perplexity and stupidity. They blinked their eyelids and lowered their eyes. Only a few of them screwed up an eye as if taking aim at something, and clenched their teeth, evidently finding it difficult to restrain their anger at this mass of people who were compelling them to freeze like this. The entire grey line breathed weariness and boredom.

The people stood opposite the soldiers, breast to breast and, pushed from behind, sometimes collided with them.

"Steady there!" one of the soldiers said in a low voice whenever this happened.

Other people grasped the soldiers' hands and spoke to them ardently. The soldiers listened, blinking their eyes; their faces became distorted by indefinite grimaces, which made them look pitiful or shy.

"Don't touch the gun!" one of them said to a young lad in a fur cap. The boy was tapping the soldier's chest and saying:

"You're a soldier, not a butcher.... You were called up to protect Russia against her enemies, but they are making you shoot at the people.... But try and understand! The people—that's Russia!"

"We are not shooting!" answered the soldier.

"Look!" said the boy, pointing to the crowd. "This is Russia, the Russian people! They want to see their tsar...."

Somebody interrupted with a shout:

"They don't!"

"Is there anything bad in the people wanting to talk to the tsar about their affairs? Tell me, is there?"

"I don't know!" answered the soldier, spitting.

The man next to him added:

"We have orders not to talk...."

He sighed despondently and lowered his eyes.

One little soldier suddenly brightened up and asked the man in front of him eagerly:

"Hey, you! Aren't you from Ryazan?"

"No, I'm from Pskov.... Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just like that.... I'm from Ryazan...."

He smiled a broad smile and hunched his shoulders from the cold.

The crowd swayed in front of the straight grey wall and beat against it like the waves of a river beating against its rocky banks, receding and rolling forward again. It is doubtful whether many of the people knew why they were here, what they wanted, and what they were waiting for. They had no conscious aim or definite intention. They were conscious only of a bitter sense of wrong, of indignation, and many, of a desire for revenge; this is what bound them all, kept them here in the street. But there was no one upon whom to vent these feelings, no one upon whom to wreak vengeance.... The soldiers did not rouse anger, they did not irritate the people—they were simply stupid and unhappy, they were freezing; many were unable to keep from shivering, and their teeth were chattering.

"We've been here since 1 o'clock this morning!" they said. "It's simply awful!"

"It's enough to make you want to lie down and die...."

"Suppose you went away, eh? We could go back to our warm barracks then...."

"What's the time?"

It was nearly 2 o'clock.

"What are you all excited about? What are you waiting for?" the sergeant-major asked.

The question, his grave face, and the serious and confident tone in which he asked the question, cooled the ardour of the people. There seemed to be a special meaning in everything he said, more profound than the simple words he uttered.

"There's nothing to wait for! You are only keeping the men out in the cold...."

"Will you shoot at us?" a young man in a hood asked the sergeant-major.

The sergeant-major remained silent for a moment and then answered coolly:

"If we are ordered to—we will!"

This caused an outburst of reproaches, oaths, and jeers.

"What for? What for?" asked a tall, red-headed man, louder than the rest.

"Because you are disobeying the orders of the authorities!" explained the sergeant-major, rubbing his ear.

The men listened to the talk going on among the crowd and blinked their eyes despondently. One of them softly exclaimed:

"Wouldn't it be nice to have something hot now?"

"Would you like some of my blood?" somebody asked him in a tone that was both angry and sad.

"I'm not a wild beast," answered the soldier, gloomily and resentfully.

Many eyes stared at the broad flat faces of the long line of soldiers with cold, silent curiosity, contempt and disgust. But the majority tried to warm them with the fire of their own excitement, to stir something in their hearts, which had been tightly compressed by barrack life, and in their heads, which had been stuffed with the rubbish of barrack room training. Most of the people wanted to do something, to put their thoughts and sentiments into practice somehow, and they kept obstinately beating against this grey cold wall of men who wished only one thing—to warm their bodies.

The talk became more ardent, the words more and more striking.

"Soldiers!" said a thick-set man with a long broad beard and blue eyes. "Who are you? Aren't you sons of the Russian people? The people are poor, downtrodden, without protection, without work and without bread, and so they have come here today to ask the tsar to help them. But the tsar orders you to shoot, to kill them! Soldiers! The people—your fathers and brothers—are asking for assistance not only for themselves, but also for you! You are being put against the people. They are compelling you to kill your own fathers and brothers! Think of what you are doing! Don't you understand that you are going against yourselves?"

That voice, calm and even, the fine face and grey-streaked beard, the whole appearance of the man and his simple and truthful words evidently moved the soldiers. They lowered their eyes at his glance, they listened to him attentively, some shaking their heads and sighing, others frowning and looking round. One of them advised in an undertone:

"Go away—the officer will hear you!"

The officer, tall, fair, with a big moustache, was slowly pacing down the line. Pulling at the glove on his right hand he kept hissing through his clenched teeth:

"Disss-misss!... Get out of here! What? You want to talk? I'll give you talk!"

He had a fat red face and round eyes, bright, but with no sparkle in them. He walked down the line unhurriedly, stepping firmly on the ground. But on his approach time flew more quickly, as if every second was in a hurry to pass in case it should be filled with something offensive and disgusting. It seemed as though an invisible ruler was trailing behind the officer, straightening the line of men. They stood up, drew in their abdomens, pushed out their chests and glanced down at their toes. Some of them drew the attention of the people to the officer with their eyes and made angry faces. On reaching the end of the line the officer commanded:

"'Shun!"

The soldiers drew smartly to attention and stood as if petrified.

"I order you to disperse!" the officer then said, unhurriedly drawing his sword from its scabbard.

It was absolutely impossible for the crowd to disperse, for the whole of the small square was crammed with people, and more and more people were pressing into its rear from the street.

Looks of hatred were cast at the officer, jeers and oaths were hurled at him, but he stood unmoved. He ran his dull eyes down the line of soldiers and his brows twitched slightly. A clamour went up from the crowd. It was irritated by the officer's calmness, which was too inhuman to be appropriate for the present moment.

"That one would give the order!"

"He'd shoot without orders...."

"Yes. Drew his sword, and all...."

"Hey, Mister! Are you ready to kill?"

This bantering tone gradually grew into one of recklessness: the cries became louder and the jeers more biting.

The sergeant-major looked at the officer, shuddered, went pale and also quickly drew his sword.

Suddenly the sinister strains of a bugle were heard. The people turned their eyes in the direction of the bugler—his cheeks were

strangely puffed out and his eyes bulged; the bugle trembled in his hands and he played much too long. The nasal, brassy sounds were drowned by an outburst of whistling, shrieking, howling, curses, reproaches, despairing groans of impotence and shouts of reckless desperation called forth by the consciousness that death could follow in an instant, and that it would be impossible to escape it. There was nowhere to go to escape from it. Several dark figures dropped to the ground and pressed close to it, others hid their faces with their hands. The man with the large beard stepped out in front, tore his overcoat open at his chest and peered with his blue eyes into the faces of the soldiers. He spoke to them, but what he said was unheard, for his voice was drowned in the chaotic tumult.

The soldiers whipped their rifles to the "ready," then raised them to "present," and stood as if petrified, in a uniform, alert posture, with their bayonets pointing at the crowd.

The line of bayonets suspended in the air was uneven—some were held too high and others too low; only a few were pointed straight at the breasts of the people, but all looked soft, and they quivered, seeming to melt and bend.

A loud voice rang out in horror and disgust:

"What are you doing? Murderers!"

The line of bayonets shook convulsively. A frightened volley rang out. The people recoiled, hurled back by the sound, by striking bullets and by the falling bodies of the killed and wounded. Some, without uttering a word, began to jump over the railings of the park.

Another volley rang out ... and then another.

A boy, who was struck by a bullet as he was climbing the railings, suddenly bent over and remained suspended with his feet upwards. A tall graceful woman with fluffy hair gasped and sank slowly to the ground near the boy.

"May you be accursed!" somebody shouted.

The place became less congested and quieter. The people in the rear ran back into the street and took refuge in the courtyards. The crowd slowly retreated as if pushed back by invisible hands. A space of about twenty feet was left between the crowd and the soldiers, and this space was strewn with bodies. Some got up and ran

quickly towards the crowd. Others got up with great difficulty, revealing patches of blood on the ground, and staggered off, leaving a trail of blood behind them. Many lay motionless, face upwards, face downwards, and on their sides, but all stretched in a queer state of tension, as if death had caught them, and they were trying to tear themselves out of its clutches....

The smell of blood pervaded the air, reminding one of the warm, saline breath of the sea in the evening, after a sultry day: it was a pernicious smell; it intoxicated one and roused an unhealthy desire to inhale it long and deeply. It distorted the imagination in a disgusting way, as butchers, soldiers and others professionally engaged in killing know.

The crowd wailed as it retreated. Curses, oaths and cries of pain mingled with a confused medley of whistling, howling and groans. The soldiers stood with their feet firmly planted on the ground, as rigid as the dead. Their faces were ash-grey, their lips were closely pressed together, as if they, too, wanted to shout and whistle, but restrained themselves because it was against orders. They stared in front of them with wide-open eyes; they no longer blinked. There was nothing human in that stare; it seemed as though those dull, vacant spots on the grey, drawn faces were sightless. Perhaps they did not want to see, because they were secretly afraid that if they saw the warm blood which they had spilled, they would want to spill more. Their rifles trembled in their hands, the bayonets twisting as if they were boring into the air. But this trembling could not dispel the dull indifference of the men whose hearts had been hardened by the violence which had been done to their will, and whose minds had been thickly plastered with disgusting, putrid falsehood. The bearded, blue-eyed man rose from the ground and again addressed the soldiers in a sobbing voice, his whole body twitching as he spoke:

"You have not killed me.... That's because I told you the sacred truth...."

The people again slowly and gloomily pressed forward to pick up the dead and wounded. Several men stood beside the one who was addressing the soldiers and, interrupting him, also began to plead, to shout and to rebuke, not angrily, but in tones of sadness and sympathy. The voices still rang with naive confidence that truth

would prevail, with a desire to prove the absurdity and madness of cruelty and to make the soldiers understand how awful was the mistake they had made. They wanted, and tried hard, to make them understand how shameful and disgusting was the part they were involuntarily playing. . . .

The officer drew his revolver from its holster, carefully examined it, and strode up to the group that was talking to the men. They made way for him, unhurriedly, as one steps aside when a stone is slowly rolling down the mountainside. The blue-eyed bearded man, however, did not budge, but met the officer with ardent words of reproach, and with wide gestures pointed to the blood all round.

"How are you going to justify this?" he asked him. "There is no justification for it."

The officer stood in front of the man, knitted his brows in a preoccupied manner and raised his arm. The shots were not heard, but wisps of smoke encircled the arm of the murderer, once, twice and thrice. After the third time, the bearded man's knees gave way, his head fell back, and waving his right arm he fell to the ground. People rushed at the murderer from all sides. He retreated, brandishing his sword and pointing his revolver at everybody. . . . A boy fell down at his feet, and he plunged his sword into his stomach. He shouted in a grating voice and jumped about like a prancing horse. Somebody threw a cap in his face. He was pelted with clots of blood-stained snow. The sergeant-major and several men ran towards him with out-thrust bayonets, and the attackers ran away. The victor waved his sword at the retreating people threateningly, and then he suddenly lowered it and plunged it once again into the body of the boy, who was crawling at his feet, bleeding profusely.

And again the brassy strains of the bugle rang out. On hearing them the people rapidly deserted the square, but the sounds continued to undulate in the air, as if putting the finishing touches to the vacant eyes of the soldiers, the bravery of the officer, his red-tipped sword and his dishevelled moustache. . . .

The vivid, scarlet hue of the blood irritated the eye and yet fascinated one, rousing a drunken and vicious desire to see more of it, to see it everywhere. The soldiers looked alert, they stretched

their necks this way and that as if searching with their eyes for more living targets for their bullets. . . .

The officer stood at one end of the line, waved his sword and shouted something in a choking voice, angrily, savagely.

From all sides came answering cries:

"Butcher!"

"Scoundrel!"

The officer stroked his moustache.

Another volley was fired, and then another. . . .

The streets were packed with people as tightly as a sack with grain. There were fewer working men here; most of the people were small shopkeepers, salesmen and clerks. Some of them had already seen the blood and the corpses, and others had been beaten up by the police. They were brought out of their houses into the street by alarm; and they spread alarm everywhere, magnifying the outward horrors of the day. Men, women and children looked around anxiously, and listened intently and expectantly. They told each other about the killing, moaned and groaned, swore, questioned the slightly wounded working men, and now and again lowered their voices to a whisper and talked mysteriously to each other. Nobody knew what was to be done, and nobody went home. They felt and guessed that something important was going to happen after this killing, something more profound and tragic for them than the hundreds of killed and wounded, who were strangers to them.

Up to this day they had lived almost without thinking, with vague ideas, heaven knows when or how acquired, about the government, the law, the authorities, and their rights, and these ideas, being amorphous, did not prevent their brains from becoming enmeshed with a thick, close web, from being covered with a thick, slimy crust. These people were accustomed to think that there was a certain power whose function it was to protect them and was capable of protecting them, namely—the law. This habit gave them a sense of security and safeguarded them from all troublesome thoughts. Life was tolerable under these conditions, and although these vague ideas were often disturbed by life's pin-pricks, scratches, jostles and sometimes even heavy blows, they remained

strong and tenacious. The scratches and fissures soon healed, and the ideas retained their lifeless integrity.

But today, their brains were suddenly exposed, and they shuddered; their breasts were filled with alarm that chilled them like a cold blast. Everything that had been established and habitual was upset, was shattered and had vanished. All of them were conscious, more or less clearly, of a sad and frightful loneliness and defenselessness in face of a cruel and cynical power which recognized no rights and no law. This power held all lives in its hands and could with impunity sow death among masses of people, could destroy the living just as its will dictated, and in any numbers it pleased. Nobody could restrain it. It refused to talk to anybody. It was all-powerful and coolly proved that its authority was limitless by senselessly strewing the streets of the city with corpses and flooding them with blood. Its bloody, thirsty, insane caprice was clearly visible, and it sowed universal alarm, a gnawing, soul-destroying dread. But it also persistently roused the mind, compelling it to devise new plans for protecting the individual, new methods for the protection of life.

A short, thick-set man was walking along with lowered head, swinging his blood-stained hands. The front of his coat was also profusely stained with blood.

"Are you wounded?" he was asked.

"No."

"What about the blood?"

"It's not my blood," the man answered and passed on. Suddenly he halted, looked round and said in a loud voice that sounded queer:

"It's not my blood. It's the blood of those who believed . . ." and he went on his way, lowering his head again, without finishing what he had to say.

A troop of horsemen rode among the crowd, swinging their knouts. The people rushed away from them in all directions, colliding with each other, and pressing against the walls. The soldiers were drunk. They smiled idiotically, swayed in their saddles, and now and again, as if reluctantly, struck at people's heads and shoulders with their knouts. One man was bowled over by a blow and fell to the ground, but he sprang to his feet again and asked the soldier:

"What was that for? Ekh! You brute!"

The soldier unslung his carbine and without reining in his horse fired at the man. The man dropped to the ground again. The soldier laughed.

"Look what they are doing!" shouted a respectably dressed, horrified gentleman, turning his distorted face in all directions. "Do you see what they're doing?"

The murmur of excited voices continued without interruption, and amidst the torments of fear, the anguish of despair, something was born that slowly and imperceptibly united resurrected, awkward minds, minds which were unaccustomed to work.

But men of peace appeared.

"Why did he abuse the soldier?" demanded one.

"The soldier struck him, didn't he?"

"He should have got out of the way!"

In an archway two women and a student were attending to a working man who had been shot through the arm. The wounded man winced, looked around angrily, and said to those around him:

"We had no secret intentions whatever. It's only skunks and dicks who say we had. We went openly. The Ministers knew why we were going. They had a copy of our petition. If we were not allowed to go, why didn't they say so, the skunks! They had plenty of time to tell us. We didn't arrange this today.... They knew—the police and the Ministers—that we were going. The murderers...."

"What did you ask for in your petition?" enquired a short, grey-haired, lean old man, thoughtfully and gravely.

"We asked that the tsar should assemble representatives elected by the people and govern the country with them, and not with the government officials. Those scoundrels have ruined Russia, they have robbed everybody."

"Yes, that's true.... We must have control!" observed the little old man.

The working man's arm was bandaged and they carefully rolled down the sleeve of his coat.

"Thank you," he said. "I told my comrades that it was no use going, that nothing would come of it. Now they will see that I was right."

He gingerly inserted his hand into his buttoned overcoat and unhurriedly went off.

"Do you hear how they talk? You know what that means, brother. . . ."

"Y-e-s! Still, they shouldn't have done this slaughter. . . ."

"They shot him today. It may be my turn tomorrow. . . ."

"You're right there. . . ."

At another spot two men were arguing heatedly. One said:

"He might not have known!"

"Then why. . . ."

But there were few now who wanted to revive the corpse, so few that they were hardly noticeable. They only roused anger by their attempts to raise again the ghost which had now been laid. They were attacked as if they were enemies, and they ran away in fright.

A battery of artillery rode into the street. The soldiers sat on their horses and limbers, thoughtfully gazing ahead, over the heads of the people. The crowd pushed back to make way for the guns. Sullen silence reigned; only the rattle of the harness and the clatter of ammunition boxes was heard. The gun barrels, swaying like elephant's trunks, pointed their muzzles to the ground as if smelling it. The cavalcade reminded one of a funeral.

Shots rang out in the distance. The people stood petrified, listening intently. Somebody said:

"Again!"

Suddenly a ripple of excitement swept down the street.

"Where, where?"

"On the Island. . . . On Vassilyevsky Island. . . ."

"Do you hear?"

"You don't say?"

"On my word of honour! They've captured a gunsmith's shop. . . ."

"Aha!"

"They cut down the telegraph poles and built a barricade. . . ."

"Is that so?"

"Is there a lot of them?"

"Plenty!"

"Oh! If only they avenged the innocent blood that has been spilt!"

"Let's go there!"

"Let's go, Ivan Ivanovich, eh?"

"Y-e-ss.... But ... you know...."

The figure of a man appeared above the crowd, and in the twilight an appeal rang out:

"Who wants to fight for freedom? For the people, for man's right to life and labour? He who wants to die in battle for the future—let him go and help!"

Some gathered round the man, and a close-packed knot of bodies was formed in the middle of the street. Other people hurried away.

"You see how angry the people are!"

"Quite legitimately! Quite!"

"But it's madness...."

The crowd melted in the twilight. People dispersed to their homes, carrying with them an unfamiliar sense of alarm, a frightening sense of loneliness, a half-awakened consciousness of the tragedy of their lives, the oppressed, senseless lives of slaves ... and a readiness to adjust themselves to everything that would be advantageous and convenient....

The atmosphere became more tense than ever. Darkness broke the contacts between people—the feeble contacts of external interests. And those who lacked fire in their hearts hastened to their accustomed nooks.

Night was falling fast, but the street lamps were not lit....

"Dragoons!" shouted a hoarse voice.

Out of a side street a squad of cavalry suddenly appeared. The horses stamped their hoofs for a few seconds and then charged down upon the people. The soldiers yelled in a queer way; they roared, and there was something inhuman, dark, blind, an unintelligible something akin to despair in that roar. Both men and horses looked smaller and blacker in the darkness. Sabres glinted dully, there were fewer outcries, but the sounds of numerous blows were heard.

"Hit them with whatever comes to your hands, comrades! Blood for blood!"

"Run!"

"Don't dare, soldier! I'm not a peasant!"

"Hit them with cobble-stones! Comrades!"

Upsetting the tiny dark figures, the horses pranced, neighed and snorted. The clash of steel was heard. A command rang out:

"Squad! . . ."

A bugle rang out, hurriedly and nervously. People ran, pushing each other and falling. The street became deserted, but dark hummocks remained on the ground, and from somewhere, down a side street, came the rapid clatter of heavy hoofs. . . .

"Are you wounded, comrade?"

"My ear's cut off, I think. . . ."

"What can you do with bare hands?"

The sound of rifle fire echoed in the deserted street.

"They haven't grown tired of it yet—the devils!"

Silence. Hurried footsteps. How strange that there were so few sounds and no movement in the street. A subdued, liquid murmur floated from all directions, as if the sea had invaded the city.

Somewhere near, a low moan trembled in the darkness. . . . Somebody was running and breathing heavily.

An anxious voice enquired:

"Are you wounded, Yakov?"

"It's nothing!" answered a hoarse voice.

From the side street, down which the dragoons had galloped, a crowd reappeared and flowed blackly across the whole width of the street. Somebody, walking in front, but inseparably from the crowd, was saying:

"Today we took a pledge sealed with our blood—henceforth we must be citizens."

Another voice interrupted him and said nervously with a sob:

"Yes—our fathers have shown us what they really are!"

And somebody else said threateningly:

"We shall never forget this day!"

They walked quickly, in a close-packed crowd, many talking at once, and their voices merged chaotically with the dark, angry, murmer. Now and again somebody raised his voice to a shout, drowning all the other voices.

"Christ, how many were killed today!"

"And what for?"

"No! We can never forget this day!"

Somebody on the side, in a strained hoarse voice, made the sinister prophecy:

"You'll forget, slaves! What's other people's blood to you?"

"Shut up, Yakov!"

It became darker and quieter. Passers-by turned their heads in the direction of the voices and growled.

A light from a window threw a faint yellow patch upon the street. In the patch two black figures were seen. One was sitting on the ground, leaning against a lamppost; the other was bending over him, evidently wanting to help him to rise. And again one of them said, softly and sadly:

"Slaves...."

TALES OF ITALY

I

THE TRAM-CAR employees in Naples were on strike: a string of empty cars stretched the entire length of the Riviera di Chiaia and a crowd of conductors and motormen, jolly, voluble Neapolitans, as volatile as quicksilver, had gathered on Piazza della Vittoria. Above their heads over the park fence sparkled a fountain jet like the slender blade of a sword, around them milled a large, hostile crowd of people who had to travel on business to all parts of the huge city and all these shop assistants, artisans, petty traders and seamstresses loudly reproached the strikers. Harsh words and biting jibes were uttered and there was much gesticulating, for the Neapolitans speak as expressively and eloquently with their hands as with their indefatigable tongues.

A light breeze was wafted from the sea, the dark green fronds of the tall palms in the city park swayed gently, their trunks looking strangely like the clumsy legs of some monster elephants. Urchins, the half-naked children of the Neapolitan streets, romped about, filling the air with their sparrow-like twitter and laughter.

The city which resembled an old engraving, was bathed in the generous rays of the blazing sun and seemed to reverberate like an organ; the blue waves in the gulf plashed against the stone embankment adding a muffled beat, like the throbbing of a tambourine, to the hubbub and cries of the city.

The strikers huddled gloomily together barely replying to the irritable outcries of the crowd; some of them climbed onto the railing of the park peering anxiously down the street over the heads of the people, like a pack of wolves surrounded by the hounds. It was clear that these people in their uniformed attire were closely linked by an unshakable resolve to stand their ground and this irritated the crowd still more. But the crowd too had its philoso-

phers. Smoking calmly, the latter admonished the more impassioned opponents of the strikers thus:

"Ah, signor! What is a man to do if he can't afford macaroni for his children?"

Sprucely-attired agents of the municipal police stood by in groups of two and three watching to see that the crowd did not obstruct the movement of the carriages. They kept strictly neutral, staring with like equanimity at the censurers and censured and good-humouredly chaffing both sides when shouts and gestures became too heated. A detachment of carabinieri carrying their short, light rifles were lined up against the buildings on a narrow side-street, ready to intervene in the event of serious clashes. They made a rather sinister group in their three-cornered hats, abbreviated capes and the scarlet stripes like two streaks of blood running down their trousers.

Suddenly the wrangling jeers, reproaches and persuasions subsided. Some new spirit swept the crowd, a pacifying spirit it seemed; the strikers moved closer together with set faces as shouts arose from the crowd:

"The soldiers!"

Whistles of mockery and triumph directed at the strikers mingled with shouts of greeting and one stout man in a light grey suit and a panama hat broke into a caper, tapping with his feet against the stone causeway. The conductors and motormen made their way slowly through the crowd to the cars, some climbed aboard. They looked grimmer than before as they forced their way through the crowd snapping retorts to the exclamations from all sides. The hubbub subsided.

Up from the Santa Lucia embankment with a light, dancing step came the little grey soldiers, their feet beating a rhythmic tattoo and their left hands swinging with a mechanical motion. They looked like tin soldiers and as fragile as mechanical toys. They were led by a tall handsome officer with knit brows and a contemptuous twist to his lips; beside him hopped a stout man in a top hat chattering volubly and cleaving the air with innumerable gestures.

The crowd fell back from the cars; the soldiers scattered along them like so many grey beads taking up positions at the platforms where the strikers stood.

The man in the top hat and several other respectable-looking citizens with him waved their arms wildly and shouted:

"The last time . . . ultima volta! Do you hear?"

The officer stood with his head inclined twirling his moustache with a bored air; a man ran up to him waving his top hat and shouting something in a hoarse voice. The officer glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, then drew himself up, threw out his chest and rapped out commands in a loud voice.

Whereupon the soldiers began jumping onto the platforms of the cars, two on each platform, while the motormen and conductors jumped down one after the other.

This struck the crowd as being funny—it roared, whistled and laughed, but all at once the noise subsided and with grim, tense faces and eyes wide with horror the people fell back from the cars in heavy silence, and stampeded toward the front car.

There, within two feet of its wheels, stretched across the rails, lay one of the motormen. His grey head was bared and his face, the face of a soldier with the moustaches bristling angrily, stared up at the sky. As the crowd gaped, a lad, small and agile as a monkey, threw himself down beside the motorman, and one by one others followed suit.

A low hum rose from the crowd and voices were heard calling fearfully on the Madonna, some cursed grimly, the women screamed and groaned and the urchins, excited by the spectacle, bounced about like rubber balls.

The man in the top hat yelled something in a hysterical voice. the officer looked at him and shrugged his shoulders—his soldiers had been sent to take over the cars from the tram men but he had no orders to fight the strikers.

Then the top hat, surrounded by some officious people, rushed over to the carabinieri—and now they came forward and bent over the men lying on the rails intending to remove them.

There was a brief scuffle; then suddenly the whole grey dusty crowd of on'ookers swayed, bellowed, howled and rushed over to the rails—a man in a panama snatched off his hat, threw it into the air and was the first to lay down beside the end striker, slapping him on the shoulder and shouting words of encouragement in his ear.

One by one people began to drop down onto the rails, as if their feet had given way beneath them—jolly, noisy folk who had

not been there at all two minutes ago. They threw themselves on the ground, laughing and pulling faces at one another and shouting to the officer who was saying something to the top-hatted individual shaking his gloves under his nose, chuckling and shaking his handsome head.

And more and more people poured onto the rails, women dropped their baskets and bundles, small boys, shaking with laughter, curled up like shivering puppies, and decently dressed people rolled about in the dust.

The five soldiers standing on the platform of the front car looked down at the heap of bodies under the wheels and shook with laughter, clinging to the bars for support, throwing back their heads and bending forward, convulsed with amusement. They did not look at all like mechanical toys now.

... Half an hour later the tram-cars, scraping and clanging were speeding through the streets of Naples, and on the platforms stood the beaming victors and down the cars walked the victors, asking politely:

"Biglietti?!"

And the passengers handed them the red and yellow slips of paper with many a wink, smile and good-natured grumbling.

II

On the little square in front of the railway station in Genoa a dense crowd was assembled; they were mostly workingmen but there were a good many respectably dressed and well-fed people as well. In front of the crowd stood members of the town council; above their heads waved the heavy and cunningly embroidered silk banner of the city, with the varicoloured banners of the workers' organizations beside it. The golden tassels, fringes, and cords glittered, the tips of the flagpoles shone, the silk rustled and a low hum like a choir singing sotto voce rose from the festive throng.

Above, on its tall pedestal, stood the statue of Columbus, the dreamer who had suffered so much for his beliefs and who won because he believed. Today too he looked down at the people and his marble lips seemed to be saying:

"Only those who believe can win."

Around the pedestal at his feet the musicians laid their instruments and the brass glittered like gold in the sun.

The receding semi-circle of the station building spread its heavy marble wings as though wishing to embrace the waiting throng. From the port came the laboured breathing of the steamships, the muffled churning of a propeller in the water, the clanging of chains, whistling and shouting. But the square was still and hot under the broiling sun. On the balconies and at the windows of houses women stood with flowers in their hands and beside them were children looking like flowers in their holiday garb.

As the locomotive rolled whistling into the station the crowd stirred and several crushed hats flew into the air like so many dark birds; the musicians picked up their trumpets, and several grave, elderly men spruced themselves, hastily stepped forward and turned to face the crowd speaking excitedly and gesturing to the right and left.

Slowly the crowd parted, clearing a wide passage to the street.

"Whom have they come to meet?"

"The children from Parma!"

There was a strike on in Parma. The bosses would not yield and the workers were hard pressed and so they had gathered their children who had already begun to suffer from hunger and had sent them to their comrades in Genoa.

A neat procession of little people emerged from behind the columns of the stations; they were shabbily clothed and their rags gave them the appearance of some queer shaggy little animals. They walked hand in hand, five in a row, very small, dusty and obviously weary. Their faces were grave but their eyes shone brightly, and when the musicians struck up the Garibaldi hymn a smile of pleasure flickered over those gaunt, hunger-pinched little faces.

The crowd welcomed the men and women of the future with a deafening shout, banners dipped before them, the brass trumpets blared out, stunning and dazzling the children; somewhat taken aback by this reception, they shrank back for a moment and then suddenly they drew themselves up so that they looked taller, coalesced into a mass and from hundreds of throats there rose a single shout:

"Viva l'Italia!"

"Long live young Parma!" thundered the crowd, closing in upon them.

"Evviva Garibaldi!" shouted the children, as their grey wedge cut into the crowd and was engulfed by it.

In the hotel windows and from the roofs of houses handkerchiefs fluttered like white birds, and a shower of flowers and gay, lively shouts poured down on the heads of the crowd below.

Everything took on a festive appearance, everything sprang to life, even the grey marble seemed to blossom out in daubs of bright colour.

The banners waved in the breeze, caps and flowers flew into the air, the tiny heads of the children rose above the heads of the throng, small grimy paws stretched out in greeting sought to catch the flowers and the air resounded with the mighty, unceasing shout:

"Viva il Socialismo!"

"Evviva l'Italia!"

Nearly all the children were snatched up, some sat perched on the shoulders of the grown-ups, others were pressed against the broad chests of stern bewhiskered men; the music was barely audible above the hubbub of shouting and laughter.

Women darted in and out of the crowd picking up the remaining newcomers and shouting to one another:

"You'll take two, Annita?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Don't forget one for lame Margaret...."

A feeling of joyous excitement reigned, on all sides were beaming faces and moist kind eyes, and already some of the strikers' children were munching bread.

"No one thought of this in our time!" remarked an old man with a beak-like nose and a black cigar between his teeth.

"And how simple it is...."

"Yes. Simple and wise."

The old man removed the cigar from his mouth, glanced at its tip and sighed as he shook off the ash. Then noticing two little Parma children—brothers obviously—beside him, he assumed an expression of mock gravity, and with the kiddies staring gravely at him, pushed his hat over his eyes, spread out his arms and, as the boys backed away together scowling, suddenly squatted down and crowed like a rooster. The boys roared with laughter, stamping their bare soles on the cobbles; the man rose, righted his hat, and

feeling that he had done all that was required of him, strolled off swaying on his unsteady feet.

A humpbacked, grey-haired woman, with the face of a witch and wiry grey hairs sprouting on a bony chin, stood at the foot of the statue of Columbus and wept, wiping her reddened eyes with the end of her faded shawl. Dark and ugly, she looked strangely forlorn among the excited throng. . . .

A black-haired young Genoese woman came tripping along, leading by the hand a young man of about seven wearing wooden clogs and a grey hat so large that it reached down almost to his shoulders. He tossed his little head to shake the hat back from his eyes but it kept slipping forward onto his face until the woman swept it off and waved it high in the air, laughing and singing; his face wreathed in smiles the child threw back his head to look, then jumped up to catch the hat as both disappeared from view.

A tall man in a leather apron, with powerful bare arms carrying a little girl of six on his shoulder, a grey mousey little thing remarked to the woman walking beside him leading a small boy with flaming red hair:

"See what I mean? If this sort of thing takes root . . . it won't be easy to get the better of us, eh?"

And with a deep laugh of triumph he threw his little burden up into the blue air, crying: "Evviva Parma—a!"

The people gradually dispersed carrying or leading the children with them, until the square was empty of all save the crumpled flowers, candy wrappers, a group of jolly facchini and over them the noble figure of the man who discovered the New World.

And the happy shouts of the people going forward to a new life echoed through the streets like the fanfare of great trumpets.

III

The calm blue lake is set in a frame of tall mountains crested by eternal snows, the dark tracery of gardens undulates in luxurious folds down to the water's edge, white houses that seem built of sugar gaze into the water and the stillness is like the gentle slumber of a child.

It is morning. The scent of flowers is wafted sweetly from the hills. The sun has just risen, and the dewdrops still glisten on the leaves of the trees and the blades of grass. The road is a grey ribbon flung into the silent mountain gorge, the road is paved with stones yet it seems as if it must be soft as velvet to the touch.

Beside a heap of rubble sits a worker, as black as a beetle; his face expresses courage and kindliness and he wears a medal on his chest.

Resting his bronzed hands on his knees and raising his head, he looks up into the face of the passer-by standing under the chestnut tree.

"This medal, signor," he says, "is for my work on the Simplon tunnel."

And looking down he smiles gently at the shining piece of metal on his chest.

"Yes, all work is hard until it gets into your bones and you learn to love it, and then it stirs you and ceases to be hard. But, of course, it wasn't easy!"

He shook his head faintly, smiling at the sun; then, livening up suddenly, he waved his hand and his black eyes glistened.

"Sometimes it was a bit frightening. Even the earth must feel something, don't you think? When we burrowed deep inside, cutting a great gash into the mountain side the earth there within met us wrathfully. Its breath was hot, and our hearts sank, our heads grew heavy and our bones ached. Many have experienced the same thing! Then it hurled stones at us and doused us with hot water; that was awful! Sometimes when the light struck it, the water would turn red and my father would say that we had wounded the earth, and it would drown and scorch us all with its blood! That was sheer imagination, of course, but when you hear such talk deep down inside the earth, in the suffocating darkness with the water dripping mournfully and the iron grating against the stone, everything seems possible. It was all so fantastic there, signor; we men seemed so puny compared with that mountain that reached up to the clouds, the mountain into whose bowels we were drilling ... you have to see it to understand what I mean. You ought to have seen the yawning gap we little men had made in the mountain side, and when we would enter through the gap at

dawn the sun would look sadly after us as we burrowed into the earth's bowels, you ought to have seen the machines, the gloomy face of the mountain, heard the heavy rumble deep within and the echo of the explosions sounding like the laughter of a madman."

He examined his hands, touched the metal tab on his blue overall and sighed faintly.

"Men know how to work!" he continued with pride. "Ah, signor, man, small as he is, can be an invincible force when he wants to work. And, mark my words, the time will come when puny man will be able to do anything he wishes. My father didn't believe that at first.

" 'To cut through a mountain from one country to another,' he used to say, 'is defying God who divided land by walls of mountains, you'll see, the Madonna will forsake us!' He was mistaken, the Madonna never forsakes men who love her. Later on father came to think almost the same way as I have told you, because he felt bigger and stronger than the mountain, but there was a time when he would sit at table on feast days with a bottle of wine in front of him and lecture me and the others.

" 'Children of God,' that was one of his favourite expressions for he was a good, God-fearing man, 'children of God,' he would say, 'you can't fight the earth that way, she will take revenge for her wounds and will remain unvanquished! You will see: we shall bore our way right to the heart of the mountain and when we touch it, we shall be hurled into the flames, because the heart of the earth is fire, everyone knows that! To till the earth to help Nature with her birthpangs, that man is ordained to do, but we dare not disfigure her face or her form. See, the farther we bore into the mountain, the hotter the air and the harder it is to breathe. . . .' "

The man laughed softly, twirling his moustaches with his fingers.

"He wasn't the only one who thought thus, and indeed it was true: the farther we advanced into the tunnel, the hotter it grew, the more of us took ill and died. And the hot springs gushed in an ever more powerful stream, chunks of earth tore loose, and two of our men from Lugano went insane: At night in the barracks many would rave in delirium, groan and leap from their beds in a fit of horror. . . .

" 'Was I not right?' father said, with terror in his eyes and his cough grew worse and worse.... 'Was I not right?' he said. 'You can't defeat nature!'

"And finally he took to his bed never to rise again. He was a sturdy old man, my father, and he batt'ed with death for more than three weeks, stubbornly, uncomplainingly, like a man who knows his worth.

" 'My work is done, Paolo,' he said to me one night. 'Take care of yourself and go home, and may the Madonna be with you!' Then he was silent for a long time, and lay there breathing heavily with his eyes closed."

The man rose to his feet, glanced up at the mountains and stretched himse'f so that his sinews cracked.

"Then he took me by the hand and drew me close to him and said—God's truth, signor!—'Do you know, Paolo my son, I think that it will be accomplished just the same: We and those who are boring from the other side will meet within the mounta'n, we shall meet, you believe that, don't you Paolo?' Yes, I believed it. 'Very good, my son! That is well: a man must always believe in what he is doing, he must be confident of success and have faith in God who, thanks to the Madonna's prayers helps good works. I beseech you, son, if it should happen, if the men meet inside the mountain come to my grave and say: Father it is done! Then I shall know!'

"It was good, signor, and I promised him. He died five days later. Two days before his death he asked me and the others to bury him on the spot where he had worked inside the tunnel, he begged us to do it, but I think he must have been raving.

"We and those others who were moving toward us from the other side met in the mountain thirteen weeks after my father's death. That was a mad day, signor! Oh, when we heard there underground in the darkness the sounds of that other work, the sounds made by those coming to meet us in the bowels of the earth, you understand, signor, beneath the tremendous weight of the earth that could have crushed us little men, all of us with one blow!

"For many days we heard these sounds, hollow sounds that grew louder and more distinct each day, and the wild joy of victors possessed us, we worked like fiends, like evil spirits, and felt no weariness, needed no urging. Ah, it was good, like dancing on

a sunny day, it was, I swear to you! And we all became as kind and gentle as children. Ah, if you but knew how powerful, how passionate is the desire to meet other men in the darkness underground where you have been burrowing like a mole for many long months!"

His face flushed with excitement at the recollection, he came closer and gazing deeply with his profoundly human eyes into those of his listener, he continued in a soft, happy voice:

"And when finally the last intervening layer of earth crumbled and the bright yellow flame of the torch lit up the opening and we saw a black face streaming with tears of joy and more torches and faces behind it, shouts of victory thundered, shouts of joy—oh, that was the happiest day of my life, and when I recall it I feel that my life has not been in vain! That was work, my work, holy work, signor, I tell you! And when we emerged into the sunlight many of us fell to the ground and pressed our lips to it, weeping; it was as wonderful as a fairy tale! Yes, we kissed the vanquished mountain, kissed the earth; and that day I felt closer to the earth than I had ever been, signor, I loved it as one loves a woman!

"Of course, I went to my father's grave. I know that the dead cannot hear anything, but I went just the same, for one must respect the wishes of those who laboured for us and who suffered no less than we did, is that not so?

"Yes, yes, I went to his grave, knocked at the earth with my foot and said as he had bade me:

"'Father, it is done!' I said. 'Man has conquered. It is done, father!'"

IV

At a small station between Rome and Genoa the conductor opened the door of our compartment and with the aid of a grimy oiler almost carried in a one-eyed little old man.

"Terribly old!" they chorussed, smiling good-naturedly.

But the old man turned out to be quite vigorous. Thanking his assistants with a wave of his wrinkled hand, he raised his battered hat from his hoary head with an air of polite affability and glancing sharply at the benches with his one eye enquired:

"Permit me?"

The passengers moved up and he sat down with a sigh of relief, resting his hands on his bony knees, his lips parted in a good-natured toothless smile.

"Travelling far, granpa?" my companion asked him.

"Oh no, only three stations from here!" was the old one's ready reply. "I'm going to my grandson's wedding. . . ."

A few minutes later to the accompaniment of the rhythmic beat of the wheels he was telling us his story, swaying from side to side like a broken branch on a stormy day.

"I'm a Ligurian," he said, "we Ligurians are a sturdy lot. Take me, I've got thirteen sons, and four daughters and I don't know how many grandchildren. This is the second to get married. Pretty good, eh?"

And proudly surveying us all with his single eye, dimmed yet merry still, he chuckled.

"See how many people I've given my king and country!"

"How did I lose my eye? Ah, that happened a long time ago. I was just a bit of a lad then. I was already helping my father though. He was turning the soil in the vineyard. The soil down our way is hard and stony and needs a deal of attention. A stone flew up from under my father's pickaxe and hit me right in the eye. I don't remember the pain now, but that day while I was eating my dinner my eye fell out. That was awful, signori! They stuck it back and put a warm bread poultice on but it was no use, the eye was gone!"

The old man vigorously rubbed his sallow flabby cheek and again smiled his good-humored gay smile.

"In those days there weren't as many doctors as there are now and people lived foolishly. Oh yes. But perhaps they were kinder, eh?"

Now his one-eyed, leathery face covered with deep furrows and greenish-grey mouldy-looking hair, took on a cunning, sly expression.

"When you've lived as long as I have you can judge people rightly, don't you think so?"

He raised a dark, crooked finger gravely as though reproving someone.

"I'll tell you something, signori, about people. . . ."

"I was thirteen when my father died, and was smaller even than I am now. But I was spry and tireless when it came to work. That was all I inherited from my father, for our plot of land and the house were sold to cover our debts. And so I lived with my one eye and my two hands working wherever there was work to be found. . . . It was hard, but youth is not afraid of hardships, is it?

"When I was nineteen I met the girl whom I was fated to love. She was as poor as I was, but she was a strapping girl and stronger than me. She lived with her old invalid mother and like myself did whatever work came her way. She wasn't especially handsome but she was kind and had a good head on her shoulders. And a fine voice, too. Ah, how she could sing! Just like a professional. And a good voice is worth a great deal. I used to sing quite well myself.

"'Shall we get married?' I asked her one day.

"'That would be foolish, one-eyed one!' she replied sadly. 'Neither you nor I have anything. How should we live?'

"That was God's truth: neither she nor I possessed anything. But what does a young couple in love need? You know yourselves how little love requires, I insisted and won my point.

"'Well, perhaps you're right,' said Ida at last. 'If the Holy Mother helps you and me now that we live apart it will be so much easier for her to help us when we live together!'

"And so we went to the priest.

"'This is madness!' he said. 'Are there not enough beggars in Liguria as it is? Unhappy people, you are the devil's playthings, resist his temptations or you will pay dearly for your weakness!'

"The young folk in the community laughed at us, the old folk censured us. But youth is stubborn and wise in its own way! The wedding day arrived, we were no richer on that day than before and we did not even know where we would lay us down to sleep on our wedding night.

"'Let us go to the fields!' said Ida. 'Why not? The mother of God is kind to people wherever they may be.'

"And so we decided—let the earth be our bed and the sky our counterpane.

"And now begins another story, signori. I beg your attention, for this is the best story in all my long life!

"Early in the morning the day before our wedding, old Giovanni for whom I had done a good deal of work said to me, muttering under his breath because he disliked to speak of such trifles:

" 'You ought to clean out the old sheep pen, Ugo. Put in some clean straw. It's dry and the sheep haven't been there for more than a year, but you'd best clean it out if you and Ida want to live in it.'

"And there was our house!

"As I was busy cleaning out the sheep pen, singing at my work, I looked up to see Costanzo, the carpenter, standing in the doorway.

" 'So this is where you and Ida are going to live? But where is your bed? I have an extra one at my place. Come over and get it when you've finished cleaning.'

"As I was going to him, Maria, the shrewish shopkeeper shouted:

" 'Getting married, the fools, with not a sheet nor a pillow to their name! You are crazy, one-eyed one, but send your bride to me. . . .'

"And lame, Ettore Viano tortured by rheumatism and fever, cried out to her from his doorstep:

" 'Ask him how much wine he has put by for the guests? Ah, how can people be so thoughtless!' "

A bright tear glistened in one of the deep folds on the old man's cheek, he threw back his head and laughed soundlessly, his bony Adam's apple working and his loose skin trembling.

"Oh, signori, signori," he was choking with laughter and waving his hands in childish glee. "On the morning of our wedding day we had everything we needed for our home—a statue of the Madonna, dishes, linen, furniture, everything, I swear to you! Ida laughed and wept, I too, and everyone else laughed—for it is bad to weep on a wedding day, and all our own folks laughed at us!

"Signori! It is damned fine to have the right to call people your own. And even better to feel them your own, near and dear to you, people, who do not regard your life as a trifle and your happiness a plaything!

"And what a wedding it was! What a day! The whole community attended the ceremony, and everyone came to our stable which

had all at once become a rich mansion.... We had everything! Wine and fruit, meat and bread, and everyone ate and everyone was gay.... That, signori, is because there is no greater happiness than to do good to people, believe me, there is nothing finer and more beautiful than that!

"And the priest came too. He made a fine speech. 'Here,' he said, 'are two people who have worked for all of you, and you have done what you could to make this day the best in their lives. And that is as it should be for they have worked for you, and work is more important than copper and silver money, work is always more important than the remuneration you receive for it! Money goes but work remains.... These people are gay and modest, their life has been hard yet they did not complain, their lives will be harder still and still they will not grumble, you will help them in their hour of need. They have good hands and stout hearts.'

"And he said many flattering things to me, Ida and the whole community!"

The old man surveyed us all with an eye that had regained its lost youth:

"There, signori, I have told you something about people. It was good was it not?"

V

Let us raise our voices in praise of woman, the Mother, inexhaustible fount of all-conquering life!

This is the tale of the flint-hearted Timur-i-leng, the lame panther, of Sakhim-i-Kirani, the lucky conqueror, of Tamerlane, as he was called by the infidels, of the man who sought to destroy the whole world.

For fifty years he trampled the earth, his iron heel crushing cities and states as the foot of an elephant crushes an anthill; red rivers of blood flowed in his wake in all directions; he built tall towers out of the bones of vanquished peoples, he destroyed life, pitting his power against the power of Death, for he was avenging the death of his son Jigangir. A ghastly man, he wished to rob Death of all her spoils so that she might expire from hunger and despair!

From the day when his son Jigangir died and the people of Samarkand, garbed in black and blue raiment and sprinkling their heads with dust and ashes, met the conqueror of the evil Juts, from that day until the hour of his encounter with Death in Ottrarre, where she overpowered him at last, Timur did not smile. He lived thus with lips compressed, his head unbowed and his heart locked against compassion—for thirty years!

Let us sing the praises of woman, the Mother, the sole force before which Death humbly bows her head! Let here be told the truth about Mother, how Death's servant and slave, the stony-hearted Tamerlane, the sanguinary scourge of the earth, bowed his head to her.

It came about thus: Timur-bek was feasting in the lovely valley of Canigula wreathed in clouds of roses and jasmine, the valley Samarkand poets named "Vale of Flowers" whence the blue minarets of the great city, the blue cupolas of the mosques are visible.

Fifteen thousand circular tents were spread out fanwise in the valley like fifteen thousand tulips and over each tent hundreds of silken pennants fluttered in the breeze like flowers.

And in the centre stood the tent of Gurugan Timur, like a queen among her train. It was four-cornered, each side one hundred paces in length, three spears in height, the centre was supported by twelve golden columns each as thick as a man; atop rested a pale blue cupola while the sides were of black, yellow and blue striped silk; five hundred scarlet cords kept it fixed firmly to the ground so that it might not rise into the sky, four silver eagles stood at its corners; and under the cupola on a dais in the centre of the tent sat the fifth, the invincible Timur-Gurugan, the king of kings, himself.

He was garbed in a flowing silken robe of a celestial hue studded with pearls, five thousand large pearls no less. On his terrible hoary brow sat a white peaked cap with a ruby on the tip that swayed to and fro like a bloodshot eye surveying the world.

The face of the Lame One was like a broad-bladed knife, rusty from the blood into which it had been immersed thousands of times; his eyes were narrow slits that missed nothing, and their glitter was like the cold glitter of the zaramut, favourite gem of the Arabs which the infidels call emerald and which cures the falling sick-

ness. And from his ears suspended earings of Ceylon rubies, the colour of a lovely maiden's lips.

On the floor of the tent on carpets of unsurpassed beauty stood three hundred golden jugs of wine and everything meet for a kingly feast; behind Timur sat the musicians, beside him no one, and at his feet, his kinsmen, kings and princes and chieftains and closest to him of all drunken Kermani, the poet, who, when the destroyer of the world once asked him:

"Kirmani! How much wouldst thou give for me, were I to be sold?" had replied: "Twenty-five askers."

"But my belt alone is worth as much!" Timur had exclaimed in amazement.

"It is of thy belt that I was thinking," replied Kirmani, "only of thy belt, for thou thyself art not worth a farthing!"

So spake Kermani, the poet, to the king of kings, the man of horror and evil, and may the glory of the poet, friend of truth, be ever exalted above the glory of Tamerlane!

Let us sing the praises of poets who know but one God, the fearless, beautiful word of truth. That is their God forever!

And so in the hour when the revelry and feasting, the proud reminiscences of battles and victories, were at their height, in the midst of the loud music and the popular games played in front of the king's tent, where innumerable piebald jesters bounded up and down, where athletes were wrestling and tight-rope walkers went through such contortions that one would think there was not a bone in their bodies, and warriors crossed swords exhibiting peerless skill in the art of killing, and performances were given with elephants painted red and green which made some appear frightful and others ridiculous—at that hour of rejoicing among Timur's men, who were intoxicated with fear of him, with pride in his glory, with weariness of victories, with wine and koumiss—at that wild hour, suddenly cutting through the hubbub, like a streak of lightning through a thunder-cloud, the cry of a woman, the proud cry of a she-eagle, a sound familiar and in harmony with his wounded soul, the soul wounded by Death and hence cruel toward living men, reached the ears of Sultan Bayezid's conqueror.

He ordered his men to see who it was that had cried out in joyless voice, and he was told that a woman, a mad creature in

dust and rags, had come and, speaking the language of the Arabs was demanding, yes demanding, to see him, the ruler of three cardinal points of the earth.

"Bring her in!" said the king.

And so before him stood a woman. She was barefoot and her tattered clothing had faded in the sun, her black tresses were loosened so that they covered her bare breast, her face was the colour of bronze and her eyes imperious, and her dark hand outstretched toward the Lame One did not tremble.

"Is it thou hast vanquished Su'tan Bayezid?" she demanded.

"Yes, I have defeated many besides, and am not yet weary of conquests. And what saith thou of thyself, woman?"

"Hear me!" said she. "Whatever thou hast done, thou art but a man. I am a Mother! Thou servest death, I serve life. Thou hast sinned against me and so I have come to demand that thou atone for thy guilt. I have been told that thy device is 'in justice lies strength,' I do not believe it, but to me thou must be just, for I am a Mother!"

The king had wisdom enough to feel the power behind these bold words.

"Sit down and speak. I would listen to thee!"

She seated herself at her convenience upon the carpet amid the intimate circle of kings and began her tale:

"I am from the region of Salerno, far away in Italy, thou knowest not those parts! My father was a fisherman, my husband too, he was as beautiful as only happy men are and it was I who gave him happiness! I had a son, the finest lad in the world. . . ."

"Like my Jigangir," the old warrior murmured.

"The handsomest and the cleverest lad is my son! He was six years old when the Saracen pirates landed on our coast. They slew my father and my husband and many others, and they carried off my boy and for four years now I have been searching the earth for him. Now thou hast him. This I know, for Bayezid's men captured the pirates, and thou hast conquered Bayezid and taken all his possessions. Thou must know where my son is and give him back to me!"

Everyone laughed and the kings, who always consider themselves to be wise, said:

"She is mad!" said the kings and the friends of Timur, the princes and chieftains, and they laughed.

Only Kirmani gazed at the woman gravely and Tamerlane looked at her in great wonder.

"She is mad as a Mother is mad," the drunken poet Kirmani said softly; and the king, the enemy of peace, said:

"Woman! How hast thou come hither from that unknown land across the seas, the rivers and mountains, through woods and forests? How is it that beasts and men—often more savage than the most savage of beasts—have not moles'ed thee, how couldst thou have wandered alone without a weapon which is the only friend of the defenceless and which will not betray him so long as he has strength to wield it? I must know this in order that I might believe thee and that my wonder might not prevent me from understanding what thou sayest!"

Let us sing the praises of woman, the Mother, whose love knows no obstacles, whose breast has nurtured the whole world! All that is beautiful in man, is derived from the sun's rays and from his Mother's milk. This it is that imbues us with love of life!

"I encountered but one sea in my wanderings," she replied. "There were many islands and fishing boats on it, and when one seeks a loved one the winds are always with one. And for one who has been born and brought up on the seashore it is no hardship to swim rivers. Mountains? I did not notice them."

And the drunken Kirmani said gaily:

"A mountain becomes a valley to one who loves!"

"There were forests, yes. I encountered wild boars, bears, lynxes and fearful bul's with their heads bent low and twice panthers looked at me with eyes like thine own. But every animal has a heart, and I spoke with them as I speak with thee, they believed me when I said I was a Mother, and they went their way sighing, for they pitied me! Knowest thou not that the beasts too love their children and know how to fight for their lives and freedom no worse than men?"

"Well said, woman," said Timur. "And often, this I know, they love more strongly and fight more stubbornly than men!"

"Men," she continued, like a child, for every Mother is a child a hundredfold at heart, "men are always children to their mothers, for every man has a Mother, every man is some mother's son.

even thou, old man, wast born of woman, thou canst deny God. but this thou canst never deny!"

"Well said, woman!" exclaimed Kirmani, the fearless poet. "Well said! From a herd of bullocks there will be no calves, without the sun flowers will not bloom, without love there is no happiness, without woman there is no love, without Mothers, there are neither poets nor heroes!"

And the woman said:

"Give me back my child for I am his Mother and I love him!"

Let us bow to woman, who bore Moses, Mohammed and the great prophet Jesus who was put to death by evil men, but who, as Sherifu 'd-Din hath said, shall rise again and bring judgment upon the living and the dead, and this shall come to pass in Damascus, in Damascus!

Let us bow to Her who tirelessly gives birth to the great! Aristotle is Her son, and Firdusi, and Saadi, as sweet as honey, and Omar Khayyam, like unto wine mixed with poison. Iskander and the blind Homer—these are all Her children, all of them imbibed her milk and She led each one of them into the world by the hand when they were no bigger than tulips. All the pride of the world comes from Mothers!

And the hoary destroyer of cities, the lame tiger Timur-Gurugan sat sunk in thought. After a long silence he said to those gathered about him:

"Men tangri Kuli Timur! I, God's servant Timur, do say what must be said! Thus I have lived, for many years the earth has groaned beneath my feet, and for thirty years I have been destroying it in order to avenge the death of my son Jigangir, for extinguishing the sun of life in my heart! Men have fought against me for kingdoms and cities, but never has anyone fought me for man, and never has man had any value in my sight, and I did not know who he was and why he stood in my path! It is I, Timur, who said to Bayezid when I defeated him: 'Oh, Bayezid, it must be that before God countries and men are as nothing, for behold, he suffers them to be possessed by such as we: thou, one-eyed and I, lame!' So spake I to him when he was brought to me in chains and could barely stand under their weight, so spake I, gazing upon

him in misfortune and life at that moment was to me as bitter as wormwood, the weed of ruins!

"I, God's servant Timur, say what must be said! Here before me sits a woman, one of myriads, and she has awakened in my soul feelings such as I have never known. She speaks to me as to an equal, and she does not beg, she demands. And I see now, I understand why this woman is so strong—she loves, and love has taught her that her child is the spark of life which can kindle a flame for many centuries. Were not all the prophets children too, and were not all the heroes weak? O, Jigangir, light of mine eyes, perhaps thou wert destined to kindle the earth, to sow it with happiness. I, thy father, have drenched it with blood and it has grown fat!"

Once again the scourge of the nations lapsed into silence, then at last he spoke again:

"I, God's servant Timur, speak that which must be spoken! Three hundred horsemen shall set out at once to all corners of my land and they shall find the son of this woman and she shall wait here, and I shall wait with her: he who returns with the child in his saddle good fortune shall be his —It is I Timur who speaks. Have I spoken well, woman?"

She tossed her black hair back from her face, smiled to him and replied:

"Thou hast, king!"

Then rose this terrible old man and in silence bowed to her, and the merry poet Kirmani spake up with great rejoicing:

What is more beautiful than the song of flowers and stars?
The answer all men know: 'tis the song of love!
What is more beauteous than the sunlight at noon in May?
The lover replies: She whom I love!
Ah, beautiful are the stars in the midnight sky,
And beautiful the sun on a summer's noontide,
But the eyes of my loved one are lovelier than all the flowers,
And her smile is more gentle than the sun's rays.
But the song most beautiful of all is yet to be sung,
The song of the beginning of all things on earth,
The song of the world's heart, of the magic heart,
Of her whom on earth we call Mother!

And Timur said to his poet:

"So Kirmani! God was not mistaken when he chose thy lips to extol his wisdom!"

"God is himself a great poet!" spake the drunken Kirmani.

And the woman smiled and all the kings smiled and the princes, and the chieftains smiled, they were all children as they gazed upon her—upon Mother!

All this is true; every word spoken here is the truth, our mothers know it to be so, ask them and they will tell you:

"Yes, all this is the eternal truth, we are stronger than death, we who are forever bringing into the world sages, poets and heroes, we who imbue man with all that makes him glorious!"

VI

One can talk endlessly about Mothers.

For several weeks enemy hosts had encased the city in a tight ring of steel; by night bonfires were lit and the flames peered through the inky blackness at the walls of the city like a myriad of red eyes—they blazed malevolently, and their warning glare evoked gloomy thoughts within the beleaguered city.

From the walls they saw the enemy noose draw tighter: saw the dark shadows hovering about the fires, and heard the neighing of well-fed horses, the clanging of weapons, the loud laughter and singing of men confident of victory—and what can be more jarring to the ear than the songs and laughter of the enemy?

The enemy had thrown corpses into all the streams that fed water to the city, he had burned down the vineyards around the walls, trampled the fields, cut down the orchards—the city was now exposed on all sides, and nearly every day the cannon and muskets of the enemy showered it with lead and iron.

Detachments of war-weary, half-starved soldiers trooped sullenly through the narrow streets of the city; from the windows of houses issued the groans of the wounded, the cries of the delirious, the prayers of women and the wailing of children. People conversed in whispers, breaking off in the middle of a sentence, tensely alert: was that not the enemy advancing?

Worst of all were the nights; in the nocturnal stillness the groans and cries were more distinctly audible; black shadows crept stealthily from the gorges of the distant mountains toward the half demolished walls, hiding the enemy camp from view, and over the black ridges of the mountains rose the moon like a lost shield dented by sword blows.

And the people in the city, despairing of succour, worn out by toil and hunger, their hope of salvation waning from day to day, the people in the city stared in horror at that moon, at the sharp-toothed ridges of the mountains, the black maws of the gorges and at the noisy camp of the enemy. Everything reminded them of death, and not a star was there in the sky to give them consolation.

They were afraid to light the lamps in the houses, and a heavy darkness enveloped the streets, and in this darkness, like a fish stirring in the depths of a river, a woman draped from head to foot in a black cloak moved soundlessly.

When they saw her, people whispered to one another:

"Is it she?"

"It is she!"

And they withdrew into the niches under archways, or hurried past her with lowered heads. The patrol chiefs warned her sternly:

"Abroad again, Donna Marianna? Take care, someone may kill you and none shall hasten to apprehend your assailant. . . ."

She drew herself up and stood waiting, but the patrols passed by, either not daring or else scorning to raise their hand against her; the armed men avoided her like a corpse, and, left alone in the darkness, she continued her solitary wanderings from street to street, soundless and black like the incarnation of the city's misfortune, while all about her, as though pursuing her, melancholy sounds issued from the night: the groans, cries, prayers and the sullen murmur of soldiers who had lost all hope of victory.

A citizen and a mother, she thought of her son and her country: for leading the men who were destroying her town was her son—handsome, gay and ruthless; and yet, not so long ago she had looked upon him with pride, regarding him as her precious gift to her country, a beneficent force she had brought forth to aid the city folk, the nest where she herself had been born, where her

son had been born and reared. Her heart was bound by hundreds of invisible threads to these ancient stones with which her forefathers had built their homes and raised the walls of the city; to the soil wherein lay buried the bones of her kinsmen, to the legends, the songs and the hopes of the people. And now this heart had lost a loved one and it wept. She weighed in her heart as on scales her love for her son and her love for her native city, and she could not tell which weighed the more.

And so she wandered thus by night through the streets, and many, failing to recognize her, drew back in fear, mistaking her black figure for the incarnation of Death that was so near to all of them, and when they did recognize her, they turned silently away from the mother of a traitor.

But one day in a remote corner by the city wall she saw another woman kneeling beside a corpse; motionless, like a clod of earth, the woman was praying, her grief-stricken face upturned to the stars. And on the wall overhead the sentries spoke in low tones, their weapons grating against the stone.

The traitor's mother asked:

"Your husband?"

"No."

"Your brother?"

"My son. My husband was killed thirteen days ago, my son today."

And rising from her knees, the mother of the slain man said humbly:

"The Madonna sees all and knows all, and I am grateful to her!"

"What for?" asked the first, and the other replied:

"Now that he has died honourably fighting for his country I can say that I feared for him: he was lighthearted, too fond of revelry and I feared that he might betray his city, as did the son of Marianna, the enemy of God and Man, the leader of our foes, may he be accursed and the womb that bore him!"

Marianna covered her face and went on her way. The next morning she appeared before the city's defenders and said:

"My son has come to be your enemy. Either kill me or open the gates that I may go to him. . . ."

They replied:

"You are a human being, and your country must be precious to you; your son is as much an enemy to you as to each one of us."

"I am his mother, I love him and feel that I am to blame for what he has become!"

Then they took counsel with one another and decided:

"It would not be honourable to kill you for the sins of your son. We know that you could not have led him to commit this terrible sin, and we can understand your distress. But the city does not need you even as a hostage: your son cares nought for you, we believe that he has forgotten you, fiend that he is, and there is your punishment if you think you have deserved it! We believe that is more terrible than death itself!"

"Yes," she said. "It is indeed more terrible."

And so they opened the gates and suffered her to leave the city and watched long from the battlements as she departed from her native soil now drenched with the blood her son had spilt so copiously. She walked slowly, for her feet were reluctant to tear themselves away from this soil, and she bowed to the corpses of the city's defenders, kicking aside a broken weapon in disgust, for all aggressive weapons are revolting to mothers: they recognize only those used to protect life.

She walked as though she carried a precious phial of water beneath her cloak and feared to spill a drop; and as her figure grew smaller and smaller to those who watched from the city wall, it seemed to them that with her went their dejection and hopelessness.

They saw her pause halfway and throwing back the hood of her cloak turn back and gaze long at the city. And over in the enemy's camp they saw her alone in the field and figures dark as her own approached her cautiously. Approached and enquired who she was and whence she had come.

"Your leader is my son," she said, and not one of the soldiers doubted it. They fell in beside her singing his praises, saying how clever and brave he was, and she listened to them with head proudly raised, showing no surprise, for her son could not be otherwise.

And now, at last, she stood before him whom she had known nine months before his birth, him whom she had never felt apart from her own heart. In silk and velvet he stood before her, his

weapons studded with precious stones. All was as it should be, thus had she seen him so many times in her dreams—rich, famous and admired.

"Mother!" he said, kissing her hands. "Thou hast come to me, thou art with me, and tomorrow I shall capture that accursed city!"

"The city where thou wert born," she reminded him.

Intoxicated with his prowess, crazed with the thirst for more glory, he answered her with the arrogant heat of youth:

"I was born into the world and for the world, and I mean to make the world quake with wonder of me! I have spared this city for thy sake, it has been like a thorn in my flesh and has retarded my swift rise to fame. But now tomorrow I shall smash that nest of obstinate fools!"

"Where every stone knows and remembers thee as a child," she said.

"Stones are dumb, unless man makes them speak. Let the mountains speak of me, that is what I wish!"

"And what of men?" she asked.

"Ah yes, I have not forgotten them, mother. I need them too, for only in man's memory are heroes immortal!"

She said:

"A hero is he who creates life in defiance of death, who conquers death. . . ."

"No!" he objected. "The destroyer is as glorious as the builder of a city. See, we do not know who it was that built Rome—Aeneas or Romulus—yet we know well the name of Alaric and the other heroes who destroyed the city. . . ."

"Which outlived all names," the mother reminded him.

Thus they conversed until the sun sank to rest; less and less frequently did she interrupt his wild speech, lower and lower sank her proud head.

A Mother creates, she protects, and to speak to her of destruction means to speak against her; but he did not know it, he did not know that he was negating her reason for existence.

A Mother is always opposed to death; the hand that brings death into the dwellings of men, is hateful and hostile to Mothers. But the son did not perceive this, for he was blinded by the chilly glitter of glory that deadens the heart.

Nor did he know that a Mother is as clever and ruthless a creature as she is fearless when the life she creates and cherishes is in question.

She sat with bowed head, and through the opening in the leader's richly appointed tent she saw the city where first she had felt the sweet tremor of life within her and the anguished convulsions of the birth of this child who now sought to destroy.

The crimson rays of the sun dyed the walls and towers of the city blood-red, cast a baleful glare on the windowpanes so that the whole city seemed to be a mass of wounds with the crimson sap of life flowing from each gash. Presently the city turned black as a corpse and the stars shone above it like funeral candles.

She saw the dark houses where people feared to light candles so as not to attract the attention of the enemy, saw the streets steeped in gloom and rank with the stench of corpses, heard the muffled whispers of people awaiting death—she saw all and everything; so near and dear to her it stood there, dumbly awaiting her decision, and she felt herself the mother of all those people in her city.

Clouds descended from the black peaks into the valley and like winged steeds swooped down upon the doomed city.

"Perhaps we shall attack tonight," said her son, "if the night is dark enough! It is hard to kill when the sun shines in your eyes and the glitter of the weapons blinds you, many a blow goes awry," he remarked, examining his sword.

The mother said to him:

"Come, my son, lay thy head on my breast and rest, remember how gay and kind thou wert as a child, and how everyone loved thee. . . ."

He obeyed her, laid his head in her lap and closed his eyes, saying:

"I love only glory and thee for having made me as I am."

"And women?" she asked bending over him.

"They are many, one tires of them as of everything that is too sweet."

"And dost thou not desire children?" she asked for the last time.

"What for? That they might be killed? Someone like me will kill them; that will give me pain and I shall be too old and feeble to avenge them."

"Thou art handsome, but as barren as a streak of lightning," she said with a sigh.

"Yes, like lightning . . ." he replied, smiling.

And he dozed there on his mother's breast like a child.

Then, covering him with her black cloak, she plunged a knife into his heart, and with a shudder he died, for who knew better than she where beat her son's heart. And, throwing his corpse at the feet of the astonished sentries, she said addressing the city:

"As a Citizen, I have done for my country all I could: as a Mother I remain with my son! It is too late for me to bear another, my life is of no use to anyone."

And the knife, still warm with his blood, her blood, she plunged with a firm hand into her own breast, and again she struck true, for an aching heart is not hard to find.

VII

The cicadas are humming.

It is as if thousands of metal strings were stretched taut among the thick foliage of the olive trees, the wind stirs the tough leaves, they touch the strings and this light, ceaseless contact fills the air with intoxicating sound. It is not exactly music, yet it seems as if invisible hands were tuning hundreds of invisible harps, and one waits in tense expectancy for the tuning to cease, and for a grand string orchestra to strike up a triumphant hymn to the sun, sky and sea.

The wind blows, swaying the trees so that their waving crowns seem to be moving from the mountains down to the sea. The surf beats dully and rhythmically against the rocky shore; the sea is a mass of living, white daubs of foam looking like great flocks of birds that have settled on its blue expanse; they all float in one direction, then disappear into the depths only to rise again with a faintly audible sound. And as though luring them away in their wake, two boats, their triple sails raised high, bob up and down on the horizon, like two grey birds themselves; the whole scene is as unreal as a distant, half-forgotten dream.

"There'll be a stiff gale by sundown!" says an old fisherman, sitting in the shadow of the rocks on the small pebbled beach.

Fragrant seaweed, rust-coloured, golden-hued and green, washed up by the tide is spread out on the pebbles; the seaweed withers on the hot stones under the blazing sun filling the salty air with the tangy scent of iodine. Curly wavelets chase one another up the beach.

The old fisherman resembles a bird with his small wizened face, his hooked nose and the round and doubtless very sharp eyes hidden amid the dark folds of the skin. His gnarled, withered fingers lie motionless on his knees.

"About half a hundred years ago, signor," says the old man, in a voice that harmonizes with the murmur of the waves and the hum of the cicadas, "I remember just such a bright and glorious day, when everything seems to laugh and sing. My father then was about forty, I was sixteen and in love, as is only natural for a lad of sixteen under the beneficent sun to be.

"'Come, Guido,' said my father, 'Let us go out for some pezzoni'; pezzoni, signor, is a very delicate tasty fish with pink fins, it is also known as coral fish because you find it deep down among the coral reefs. You catch it standing at anchor with a heavily weighted hook. A handsome fish.

"And so we set off anticipating nothing but a successful catch. My father was a strong man and an experienced fisherman, but shortly before this trip he had been ill, his chest had ached and his fingers were twisted with rheumatism, the fisherman's disease.

"This is a very treacherous and evil wind that is blowing now so caressingly upon us from the shore, as if gently impelling us toward the sea: out there it comes upon you unawares and suddenly hurls itself at you, as if you had done it an injury. It sends your barque flying, sometimes keel upwards with you in the water. It happens in a jiffy and before you have time to curse or to utter God's name you are sent swirling helplessly into the distance. A robber is more honest than that wind. But then men are always more honest than the elements.

"Well, it was just such a wind that struck us four kilometres from the shore, quite close by, as you see. It took us by surprise like a coward and a scoundrel.

"'Guido!' cried my father, seizing hold of the oar with his twisted hands. 'Hold on, Guido! Quick, the anchor!'

"But while I was fumbling for the anchor, the wind tore the oar out of my father's hand knocking him a blow on the chest that sent him reeling unconscious to the bottom of the boat. I had no time to help him for every second threatened to consign us to the waves. At first everything happened very quickly: by the time I took up the oars we were being swept along, with the spray surrounding us on all sides, as the wind picked the crests off the waves and sprinkled us like the priest does, only with a great deal more energy and not in order to wash away our sins.

" 'This is serious, my son!' said father regaining consciousness. He looked out toward the shore. 'This is going to last a long time, my boy,' he said.

"When you are young you do not easily believe in danger; I tried to row and did everything that a sailor must do at critical moments at sea with the wind, the breath of wicked devils, busy digging a thousand graves for you, and singing your requiem free of charge.

" 'Calm yourself, Guido,' said my father, smiling and shaking the water from his head. 'What use is it to pick at the sea with matchsticks? Save your strength or else the folks at home will await you in vain.'

"The green waves tossed our little craft as children toss a ball, they climbed over the sides, rose above our heads, roaring and shaking us madly, we dropped down into yawning pits, then climbed to the top of tall white peaks, and the shore sped swiftly farther and farther away and seemed to be dancing along with our barque.

" 'You may return but I shall not!' my father said to me. 'Listen and I shall tell you what you should know about fishing and work. . . .'

"And he began to tell me all he knew about the habits of one or another fish, where, when and how best to catch them.

" 'Had we not better pray, father!' I suggested when I saw how bad our plight was; we were like a couple of rabbits among a pack of white hounds that were baring their fangs at us from all sides.

" 'God sees all!' said he. 'He knows that men whom he created to dwell on land are now perishing at sea and that one of them, having lost hope of salvation, must bequeath to his son all the

knowledge he possesses. Work is necessary for the earth and for men. God understands that. . . .'

"And when he had imparted to me all he knew about his craft, he told me what a man must know in order to live in peace with his fellow men.

" 'Is this the time to teach me?' I said. 'On land you did not do it!'

" 'On land death was never so close.'

"The wind howled like a wild beast, and the waves roared so loud that father had to shout for me to hear him.

" 'Always behave as if you were neither worse nor better than your fellow men, and you will be all right! The nobleman and the fisherman, the priest and the soldier are part of the same organism and you are as necessary a part of that organism as all the others. Never approach a man thinking that there is more bad than good in him, believe that there is more good in him and you will always find it to be so. Men behave as one expects them to.'

"He did not say this all at once, of course. His words came to me through the spray and foam as we tossed from wave to wave, now plunging deep down, now climbing high up. Much of what he said was carried away by the wind before it reached me, much I did not understand, for, signor, how can one learn with death staring one in the face? I was afraid, I had never before seen the sea in such a fury or felt so helpless on it. And I cannot say whether it was then or later on when I remembered those hours that I experienced a sensation I shall never forget as long as I live.

"I can see my father, as if it were yesterday, sitting at the bottom of the boat, his poor arms outstretched as he clung to the sides with his crooked, twisted fingers; his hat had been washed away and the waves struck against his head and his shoulders now from the right, now from the left, in front and behind, and each time he would toss his head, snort and shout to me. Drenched to the skin, he seemed to have shrunken in size and his eyes were large with fear, or perhaps with pain. With pain, I suppose.

" 'Hark!' he would cry. 'Do you hear me?'

"Sometimes I would answer:

" 'I hear you!'

"'Remember, all good comes from man.'

"'I shall remember!' I would reply.

"Never had he spoken thus to me on land. He had always been gay and kind but I had felt that he regarded me with amusement and distrust and that I was still a child to him. Sometimes this offended me, for youth is easily wounded.

"His shouts allayed my fear, perhaps that is why I remember everything so vividly."

The old fisherman fell silent, his eyes fixed on the foamy sea. Then he smiled and went on with a wink:

"I have observed people for many years, signor, and I know that remembering is the same as understanding, and the more you understand the more good you see, that's the truth, believe me!

"There, I can remember his dear face, all wet and the big staring eyes looking at me gravely and lovingly and in such a way that I knew then I was not destined to die that day. I was afraid but I knew I would not perish.

"Finally, of course, we capsized. There we were both in the seething water, with the foam blinding us, the waves hurling our bodies about, dashing them against the keel of the boat. We had lashed to the thwarts everything that could be tied, in our hands we held the ropes, we would not be cast away from our barque so long as we had the strength to hold on, but it was hard to keep our heads above water. Several times he and I were thrown against the keel and washed off again. The worst of it is that your head swims, you are deafened and blinded, your ears fill with water, and you swallow great quantities of it.

"This lasted for a long time, about seven hours, until the wind suddenly turned, blowing strongly shoreward, and we were carried swiftly toward the land.

"'Hold on!' I cried joyfully.

Father shouted something back but I heard only one word:

"'... dashed....'

"He meant the rocks, but they were still far off and I did not believe him. But he knew better than I, we were borne along numb and helpless amid the mountains of water, clinging like snails to our boat which knocked us about unmercifully. This went on for a long while but at last the dark crags of the coast came into

view. After that everything happened very swiftly. Swaying, they moved toward us, bending over the water, ready to crash down upon us. The white waves hurled our bodies forward once, twice, our boat crunched like a nut under the heel of a boot, I was torn loose, saw the black ribs of the rocks as sharp as knives looming before me, saw my father's head high above mine, then lifted above those devil's claws.

"He was picked up an hour or two later with his back broken and his skull smashed. The wound in his head was so big that part of the brain had been washed out of it, and I can remember the grey chunks of matter in the wound with red veins running through it like marble or foam mixed with blood. His body was terribly mutilated, but his face was clear and calm and his eyes tightly closed.

"I? Yes, I was also badly battered up, I was unconscious when they pulled me ashore. We had been carried away to the mainland beyond Amalfi, a long way from home, but, of course, the folk there are also fishermen and such things do not surprise them but make them kind and gentle. Men who lead a dangerous life are always kind!

"I'm afraid I haven't been able to make you understand how I really feel about my father and what it is I have been carrying in my heart for fifty-one years now. One needs special words for that, not words but music perhaps. But we simple folk, are like fish, we cannot talk as well as we would wish! One always feels and knows more than one can express.

"The whole thing is that he, my father, in his hour of death, knowing that he could not escape it, was not afraid, he did not forget about me, his son, and found the strength and the time to pass on to me everything he thought I should know. I have lived for sixty-seven years and I can say that everything he told me then is true!"

The old man took off his knitted cap that had once been red and was now brown, pulled out his pipe and bending his naked, bronzed skull, said emphatically:

"Yes, it is all true, dear signor! Men are as you wish to see them, look at them in kindness and you will do good both to them and to yourself. They will become better, and you too. It is simple, isn't it?"

The wind blew more and more strongly, the waves mounted higher, became sharper and whiter; the birds on the sea grew bigger and scurried farther and farther into the distance, and the two boats with the three rows of sails had already disappeared behind the blue rim of the horizon.

The steep shores of the island were encased in foam, the blue water splashed noisily and the cicadas kept up their tireless, passionate din.

VIII

A man in a light suit, lean and clean-shaven like an American, sat down at an iron table near the door of the restaurant and drawled lazily:

"Ga-aarçon...."

Acacia blossoms, white and golden, hung in thick profusion all around, there was radiant sunlight everywhere and earth and sky were filled with the gentle gladness of springtide. Down the middle of the street cantered little shaggy-eared donkeys with a pattering of hoofs, heavy draught horses passed slowly by at a walking gait. The pedestrians strolled along and it was clear that everyone desired to stay as long as possible in the sunshine and the air that was filled with the honey-laden scent of flowers.

Children, the heralds of spring, flashed by, the sun tinting their clothes with bright hues; gaily dressed women, as essential to a sunny day as the stars at night, sailed along, swaying slightly as they walked.

There was something curious about the appearance of the man in the light suit: he looked as though he must have been extremely dirty and had only that day been scrubbed clean, but so vigorously that all vividness had been rubbed off him forever. He gazed around him with faded eyes as if he were counting the sun spots on the walls of the houses and on everything that moved along the dark street and over the broad flagstones of the boulevard. His flaccid lips were pursed and he was softly and painstakingly whistling a queer, sad melody, his long white fingers thrumming in time on the edge of the table. His nails gleamed palely and in his other hand he held a tan glove with which he beat time on his knee. His features be-

spoke intelligence and resolution, it seemed a pity that the glow had been so roughly wiped off his face.

As the waiter, with a deferential bow, placed a cup of coffee, a small bottle of green liqueur and some biscuits before him, a broad-chested man with agate eyes sat down at the next table. His cheeks, neck and hands were smoke-begrimed and he himself was so angular and with such steel-like quality of strength that he seemed part of some huge machine.

When the eyes of the clean man rested wearily on him, he raised himself slightly, touched his cap with his fingers and said through his thick moustache:

"Good day, Mr. Engineer."

"Ah, so it's you again, Trama!"

"Yes, it's me, Mr. Engineer...."

"Well, we may expect something, eh?"

"How is your work getting on?"

"I'm afraid," the engineer said with a faint smile on his thin lips, "that one cannot make conversation with questions alone, my friend...."

His companion pushed his hat onto one ear and laughed heartily.

"Right you are!" he said through his laughter, "but, I swear I'd give a lot to know...."

A piebald, coarse-haired donkey, harnessed to a coal cart in his tracks, stretched out his neck and emitted a mournful cry, but evidently the sound of his own voice did not please him that day for he broke off in confusion on a high note, shook his shaggy ears and, lowering his head, trotted on with a clatter of hoofs.

"I am waiting for that machine of yours as impatiently as I would wait for a new book from which I could derive greater wisdom...."

"I do not quite understand the analogy," murmured the engineer sipping his coffee.

"Don't you agree that a machine frees man's physical energy as much as a good book frees his spirit?"

"Ah!" said the engineer, raising his head. "Perhaps you're right."

"And now, I suppose, you will start your propaganda?" he added, placing the empty cup back on the table.

"I have started already...."

"What is it? Strikes and disturbances again, eh?"

The other shrugged his shoulders, smiling gently.

"If only all that were not necessary...."

An old woman in black, as austere as a nun, silently proffered a bunch of violets to the engineer. He took two and handing one to his companion, said reflectively:

"You have such a good head, Trama, it is a pity you are an idealist...."

"Thank you for the flowers and the compliment. A pity, you say?"

"Yes! You are essentially a poet, and you ought to study to become an efficient engineer."

Trama chuckled, his white teeth gleaming.

"Ah, there you're right!" he said. "An engineer is a poet. Working with you I have learned that...."

"You are very polite...."

"And I was thinking, why should Monsieur the Engineer not become a Socialist? A Socialist must be a poet too...."

They both laughed in complete mutual understanding, these two men so strikingly different in appearance, the one dry, nervous, worn out, with faded eyes, and the other looking as if he had been hammered out in a forge shop only yesterday and had not yet been polished.

"No, Trama, I would prefer to have my own workshop and some three dozen good lads like yourself working for me. Then we would be able to do something...."

He tapped the table lightly with his fingers and sighed as he put the violets in his buttonhole.

"Devil take it," cried Trama growing excited, "to think that trifles can prevent a man from living and working...."

"Oh so you call human history a trifle, master mechanic Trama?" queried the engineer with a subtle smile. The worker snatched off his hat, gesturing with it as he went on heatedly:

"Eh, what is the history of my forefathers?"

"Your forefathers?" queried the engineer, accentuating the first word with a more caustic smile.

"Yes, mine! Insolence you think? Perhaps. But why are Giordano Bruno, Vico and Mazzini not my forefathers, am I not living in their world, am I not enjoying the fruit of their great minds?"

"Ah, in that sense!"

"Everything the departed have given to the world is mine!"

"Of course," said the engineer, knitting his brows gravely.

"And everything that has been done before me, before us, is the ore which we must turn into steel, is it not?"

"Why, of course, that is obvious!"

"After all, you educated men, just as we workers, are reaping the fruit of the minds of the past."

"I do not deny that." said the engineer, bending his head; a boy in grey tatters, as tiny as a ball that has been battered in play, stood beside him holding a bunch of crocuses in his filthy little paws, and urging insistently:

"Buy my flowers, signor. . . ."

"I have some. . . ."

"You can never have too many flowers. . . ."

"Right you are, lad," said Trama, "Bravo, give me two. . . ."

And when the boy had given him the flowers he raised his hat and offered a bunch to the engineer.

"Thank you."

"It's a glorious day, isn't it?"

"Yes, even at fifty I can appreciate its beauty. . . ."

He glanced thoughtfully about him with narrowed eyes and heaved a sigh.

"You, I daresay feel the spring sun in your veins very keenly, not only because you are young, but because, I see, the whole world looks different to you than it does to me. Is that not so?"

"I do not know," replied the other laughing. "But life is good!"

"Because of what it promises?" the engineer asked sceptically. The question appeared to sting his companion, for replacing his cap on his head, he answered impulsively:

"Life is good because of all that I love in it! The devil take it, my dear sir, for me words are not merely sounds and letters; when I read a book, look at a picture or behold something beautiful I feel as if I had created it all with my own hands!"

They both laughed at that, the one frankly and heartily as though proud of his ability to laugh well, throwing his head back and thrusting out his broad chest, the other, almost soundlessly, chokingly, baring his teeth that had gold clinging to them as if he had recently

been chewing it and had forgotten to clean the greenish remnants that had stuck to the ivory.

"You're a good lad Trama, it is always a pleasure to see you," said the engineer and added with a wink: "If only you weren't such a trouble-maker...."

"Oh, I'm always making trouble...."

And screwing up his fathomless black eyes in an expression of mock gravity, he enquired:

"I trust our behavior was quite correct that time?"

The engineer shrugged his shoulders and rose.

"Oh yes, quite. That affair cost the concern some thirty-seven thousand lire, you know...."

"It might have been wiser to have added that to the men's wages...."

"H'm! You miscalculate. Wiser, you say? Every beast has his own brand of wisdom."

He held out a dry yellow hand and when the worker shook it, said:

"I still think you ought to study and study hard...."

"I learn something every minute...."

"You would make an engineer with a rich imagination."

"Oh, my imagination comes in quite handy as it is!"

"Well, so long, my stubborn friend!"

The engineer walked off under the acacias through the tracery of sunbeams, taking long strides with his lanky legs and pulling his glove on to the thin long fingers of his right hand. The blue-black waiter moved away from the door of the restaurant where he had been listening to the conversation and said to the worker who was rummaging in his purse for some coppers:

"Getting old, our engineer...."

"Oh, he can still hold his own!" exclaimed the worker confidently. "There's plenty of sparks under that skull of his...."

"Where will you be speaking next time?"

"In the same place, the labour exchange, have you heard me?"

"Three times, comrade...."

Shaking hands warmly they parted with a smile; one walking off in the opposite direction from that the engineer had taken, the other humming softly as he commenced to clear the tables.

A group of school children in white aprons, boys and girls, marched along in the middle of the road bubbling with noise and laughter; the first two were blowing lustily into their paper trumpets and the acacias softly showered them with snowy petals.

Whenever one looks at children, especially in springtime, one feels prompted to call after them loudly and gaily:

"Hey, there, young folk! May the future be yours!"

IX

It had been raining heavily since early morning but by midday the clouds had spent themselves, their dark fabric grew threadbare and dissolved into a host of filmy shreds which the wind wafted over toward the sea, weaving them again into a dense bluish-grey mass that cast a thick shadow on the rain-calmed sea.

In the east the dark sky was rent by flashes of lightning while a magnificent sun threw its blinding light over the island.

Seen from a long distance out at sea the island must have looked like a rich temple on a feast day; everything so radiantly clean, generously decked with bright flowers, and the big raindrops glistening everywhere, like topazes on the yellowish young leaves of the vines, amethysts on the clusters of wistaria, rubies on the scarlet geraniums and like emeralds strewn in rich profusion over the grass, the green underbrush and the leaves of the trees.

The air was still with the hush that comes after rain; the gentle babble of the brook hidden amid the rocks and under the roots of the euphorbia, dewberry and fragrant, twining clematis. Down below, the sea murmured softly.

The golden shafts of the furze pointed skywards and swayed gently, weighted by moisture, which they shook noiselessly from their fantastic blossoms.

Against the lush green background, the light purple wistaria vied with the blood-red geraniums and roses, the rusty yellow brocade of the clematis blossoms mingled with the dark velvet of the irises and gilly flowers and it was all so vivid and glowing that the flowers seemed to be singing like violins, flutes and passionate violoncellos.

The moist air was fragrant and as heady as old wine.

Under a grey rock, jagged and torn by blasting, the stains of oxidized iron showing in the cracks, amid grey and yellow boulders exuding the sourish smell of dynamite, four quarrymen, husky fellows in damp rags and leather sandals, sat partaking of their midday meal.

They ate heartily and slowly, out of a large bowl filled with the tough meat of the octopus fried with potatoes and tomatoes in olive oil, and washed it down with red wine quaffed in turn from a bottle.

Two of the men were clean-shaven and resembled one another sufficiently to be brothers, twins even; the third was a small, bow-legged, one-eyed chap with quick nervous gestures that made him resemble an old scraggy bird; the fourth was a broad-shouldered, bearded, hooknosed man of middle age with an abundant sprinkling of grey in his hair.

Breaking off large chunks of bread he smoothed out his wine-stained whiskers and placed a piece in the dark cavern of his mouth.

"That's nonsense," he was saying, his hairy jaws working methodically as he chewed his food. "It's a lie. I haven't done anything wrong. . . ."

His brown eyes under their thick brows had an unhappy mocking expression; his voice was heavy and gruff, his speech slow and hesitant. Everything about him—his hat, his hairy coarse-featured face, his large hands and his dark blue suit spattered with white rock powder—revealed that he was the one who drilled the holes in the mountainside for blasting.

His three workmates listened attentively to what he was saying; they did not interrupt him but looked up at him from time to time as if to say: "Go on. . . ."

And he went on, his grey eyebrows moving up and down as he spoke:

"That man, Andrea Grasso, they called him, came to our village like a thief in the night; he was dressed in rags, his hat the colour of his boots and as tattered. He was greedy, shameless and cruel. And seven years later our elders were doffing their hats to him while he barely gave them a nod. And everyone for forty miles around was in debt to him."

"Yes, there are such people," remarked the bow-legged one, sighing and shaking his head.

The narrator glanced at him.

"So you've met that kind too?" he enquired mockingly.

The old man made an eloquent gesture, the two clean-shaven men grinned in unison, the hooknosed one took a draught of wine and went on, watching the flight of a falcon in the azure sky:

"I was thirteen when he hired me along with some others to haul stones to build his house. He treated us worse than animals and when my pal Lukino told him so he said: 'My ass is mine while you are a stranger to me, why should I be kind to you?' Those words were like a knife-thrust to me, and from that time on I began to watch him more closely. He was mean and brutal to everybody, even to old men and women, it made no difference to him, I could see that. And when respectable people told him he was behaving badly he laughed in their faces: 'When I was poor,' he said, 'no one treated me any better.' He took up with priests, carabinieri and policemen, the rest of them saw him only when they were in grave trouble and then he could do what he liked with them."

"Yes, there are people like that," repeated the bow-legged one softly and all three glanced at him in sympathy: one of the clean-shaven workers silently handed him the wine bottle, the old man took it, held it up to the light and before putting it to his lips, said:

"I drink to the sacred heart of the Madonna!"

"He often used to say that the poor have always worked for the rich and the fools for the wise, and that is how it must be always."

The story-teller laughed and stretched out his hand for the bottle. It was empty. He threw it carelessly onto the stones alongside the hammers, picks and a length of Bickford fuse curled up like a dark snake.

"I was a youngster then and I resented those words deeply, so did my workmates: they killed our hopes, our desire for a better life. Late one night I and Lukino my friend met him as he was crossing the field on horseback. We stopped him and said politely but firmly: 'We ask you to be kinder to folk.'"

The clean-shaven fellows burst out laughing and the one-eyed one too chuckled softly while the narrator heaved a loud sigh:

"Yes, of course, it was stupid! But youth is honest. Youth believes in the power of the word. You might say that youth is life's conscience. . . ."

"Well, and what did he say?" asked the old man.

"He yelled: 'Let go of my horse, you scoundrels!' And pulling out a pistol he pointed it at us. We said: 'You have no need to fear us, Grasso. And don't be angry. We are merely giving you a piece of advice!'"

"Now that was good!" said one of the clean-shaven men, and the other nodded in agreement; the bow-legged one pursed his lips and examined a stone, stroking it with his crooked fingers.

The meal was over. One of the men amused himself by knocking the crystalline raindrops off the blades of grass with a thin stick, another looked on, picking his teeth with a dry grass stalk. The air grew drier and hotter. The brief shadows of noon were melting rapidly. The sea murmured a gentle accompaniment to the solemn tale:

"That meeting had unpleasant consequences for Lukino. His father and uncle were in debt to Grasso. Poor Lukino grew thin and haggard, he ground his teeth and his eyes lost the brightness that had once attracted the girls. 'Ah,' he said to me once, 'that was a foolish thing we did that day. Words are worth nothing when addressed to a wolf!' 'Lukino is ready for murder.' I thought to myself. I was sorry for the lad and his good family. But I was poor myself and all alone in the world, for my mother had died recently."

The hook-nosed stone-cutter brushed his moustache and beard with his lime-stained fingers, and as he did so a heavy-looking silver ring gleamed on the forefinger of his left hand.

"I might have done a service to my fellowmen if I had been able to carry the thing to the end, but I am soft-hearted. One day, meeting Grasso on the street, I walked alongside him and speaking as humbly as I could, said: 'You are a mean, greedy fellow, it is hard for folks to live with you, you are liable to push someone's hand and that hand may reach for a knife. My advice to you is to go away from here.' 'You're a fool, young man!' he said, but I kept insisting. 'Listen,' he said with a laugh, 'How much will you take to leave me in peace? Will a lira be enough?' That was insulting but I controlled my anger. 'Get out of here, I tell you!' I insisted. We were walking shoulder to shoulder, I on his right. When I wasn't looking he drew out his knife and stuck me with it. You can't do much with your left hand, so it went into my chest only one inch

deep. Naturally I flung him to the ground and kicked him the way you would kick a hog."

" 'Now perhaps you will take my advice!' I said as he writhed on the ground."

The two clean-shaven fellows threw an incredulous glance at the speaker and dropped their eyes. The bow-legged one bent over to tie the leather thongs of his sandals.

"The next morning when I was still in bed the carabinieri came and took me to the sheriff who was a pal of Grasso's. 'You are an honest man, Ciro,' he said, 'so you will not deny that you tried to murder Grasso last night.' I said that was not exactly the truth, but they have their own way of looking at things. So they kept me in jail for two months before I was brought to trial and then they sentenced me to a year and eight months. 'Very well,' I told the judges, 'but I don't consider the incident closed!' "

He drew a fresh bottle from its cache among the stones and thrusting its neck under his moustaches took a long draught of the wine; his hairy Adam's apple moved thirstily up and down and his beard bristled. Three pairs of eyes watched him in grave silence.

"It's sickening to talk about it," he said handing the bottle to his workmates and smoothing his moist beard.

"When I returned to the village it was clear that there was no room for me there; everyone was afraid of me. Lukino told me that things had got even worse that year. He was sick to death of it all, the poor lad. 'So that's it,' I said to myself and went to see that man Grasso; he was terribly scared when he saw me. 'Well, I'm back,' I said. 'Now it's your turn to go away!' He snatched up his rifle and fired but it was loaded with bird shot and he aimed at my legs. I didn't even fall. 'If you had killed me I would come and haunt you from the grave, I have sworn to the Madonna that I shall get you out of here. You are stubborn, but so am I.' We got into a scuffle and before I knew it I had accidently broken his arm. I hadn't intended to do him violence and he had attacked me first. A crowd gathered and I was taken away. This time I got three years and nine months and when my term ended, my jailer, a man who knew the whole story and liked me, tried hard to persuade me not to go back home. He offered me a job with his son-in-law who had a big plot of land and a vineyard in Apulia. But I, naturally, could not give

up what I had undertaken. So I went home, this time with the firm intention not to indulge in any useless chatter, I had learned by then that nine words out of ten are superfluous. I had only one thing to say to him: 'Get out!' I arrived in the village on a Sunday and went straight to Mass. Grasso was there. As soon as he saw me he jumped up and yelled all over the church: 'That man has come here to kill me, citizens, the devil has sent him for my soul!' I was surrounded before I had time to touch him, before I had time to tell him what I wanted. But it didn't matter for he fell onto the stone floor in a fit and his right side and his tongue were paralyzed. He died seven weeks later.... That's all. And folks invented a sort of legend about me.... It's quite terrible, but a lot of nonsense."

He chuckled, looked up at the sun and said:

"Time to get started...."

In silence the other three rose slowly to their feet; the hook-nosed worker stared at the rusty, oily cracks in the rock and said. "Let's get to work...."

The sun was at its zenith and all the shadows had shrivelled up and vanished.

The clouds on the horizon sank into the sea whose waters had grown calmer and bluer than before.

X

Pepe is ten, he is as frail, slender and mobile as a lizard, his motley rags hang from his narrow shoulders, and the skin, blackened by sun and dirt, peeps through innumerable rents.

He looks like a dried-up blade of grass, which the sea breeze blows hither and thither. From sunrise to sunset Pepe leaps from stone to stone on the island and hourly one can hear his tireless little voice pouring forth:

Italy the Beautiful,
Italy my country!

Everything interests him: The flowers that grow in riotous profusion over the good earth, the lizards that dart among the purpurescent boulders, the birds amid the chiselled perfection of the

olive tree leaves and the malachite tracery of the vines, the fish in the dark gardens at the sea bottom and the foreigners on the narrow, crooked streets of the town: the fat German with the sword-scarred face, the Englishman who always reminds one of an actor in the role of a misanthrope, the American who endeavours in vain to look like an Englishman, and the inimitable Frenchman as noisy as a rattle.

"What a face!" Pepe remarks to his playmates, glancing with his keen dancing eyes at the German who is so puffed out with importance that his very hair seems to stand on end. "Why, he's got a face as big as my belly!"

Pepe doesn't like Germans, he shares the ideas and sentiments of the streets, the squares and the dark little saloons where the townsfolk drink wine, play cards, read the papers and discuss politics.

"The Balkan Slavs," they say, "are much closer to us poor southerners than our good allies who presented us with the sands of Africa in reward for our friendship."

The simple folk of the south are saying this more and more often and Pepe hears everything and forgets nothing.

Here is an Englishman, striding tediously along on scissor-like legs. Pepe in front of him is humming something like a funeral dirge or just a mournful ditty:

My friend has died,
My wife is sad...
And I do not know
What ails her.

Pepe's playmates trail along behind convulsed with laughter, scurrying like mice to hide in the bushes or behind walls whenever the foreigner glances at them calmly with his faded eyes.

One could tell a host of entertaining stories about Pepe.

One day some signora sent him to her friend with a basket of apples from her garden.

"I will give you a soldo!" she said, "you can well use it."

Pepe readily picked up the basket, balanced it on his head and set off. Not until evening did he return for the soldo.

"You were in no great hurry," the woman remarked.

"Ah, dear signora, but I am so tired!" Pepe replied with a sigh. "You see there were more than ten of them!"

"Why, of course, there were more than ten! It was a full basket!"

"Not apples, signora, boys."

"But what about the apples?"

"First the boys, signora: Michele, Giovanni...."

The woman grew angry. She seized Pepe by the shoulder and shook him:

"Answer me, did you deliver the apples?" she cried.

"I carried them all the way to the square, signora! Listen, how well I behaved myself: At first I paid no attention to their jibes. Let them compare me to a donkey, I told myself, I will endure it all out of respect for the signora, for you, signora. But when they began to poke fun at my mother, I decided I had had enough. I put the basket down and you ought to have seen, good signora, how neatly I pelted those little devils with those apples. You would have enjoyed it!"

"They stole my fruit!" cried the woman.

Pepe heaved a mournful sigh.

"Oh, no," he said, "the apples that missed were smashed against the wall, but the rest we ate after I had beaten my enemies and made peace with them...."

The woman loosed a flood of abuse on Pepe's small shaven head. He listened attentively and humbly, clicking his tongue now and again in admiration at some particularly choice expression. "Oho, that's a beauty! What a vocabulary!"

And when at last her anger had spent itself and she left him, he shouted after her:

"But you really wouldn't have felt that way if you saw how beautifully I lammed the filthy heads of those good-for-nothings with those wonderful apples of yours. If only you could have seen it, why you'd have given me two soldos instead of one!"

The silly woman did not understand the modest pride of the victor, she merely shook her fist at him.

Pepe's sister who was much older, but not smarter than he, went to work as housemaid in a villa owned by a rich American. Her appearance altered at once; she became neat and tidy, her cheeks became rosy, and she began to bloom and ripen like a pear in August.

"Do you really eat every day?" her brother once asked her.

"Twice and three times a day if I wish," she replied proudly.

"See you don't wear out your teeth," Pepe advised.

"Is your master very wealthy?" he enquired after a pause.

"Oh, yes, I believe he is richer than the king!"

"That's nonsense! How many pairs of trousers has he got?"

"That is difficult to say."

"Ten."

"More, perhaps. . . ."

"Go and bring me one pair, not too long in the leg but the warmest you can find," said Pepe.

"What for?"

"Well, just look at mine!"

There was indeed not much to see for little enough remained of Pepe's trousers.

"Yes," his sister agreed, "you really need some clothes! But won't he think we have stolen them?"

"Don't imagine that folks are sillier than we are!" Pepe reassured her. "When you take a little from someone who has a lot that isn't stealing, it's just sharing."

"You're talking foolishness," his sister objected, but Pepe overcame her scruples and she brought a good pair of light-grey trousers. They were, of course, far too large for Pepe but he knew at once how to overcome that difficulty.

"Give me a knife!" he said.

Together they quickly converted the American's trousers into a very convenient costume for the boy; the result of their efforts was a somewhat wide but not uncomfortable sack attached to the shoulders by bits of string that could be tied around the neck, with the trouser pockets serving as sleeves.

They might have turned out an even better and more convenient garment had the wife of the owner of the trousers not interrupted their labours: she came into the kitchen and began to give vent to a string of very ugly words in many languages, pronounced equally badly, as is customary with Americans.

Pepe could do nothing to check the flow of eloquence; he frowned, pressed his hand to his heart, clutched despairingly at his head and sighed loudly, but she did not calm down until her husband appeared on the scene.

"What's up?" he asked.

Whereupon Pepe spoke up:

"Signor, I am greatly astonished by the commotion your signora has raised, in fact I am somewhat offended for your sake. As far as I can see she thinks that we have spoiled the trousers, but I assure you that they are just right for me! She seems to think that I have taken your last pair of trousers and that you cannot buy yourself another pair...."

The American who had listened imperturbably to the speech, now remarked:

"And I think, young man, that I ought to call the police."

"Really," Pepe queried in amazement, "what for?"

"To take you to jail...."

Pepe was extremely hurt. In fact, he was ready to weep but swallowed his tears and said with great dignity:

"If, signor, it gives you pleasure to send people to jail, that is your affair! But I would not do that if I had many pairs of trousers and you had none! I would give you two, perhaps even three pairs; although it is impossible to wear three pairs of trousers at once! Especially in hot weather...."

The American burst out laughing, for even rich men can sometimes see a joke. Then he treated Pepe to some chocolate and gave him a franc piece. Pepe bit at the coin and thanked the donor:

"Thank you, signor! The coin is genuine, I presume?"

But Pepe is at his best when he stands alone somewhere among the rocks, pensively examining their cracks as if reading the dark history of rock life. At such moments his vivid eyes are dilated and filmy with wonder, his slender hands are laced behind his back and his head, slightly bent, sways slightly from side to side like the cup of a flower in the breeze. And under his breath he softly hums a tune, for he is forever singing.

It is good also to watch him looking at flowers, at the wistaria blossoms that pour in purple profusion over the walls. He stands as taut as a violin string as if he were listening to the soft tremor of the silken petals stirred by the breath of the sea breeze.

As he looks he sings: "Fiorino... Fiorino...."

And from afar, like the sound of some huge tambourine, comes the muffled sigh of the sea. Butterflies chase one another over the

flowers. Pepe raises his head and follows their flight, blinking in the sunlight, his lips parted in a smile which though tinged with envy and sadness, is yet the generous smile of a superior being on earth.

"Ohi!" he cries, clapping his hands to frighten an emerald lizard.

And when the sea is as placid as a mirror and the rocks are bare of the white spume of the tide, Pepe seated on a stone, gazes with his bright eyes into the transparent water where among the reddish seaweed the fish glide smoothly, the shrimps dart back and forth and the crab crawls along sideways. And in the stillness the clear voice of the boy pours gently forth over the azure waters:

"Sea, oh, Sea. . . ."

Adults often shake their heads disapprovingly at Pepe, saying: "That one will be an anarchist!"

But kinder folk, possessed of greater discernment, are of a different opinion:

"Pepe will be our poet. . . ."

And Pasqualino, the cabinet-maker, an old man with a head that seems cast in silver and a face like those etched on ancient Roman coins—wise and respected Pasqualino has his own opinion:

"Our children will be far better than us, and their lives will be better too!"

Many folk believe him.

THE ROMANCER

THERE WAS a man named Foma Varaxin, a cabinet-maker, aged twenty-five, a most absurd man with a large skull, flattened at the temples and elongated behind above the nape; this top-heavy skull tilted up his cropped head, and Foma walked the earth with his broad nose stuck up in the air, so that from a distance he gave the jaunty impression of wishing to cry out:

"Here, touch me, you just try!"

A single glance, however, at his nondescript face with its mouth of generous proportions and neutral-tinted eyes showed him to be just a good-natured fellow looking happily embarrassed over something or other.

His comrade, Alexei Somov, who was also a cabinet-maker, once told Foma:

"Your mug looks awful dreary! Why don't you stick on a pair of eyebrows or something. There's nothing on the whole panel except a nose, and that's as bad a job I've ever seen!"

"That is so," agreed Foma, fingering his upper lip. "Features couldn't exactly be called handsome, but then didn't Polly say I had fine eyes!"

"Don't you believe it. She says that to get you to treat her to an extra bottle of beer."

Alexei was two years Foma's junior, but he had spent five months in prison for politics, read many books, and when he was loath or unable or too lazy to understand a comrade he used to say:

"That's a bourgeois prejudice. Utopia. You must know the history of culture. You don't understand the class contradictions."

He introduced Foma into a circle where little sharp-nosed Comrade Mark, waving hands that resembled bird's feet, rattled off an account of the labour movement in the West. These narrations had an instant appeal for Foma, and after several lectures he pressed a varnish-stained hand to his chest and gushed:

"That's the stuff, Alexei! That's just about right! It does exist. . . ."

Dry sardonic Somov, screwing up his greenish eyes and pursing his lips, asked:

"What does?"

"That same attraction people have towards unity—it does! Now take me. It's all the same to me whether it's a fire, or a religious procession, or a public fair—I always feel myself drawn terribly strong to any kind of place where people are gathered. People! Now take the church—why do I like to go to church? A gathering of souls, that's why!"

"You'll get over that!" Alexei assured him with an ironical grin. "When you grasp the idea. . . ."

Foma thumped himself on the chest and cried joyously:

"I have grasped it! Here's where it is! I grasped it from the very first. Now it's a joy to me like Our Lady of all the afflicted. . . ."

"Off he goes!"

"No, wait a minute. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Isn't that it? That's the idea!"

"Don't be silly—that's the Gospel!"

"What of that? The idea is always the same, it strikes me. It may take on different shapes and different forms but the image is the same! It's the Mother of Love! Isn't that so?"

When Alexei was angry his upper lip curled, his sharp nose quivered, and his green pupils grew round like a bird's. In a dry voice that crackled oddly on its high notes, and in words that sounded like snaps, Alexei impressively and at great length tried to prove to his comrade that he was a Utopian, that his class consciousness was dormant and would probably never be awakened because Foma had been brought up in a clergyman's home where his mother served as cook and where his soul was poisoned by bourgeois prejudices and superstitions.

"But Alexei!" Foma exclaimed in an earnest tone, "it wasn't poisoned—so help me God! Quite the contrary! When I was a kid, frinstance, I didn't go to church at all. Good Lord, you don't think I'm lying, do you? That happened afterwards, when I began to read books, and in general was drawn towards people! It isn't a matter of

church-going, but a—you know—communion of souls! That's the idea! Now, what's it all about? Brothers, shame on you, how can you live like that? You're not beasts, are you? It's a matter of inspiring love and conscience, Alexei, that's the important thing it seems to me! Isn't that right?"

"No, it isn't right!" snapped Alexei, his anger rising and his cheeks breaking out in patches of red, and Foma often had the impression that Alexei's words rapped his nose like cards in that game people played.

Foma maintained an embarrassed silence, stroking his head and now and then making a timid attempt in a guilty voice to appease his comrade:

"I understand, Alexei. I really do! Of course—there's the struggle! Nobody's denying that—that's where you've got to sit tight!"

Then he would suddenly meander off, and begin to argue in an earnest tone:

"You see, I was only thinking about man. Now, what is man, generally speaking? I'm not a chisel, am I? Now, say some one began using you as a chisel, they'd start using a mallet on you—that's what I mean, don't you see! A man's not a tool, is he? Then, there's the struggle, to be sure—you can't get away from that! By all means—the struggle! But the apostolic, you know, idea—that er... general er ... universal concord ... peace on earth and goodwill among men...."

Sometimes Alexei would say nothing and fix his comrade with a long contemptuous stare. Then he would begin in a cutting voice, as though he were snipping off Foma's ears:

"No you're stupid! It's a muddle-head you are, a hopeless muddle-head!"

Or he would threaten him, icily and impressively:

"You wait—we'll soon begin to read the history of culture—you'll see."

Foma then felt very small. Incomprehensible words always exercised a depressing effect on him, inspired a reverential awe for the people who used them and elicited strange associations of ideas. Utopia he visualized as a hummocky swamp all covered with a stunted overgrowth, while over the chilly knolls, with arms outstretched, walks a woman clad all in white with the face of Our Lady, as al-

ways, filled with the vast sadness of the Mother—and she walks in silence with mute tears in her eyes. He had more than once heard the words "religious cult," and culture he envisaged as a divine service, something in the nature of a solemn matins at Easter. It slowly dawned on him that this wise science could untie all the knots of life's tangled problems, reduce all thoughts to proper order and bathe the variegated tints of life in a single steady mellow light. He spoke a lot, rapturously and breathlessly and always looked his interlocutor straight in the face with lack-lustre, tipsy-looking eyes. Every new thought that entered his mind evoked a torrent of words—he would wave his arms and cry in low and delighted tones:

"Wonderful! That's just it! So simple!"

At first his comrades of the circle and workshop lent him an attentive ear out of curiosity, but they soon discovered that Foma was simply a chatterbox, and Yegor Kashin, the dour-faced fitter, advised him more than once:

"Cut your tongue in halves, windbag!"

But this did not cool Foma's ardour—he surveyed everyone with a friendly glance and babbled on like a gushing spring brook.

When he came to the first lesson on the history of culture and found that it was to be given by a plump little blue-eyed young lady with smooth hair and a thick braid hanging down her back he was sadly puzzled, and tried all the time to avoid looking at the young lady.

He noticed, however, that she was ill at ease, trying in vain to impart a serious expression to her childish face, speaking hurriedly, incoherently, and when asked a question her face blushed crimson and her eyes blinked swiftly in confusion. She was so white and dainty that she stirred in him a feeling of pity.

"Clearly the first time," thought Foma, studiously examining the dark damp wall above her head. He was surprised to hear her speak about lightning, the clouds, sunset, the heroes of fables and Greek myths—he could not see the connection and complained about it to Alexei on their way home:

"That was a flop, Alexei! On a subject like that they should have put a different person entirely, a serious man, some one with grey in his hair like... and a deep voice... make it sound like some one was reading the Twelve Gospels!"

Somov too was disgruntled and snorted:

"Fancy appointing that froggish little thing for such a job! A fat lot I care who the Evil Serpent is.... We know who he is all right—tell us better how to destroy him...."

"Better she'd had just read straight off that thick little book!" said Foma deprecatingly, but soon forgetting the unfortunate lesson, he rambled on in his usual tone of benign dreamer: "Isn't it wonderful, brother, a little person like that coming into our rough company—here, see you, this is what I know, will you just listen! Wonderful! By getting closer to each other...."

"Talking drivel again!" Alexei brusquely stemmed the verbal tide.

"Why is it drivel?" Foma persisted gently, kindly. "You talk about class—now what kind of class is she? Simply a generous-hearted little girl. She feels sort of conscious-stricken living among people of our like, and so she...."

"When will all that treacle ooze out of you?" cried Somov in annoyance. "What's conscience got to do with it? Simply necessity—conscience be hanged! If she had another place to go to, she'd find something easier and wouldn't come to us, don't kid yourself!"

Foma looked down the street at the flaming beads of the lamp lights and asked:

"So you think she does it because she's obliged to?"

"Of course...."

"You think so?" said Varaxin with a backward toss of his head. "I don't believe it somehow!"

"Why not?"

"What's the sense in doing a thing because you're obliged to? If I'm a cabinet-maker and used to my job—why should I do the work of a common carpenter? She's kind of whittling logs...."

Alexei spat, saying:

"Let her whittle logs...."

At the second lesson Foma seemed to catch a glimpse of interesting ideas in the girl's words which stirred his heart, and when she had finished he asked:

"Comrade Liza, will you lend me that book until next time?"

"Certainly," she said, looking obviously pleased.

Then Foma walked by her side through the streets of the town, and was careful not to touch her with his elbow. They walked up

a hilly street, on both sides of which the little houses of the suburb gazed at them through darkened windows. A lamp burned at the top of the street, casting a trembling patch of dull yellow around, and the damp gloom of the autumn night was filled with the odours of rotting wood and refuse.

Foma, coughing discreetly and trying to express himself elegantly, asked Liza:

"Then, I can take it for granted that in ancient times man spoke a single language—is that so?"

"Yes, the Aryans," a low voice answered him.

"And that's been proved, has it?"

"Definitely proved."

"Fine! That's wonderful! Then all the nations that are now scattered were once devoted to the unity of life, hence in ancient times people were united by a single common idea—y-yes. . . ."

His words, however, shaped themselves laboriously, and he was thinking not of ancient times but of the little figure of the girl hurrying uphill half a pace in front of him on his left. Cloaked in the darkness she looked smaller than she was. Foma noticed that every time she passed a lighted window she bent her head and tried to slip quickly out of the patch of light.

"Wonderful!" he thought, not ceasing to talk and seeming to become a dual personality, as it were. "Such a little person, without fear, amid strange men, at night, in such a lonely spot. . . . Wonderful!"

To keep his hands from gesticulating he thrust them into his pockets. This was uncustomary and constraining.

"Aren't you afraid of drunks?" he asked.

She answered quickly, softly:

"Oh, I'm dreadfully afraid! There are so many of them around here. . . ."

"Yes," said Foma with a sigh, "they drink an unconscionable lot! The point is—life wants filling up, but there isn't anything to fill it with! I mean life in the sense of the soul. Wine, we know, enriches the fancy. You can't blame people harshly—is it a man's fault that he's obliged to sustain life by fancies?"

"I don't blame them!" exclaimed Liza, slowing her pace. "I understand. What you said is so true, so very true!"

That cheered Foma up—he never remembered any one ever having agreed with him. Drawing his hands out of his pockets and slapping the book under his jacket he resumed in earnest confidential tones:

"Now, frinstance, if books were more accessible—that would be a different matter! Generally speaking, there's no reason to be afraid of people, I assure you they deserve the fullest interest and compassion in the empty lives they lead. The fact of the matter is there is very little of everything, as you know, and that's why everybody's wild. No comforts of any kind, a man's only friend is just naked fate with the awful face of poverty and vice, as the poet has it. But then, of course, when people like you will come down in large numbers from the summit—it'll certainly give to life something that'll make it worthy of man...."

Liza walked still more slowly, holding her skirt with one hand, while she passed the other hand across her face, saying with a sigh:

"Yes, yes, that's true!"

"Fyodor Grigorievich," Foma went on, interrupting her, "the son of the clergyman in whose place my mother lived—a good woman, my mother was, but she's dead—Fyodor Grigorievich who'll now soon be a professor, he used to say, when arguing with his father: 'To live is to know!' Very simple! Supposing I live and don't know what I am, the why and wherefore and all that—now could you call that living? Just eking out an existence under the exploitation of all kinds of sinister forces originating in man and prejudices created by him—isn't that so?"

"To live is to know!" repeated Liza. "That's just the thing, comrade—you have such a wonderfully broad outlook...."

Foma did not remember what else he said, but this was the first time in his life that he had spoken so much, so boldly and ardently. They parted at the gate of a large two-storied house with columns on the façade, and Liza, shaking his hand, earnestly asked him:

"Thursday and Monday—don't forget! After seven I'm at home. I'll wait till nine—you won't forget?"

"With the greatest pleasure!" cried Foma, stamping his foot on the pavement. "Awfully grateful! Splendid!"

All night long till morning he roamed about the streets with

his head reared in the air, mentally composing ardent invocatory speeches about the necessity of rendering aid by word and deed to people who had still failed to grasp the intrinsic ideas: to live and to know. He felt very happy. The grey sky of autumn seemed to yawn before him and out of the deep blue gulf words tumbled like falling stars, beautiful rich words that formed themselves into shining ranks of good and kindly thoughts on life and men, and these thoughts left Foma astonished before their unconquerable simplicity, their truth and force.

Thursday found Foma sitting in Liza's room, seeing nothing except the tense glance of her blue eyes which, he could see, were trying to follow the drift of his words, while he looked into their blue depths and spoke:

"Then it looks, figurely speaking, as if the idea about the triumph of light over darkness is of heavenly origin?"

"If you like, yes—but—still—why must you have the heavenly?"

"It kind of looks nicer! And so—the main idea is the Sun that sheds around it the force of life! That's wonderful and quite right. I went out of town yesterday—to Yarillo,* you know—to watch the sunset! Quite easy and simple to imagine the way it's all described—serpent, swords, the struggle, the defeat of darkness and then the sunrise in a triumphant blaze! There wasn't any sunrise, though, it was raining, but that doesn't matter. I've seen the sunrise many a time, and I'll make it a point to see it on a clear day, I will!"

He looked round and took a liking to the clean cosy little room with the white bed in the corner chastely screened in a soft veil of gloom. On a table before Foma lay numerous books, others stood slanting on a shelf, the walls were hung with familiar photographs of writers and learned men with long hair and melancholy faces. Rubbing his palms covered with callouses and stained with varnish, Foma laughed softly to himself and went on:

"Wonderful, comrade, there I was sitting on a steep bank with my legs over the side, when a dog comes up, kind of beggarly looking dog it was, you know, all covered with dirt and

* An allusion to the ancient Slavonic sun-god called *Yarillo.—Trans.*

burs, with grey whiskers on its face. Hungry, old and homeless. Comes up and sits down near me and also watches: there was the sky flaming yellow and red, blue figures kept on changing, the rays broke 'em up and set 'em alight again, golden rivers flowed past—and we, a man and a dog, sat watching, just like that. Generally speaking, comrade, nobody knows for certain what a dog really is, you know, and what it's attitude is to the sun? Maybe it also—mind you, I don't know, it's just fantasy—but why shouldn't a dog be able to understand what the sun means, if it feels cold and warmth and can look at the sky? Now, a pig—that's another matter, of course! D'you know, I even joked with it—d'you understand, says I, who the real creator of life is, eh? It looked at me out of the corner of its eye and moved off a little.... Surprising how every living thing on earth is mistrustful and cautious of one another—very sad, when you come to think of it! Mind you, maybe it's silly, but when I read those two chapters I all of a sudden, you know, seemed to realize it for the first time—why, the sun! The sun—extraordinary simple!"

"You've read two chapters?" Foma heard her ask.

The question struck him as sounding sort of strict.

"Only two," he returned, and for some reason began fingering the chair on which he sat. "We've got a lot of work just now, you know, an urgent job. Klobistyaev, the merchant, is giving his daughter away in marriage—the son-in-law's going to live with them—and we're touching up a dining room suite. Splendid furniture he bought, fine antique workmanship—solid oak, you know...."

He saw the girl's eyes close wearily, and that instantly made him tongue-tied and threw him into confusion. Foma resumed not without an effort, smiling embarrassedly:

"Maybe I'm chattering too much—pardon me please!"

The young lady exclaimed hastily:

"Oh no! Your talk is so interesting. I've only just started work, and it's very important for me to study the mentality of people who ... people of your class."

Foma brightened up again, became emboldened, and, waving his arms in the air, broke into song, like a bird at sunrise.

"Allow me to say that people of my kind are like little children—timid, you know! Between ourselves, frinstance, we crafts-

men very rarely have heart to heart talks. Yet every one would like to say something about himself—because—well, you know, a man sees very little kindness, and . . . if you bear in mind that every one had a mother . . . and was used to being caressed, it's . . . a very sad thing!"

He moved up to the little hostess with his chair—something creaked with a snap and a thick book dropped on the floor.

"I'm sorry," said Foma. "Very little elbow-room in here!" Dropping his voice, he continued in a mysterious undertone: "I want to tell you how remarkably true it is that it's no good for a man to live by himself! Of course, unity of interests among the workers is a very good thing—I understand that—but interest is not the whole story—there's a mighty lot in a man's soul besides that! A man definitely wants to lay bare his soul, show it in full dress parade, in all its magnitude. . . . A man's a young creature, as you know! Not in years, of course, but taking it as life as a whole—life's not an old story, is it? Eh? And suddenly, there you are, nobody wants to listen to anything—and there you have it—loneliness of the soul . . . dumbness and death of thought! I don't agree with it—the unity of people is absolutely necessary, isn't it? Unity of interests—all right . . . but how can one explain the loneliness and the awful misery at times? You see. . . ."

"I don't quite follow you," said Liza, and her voice once more sounded teacher-like and strict.

Foma regarded her smilingly, and she, with knitted brows, returned his look with a very intent stare that once more dampened his enthusiasm. With a lift of her shoulders she drew her plait over her breast and her fingers moved swiftly twining and untwining the black ribbon, while she said in an unnaturally deep voice:

"That's rather a strange argument. While admitting the unity of interests. . . ."

"You see, the point is," broke in Foma, "if one ray is here, another there, there won't be any warmth . . . all the rays must be merged into one, isn't that so?"

"Well, yes, but what do you call a ray?"

"My soul, and yours—there you have the rays of the sun, figurely speaking."

When Foma took his leave he thought Liza looked at him suspiciously and shrank back, and when he shook her hand she tried to pull it back.

And again he wandered nearly all night through the deserted streets of the sleepy town, rousing the night watchmen dozing at the house entrances, and exciting the interest of the policemen on their night rounds.

He recalled the things he had spoken and made a wry face, feeling that he had bungled things and had not said what he wanted to.

"Funny!" he thought, "when I went to her I had everything so pat in my head. Next time I'll rehearse it properly...."

He suddenly stopped, remembering that Liza had not told him when he could come again.

"She's forgotten! I've been speaking too much!"

And then again he escorted her home at nights, and all the way he bombarded her with his rapturous speeches, confided to her, before he was aware of it, the secrets of an awakened soul, not noticing that she listened to him in silence, answered his questions in monosyllables and no longer invited him to come to her warm little room.

"Why, I believe you're a romancer!" she once exclaimed with a feeling akin to regret, and looking him squarely in the face she shook her head deprecatingly.

Foma was disconcerted by a word that was reminiscent of romance and love, and he laughed softly while Liza continued:

"How strange! Of course, I understand romanticism, but...."

She spoke long and didactically, and Foma could not understand what it was all about.

And gradually it became a necessity for him to see Liza—her eyes produced on him a heady pleasant sensation and elicited new words, kindled oddly fervent thoughts. Seeing her surrounded by a close ring of workers listening attentively and thoughtfully to her low persuasive voice, seeing her white hands fluttering like little doves in the semi-dusk of the room, her dark brows moving above the blue eyes and rosy lips quivering like budding petals. Foma thought:

"That's the Idea! To all the afflicted I bring joy...."

And he pictured to himself a cool babbling brook meandering down the hillside to a parched valley where the trees stand forlorn and dusty, their faded leaves drooping wearily, while the living water makes its way to their roots.

And he recalled the lovely fairy tale of the little girl lost in the woods—how she wandered into the cave of the dwarfs and sat among them trustfully, filled with love and goodwill to every living thing.

Sometimes Liza, warming to her subject, grew excited, stammered, found difficulty in choosing her words, and her eyes darted anxiously over the faces of her audience. At such moments Foma sat tense and breathless, he felt an urge to intervene and help her out with the missing words and—so painful was the ordeal to him—that he even perspired with the tension.

"Alexei!" he said to Somov, gesticulating. "What a wonderful thing it is when a pure person like that—almost a child she is!—comes to people and says: excuse me, that's not so, it's all wrong, you don't see the main thing—the idea of the world's unity! Extraordinary! Just like a fairy tale, eh?"

Alexei threw him a look out of the corner of his eye and muttered sarcastically:

"Mind you don't melt, you'll make the floor dirty!"

"Don't be silly! Why, you yourself—you believe, you feel it. . . ."

Somov curled his lip and snubbed his comrade with an angry snort:

"You'd better listen more and chatter less. And don't start explaining to people what you don't understand yourself. You just look, you haven't made yourself too popular—you get on people's nerves with your talk. . . ."

"I get on people's nerves?" queried Foma incredulously.

One day he had a toothache which he assiduously tried to relieve by stuffing cotton wool saturated in varnish into the cavity; he even bought some creosote, though he considered it injurious, but the pain was not allayed and he was unable to attend the lesson.

Late in the evening Somov, looking gloomy and disgruntled, came into the workshop, and calling Foma aside, demanded sternly:

"What were you talking about with Liza the day before yesterday?"

"Me? Oh, various things. Why?"

Alexei, his lips twisted, looked at him askance and, drawing at his cigarette, asked:

"Complained about being lonely, eh?"

"Complained? Me? Nothing of the kind! I just happened to mention it...."

"You ought to take better care of your words!"

"Did you see her home?"

"Sure."

"What did she tell you about me?" asked Foma, stroking his swollen cheek.

"What I'm telling you—you're a muddle-headed fellow."

"No, really?"

Somov studied the smoking tip of his cigarette and said with a sneer:

"You can take it from me! That's what she said!"

"Never mind!" exclaimed Foma, and even his tooth seemed to ache less. "I'll prove to her that...."

"Look here," said Alexei with a sardonic grin, kicking aside the shavings on the floor. "let me give you a bit of advice—or better I'll tell you what happened to me once. When I was in prison I saw a girl, one of the educated sort, during the promenade, and went nuts over her right off the bat, just like you...."

"You don't say!" Foma exclaimed in astonishment.

But Alexei, his face as wry as though he too suffered from toothache, went on without looking at his pal:

"We tapped out messages to each other at night and all that kind of thing.... I started that stuff about loneliness, and it worked out pretty rotten, my dear fellow, let me tell you!"

"You don't say!" repeated Foma in a soft whisper, waving his hands. "What makes you think—who said I was in love? Where did you get the idea?"

"Come on, kid your grandmother! I advise you to drop it...."

"That's nonsense, Alexei!" said Foma, pressing a hand to his heart and feeling that it was beating with astonishing rapidity, as though at once frightened and overjoyed. "Good Lord, who the devil would have thought it? That's extraordinary, that is! The

thing never entered my mind! But what's the use? Though, on second thought, she's made up her mind to go with us fellows, and—well, so what? Very simple, I should say! Supposing we put it like this: let a person melt in our insipid midst like a pinch of salt, and satiate...."

Somov crushed the cigarette end slowly between his fingers, stared around and started whistling between his teeth. Seeing that his comrade had no desire to listen to him Foma sighed and remarked:

"That damned tooth's a nuisance—hurts...."

"Mind something else doesn't start hurting!" Alexei warned him, concealing his eyes under his lashes, then suddenly resumed in a tone Foma had never heard him use before:

"Look here, if we're going to talk this thing out—though I'm not gifted with the gab—let me tell you this. People say that you're a muddle-headed fellow—I say it myself... it's only true—sometimes you talk such piffle, fit to make a fellow sick. Still... I always hear you—I mean listen...."

He sat on a work-bench, his back bent and his shoulders, elbows and knees sticking out in sharp angularities, and he looked as though he had been knocked together out of odd fragments of wood. Stroking his stiff dark hair he continued slowly and quietly:

"What I like about you is that you're somehow like a little child—you put faith in everything you know...."

"Alexei—that's just it!" cried Foma, leaning over to him confidentially. "D'you remember me telling you about Fyodor Grigorievich? He says the same thing. His father's all for faith. But he says, even behind faith there's a certain amount of knowledge, for without it no interpretation of life is possible...."

"You chuck that, my boy!" advised Somov. "I don't understand that...."

"No, but can't you see, it's very simple! First knowledge—then faith! It's the mother of faith, it gives it birth—you just think—how can a man have faith unless he has knowledge? Comrade Mark and Vassili, if you ask me—they simply don't believe in the power of knowledge, that's why they talk against faith in general...."

Somov regarded him with a sorrowful ironical look and observed with a shake of the head:

"It's hard to talk with you! Crammed yourself chock-full with all kinds of drivel, and it looks to me you'll never get rid of it.... Let me tell you—I'm sorry for you! Get me? And take my advice —leave Liza alone!"

Foma Varaxin forced a reluctant laugh and screwed up his eyes like a stroked cat.

No, I'll see this thing through. I will, right full ahead! I'll ask her—that's a wonderful idea! Now, what'll she say, eh?"

"What are you going to ask her?" enquired Alexei drily.

"Generally, I'll ask her about complete unity. Word and deed —is that it?"

Somov drew out a cigarette with a trembling hand and put it into his mouth the wrong end. He bit off the moistened end, spat it out on the floor, flung the cigarette after it and asked:

"Do you love her, or what? Might as well say it!"

To which Foma replied without a moment's hesitation:

"Yes, of course, very much.... I mean, if you hadn't mentioned it—I might not have guessed it perhaps—but now it's clear! When I speak with her I feel so happy and light, as though I really were a child, upon my word!"

"Good-bye," muttered Alexei, thrusting out his hand, and made for the door. He stopped in the depths of the workshop, looking small and dark, and asked in a quiet voice:

"Damn it, maybe you only just made it up?"

"What?"

"That love of yours?"

"You're a funny chap!" exclaimed Foma. "You said it yourself. I didn't make anything up. I simply didn't grasp the fact yet... it was you...."

"I'm a fool too!" said Somov and disappeared.

What with excitement and agonizingly anxious visions of his forthcoming meeting with Liza, Foma forgot his toothache and began pacing backwards and forwards among the rustling shavings. An oil lamp burned smokily on the wall, dimly illuminating the yellow strips of boards stacked on racks overhead, a pile of curly shavings in the corner on which lay sprawled the little body of

a sleeping boy, the dark work-benches, the curved legs of chairs and boards gripped in vices.

"Wonderful!" thought Foma, rubbing his hands together vigorously.

He conjured up a simple, delightful life with a clever and loving little wife full of understanding and able to find an answer to every question. Around her are dear friends and comrades, and she herself is dear and near.

"Beautiful!"

Then will come exile—that's sure to come! Somewhere far away in a lonely little village snowed up to the roofs and lost amid dark towering forests—forests towering to the very sky—he sits alone with her, studying. The walls are lined with shelves of thick impressive-looking books that tell you everything you want to know, and they both pass mentally from one to another of them by the bright ways of human thought. Outside there reigns a frozen hush, the white snow has wrapped the earth in a downy cloak and above it hangs the low cupola of the northern skies. Inside the room it is warm, clean and cosy, the fire in the stove dances in vivid yellow tongues of flame, the shadows dart silently along the walls and in a little cot by one of them lies another sweet bit of humanity born into the world to fight for the unity of all mankind into a single family of friends, workers, creators. The wintry sky of this cold country is painted by flaming sunsets, reminiscent of the primeval days when the first childish thoughts of men were born, when the invincible idea of uniting all mankind, the idea of the triumph of light was first nourished in men's minds.

Foma Varaxin did not believe in dawdling—Sunday saw him dressed in his best suit, one side of which, for some unaccountable reason, was longer than the other, and the collar of which evinced an inclination to climb to the back of his head; he put on a shirt with a starched front and frayed cuffs, donned a blue necktie with red spots, hunched his shoulders high and went forth to visit Liza.

The bright winter day was bedecked in hoar-frost and velvet draperies of snow, strengthening in Foma's breast a joyous resolve inspiring him with words bright and pure. The telegraph wires, white and shaggy with hoar-frost, stretched prettily in the air

straight towards the street where lived the girl whom Foma had already more than once and without any shadow of doubt mentally called his bride and wife. It was a glorious day, a joyous day, resplendent with light and silver scintillations.

"Oh, it's you!" said Liza, opening the door of her room.

"Are you coming in or going out?" asked Foma, smiling and giving her hand a hearty squeeze.

"I'm going out," she said, her face twisted with pain, as she blew on her fingers and shook them in front of her face. She had a little sealskin cap on her head and her left hand was gloved.

"Well, I won't keep you long!" promised Foma, settling himself into a chair in his overcoat and slapping his knee with his cap.

"Why do you look so radiant?" asked Liza, her blue eyes travelling over his figure.

He took his time, regarding her with an affectionate searching look—she was so like an apple, small, round and rosy.

"A little doll!" it flashed through his mind.

She walked to and fro between the door and the window, her heels clicking on the floor. She glanced through the window, then at the visitor with wrinkled brows, and swaying slightly, moved slowly towards the door. It seemed to him that her face looked sterner and more preoccupied than usual.

"Perhaps she feels what's coming?" he thought.

"I'll explain why I look radiant," said Foma aloud and invited her: "Sit down, please!"

She shrugged her shoulders and reluctantly, irresolutely sat down facing him.

"Well?"

Foma leaned towards her, put out a yellow-nailed varnish-stained hand, and began in a low, soft, tender voice:

"Do you know, Comrade Liza, I want to tell you just one word." He rose to his feet, pointed his finger in front of him and exclaimed in an impressive tone: "Full ahead!"

"What's that?" asked Liza, smiling.

"Let me explain: imagine a steamboat on the river, engines throttled down because the fairway's unfamiliar. Then the situation becomes clear. 'Half speed!' yells the captain down to the

engine room, and then, when all's plain sailing, the captain commands: 'Full ahead!'"

Liza opened her eyes in a puzzled look, silently biting her lips with little white teeth.

"You don't understand?" queried Foma, moving up closer.

"N-no! Who's the captain?"

"The captain? You! And me—we're both captains of our lives—you and me! We have the right to command our own destiny—isn't that so?"

"Why, yes, but—what's it all about?" exclaimed the girl, laughing.

Foma held his arms out to her and repeated in broken accents:

"Full ahead, comrade! You know us, me and all the rest—come to us, come with us to complete unity!"

Liza stood up. It seemed to him that a shadow passed over her face and chased the bloom from her cheeks, quenched the shining light of her eyes.

"I don't understand," she said, lifting her shoulders. "It goes without saying—of course I am with you.... What makes you speak of it? What is the matter?"

Foma seized her hands in his own hard palms, shook them and almost shouted:

"It goes without saying! Wonderful, comrade! I knew it ... of course you'll—you'll do it!"

"Do what?" she questioned nervously, snatching her fingers away. "Don't shout, there are other people in the house.... Do what?"

Her voice sounded angry and a little indignant. Foma caught the note and hastened to explain:

"Marry me—that's what I propose! Right full ahead! D'you imagine what it'll be like—our life, comrade? What a holiday it'll be...."

Standing before her, with his arms frantically sawing the air, he began to sketch the long pondered scenes of their life together, their work, pictures of life in exile, and as he spoke his voice dropped lower and lower, for Liza seemed to be melting before his gaze, dwindling and shrinking and receding further and further away.

"Good God, how stupid!" he heard a muffled distressed exclamation. "How vulgar!"

It seemed to Foma as if somebody had imperceptibly sprung at him and clenched a hand over his mouth so hard that his heart instantly stopped beating and he gasped for breath.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Foma!" he heard a low indignant voice saying. "It's simply—why, it's awful! It's stupid—don't you see? Oh, how disgusting, how silly!"

It seemed to him that the girl was shrinking into the wall, burying herself among the portraits, and her face grew as grey and lifeless as the photographs above her head. She pulled her plait with one hand and fanned the air in front of her with the other, shrinking ever smaller and speaking in a low but sharp voice:

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself to regard me only as a woman?"

Foma spread his hands and stammered:

"Why? Not a woman, but generally ... as people—you and me...."

"What kind of comradeship is this?" she asked. "What am I to think of you now? Why did you have to insult me, why?"

Foma had no recollection of how he left the little room with the many photographs on the walls, how he took his leave of Liza and what she said at parting—she had utterly dwindled and merged into the grey smudge of the rigid tutorial faces, had become one with them, inspiring, as they did, a cold stern deference.

He paced the streets, seeing nothing but misty circles before his eyes, and pulled his cap down low over his head, musing concentratedly, obstinately, drearily:

"Why stupid? Of what should I be ashamed? Vulgar? A woman? What's wrong with a woman? Does that matter so much? If there are two souls united in a single idea—what if it is a woman?"

And he pulled his cap lower. His head felt cold, as though it had been stocked with ice and the sense of chilliness was so keen that his heart ached with a dull pain, as if he had been breathing asphyxiating fumes in an ill-ventilated room.

He caught up with a funeral procession. A soldier was being buried. Four stalwarts in uniforms, taking broad even strides, carried the coffin on their shoulders, and it swung measuredly from

side to side in the frosty air. In front walked a drummer, adroitly beating a tattoo with his drumsticks, scattering into the air the impressive roll of his drum. Behind marched a platoon of soldiers with shouldered rifles. The soldiers wore black ear-caps tied under their chins and they all seemed to be wounded with deep gashes.

Alongside the coffin ran a little dun dog with its tail between its legs, and when the drum ceased beating the burial roll, it ran closer to the coffin, and when the drumsticks resumed their music it darted back with a timorous plaintive whimper.

Foma took off his cap with a great effort, leaned against a fence and watched the strange soldiers go by, shuddering with the cold that filled his breast and thinking, as though enquiring of some one:

"Why ashamed?"

THE MORDVINIAN GIRL

ON SATURDAYS, when the town's seven belfries ring their bells for Vespers, the deep-toned peals are answered from under the hillside by the husky screech of the factory whistles, and for several minutes there float on the air two warring currents of sound, so oddly incongruous: one gently calling, the other reluctantly dismissing.

And always on Saturdays, when coming out of the factory gates, Pavel Makov, mechanic, experiences a dismal sense of duality and shame. He walks home unhurriedly, letting his comrades overtake him, walks nervously fingering his pointed little beard and looking guiltily at the green carpeted hill, crowned by a luxuriant ridge of orchards. From behind the dark wall of fruit trees peep the grey triangles of the housetops, the dormer-windows, chimney pots, high up in the sky the starling coops, still higher the black top of a lightning-seared pine tree, and beneath it the house of Vasyagin the shoemaker. There Pavel's wife, his daughter and father-in-law await him.

"Do-ong do-ong..." floats the impressive swell overhead.

And below, from the hillside, comes the angry blast:

"Oo-oo-oo...."

With hands thrust in his trouser pockets and body bent forward Pavel walks slowly uphill along a cobble-stone drive, while his comrades make a short cut through the back gardens, leaping like black goats from path to path.

Misha Serdyukov, a foundry man, shouts from somewhere overhead:

"Pavel, will you come?"

"I don't know, old chap, I'll see," answers Pavel, stopping to watch the workmen scrambling and stumbling up the steep craggy ascent. There are sounds of laughter and whistling, all are cheered

by the prospect of a Sunday rest, grimy faces shine and white teeth flash exultantly.

The wattle fences of the vegetable gardens creak and snap under the assault of the homegoing crowd; old wife Ivanikha, the gardener, greets the factory hands with her customary torrent of snuffling abuse, and the sun as it sinks beyond the river far down by Prince's Grove paints the hag's tatters in purple and her grizzled head in gold.

From below comes a smell of burning, of oil and dank swamps and the hillside is redolent with the spicy odours of young cucumbers, dill, and black currants. The scolding of the old woman is drowned in the merry carillon of the cathedral bells.

"Y-yes" Makov muses drearily. "Such weakness of character is shameful—very shameful! . . ."

He comes to the top of the hill and looks down. Five chimney pots stick out like the claws of a slimy monster submerged in the fetid marsh.

The narrow tortuous river intersected by shifting islets is flaming red, and hectic patches glow amid the puny fir trees in the swamp as the evening sun casts its reflection in the rusty water between the hillocks.

The lovely sunbeams are wasted on the swampy dreariness, swallowed without a trace by the sour putrid waters of the slough.

"Better be moving on!" Makov urges himself.

But—he stands thoughtfully for a minute or two more.

He was met at the house gate by Vasyagin—a skinny, bald-headed man with one eye. To conceal the ugly cavity where his right eye had been, he wears a pair of dark spectacles when going out into the street, for which the people of the workers' suburb nicknamed him "Goggle-eyed Valek." Beneath a hooked nose was a sparse chaotic growth of grey, wiry hairs which he coaxed on holidays into the semblance of a moustache by some sticky arrangement that pursed up his lips and gave the impression that the shoemaker was constantly blowing at something hot.

Just now his mouth was extended in an affable little smile as Valek whispered to his son-in-law:

"Saturday-night's, if you please!"

Pavel thrust a twenty kopeck piece into his hand and passed through a little courtyard overgrown with grass, where in a corner beneath a rowan-tree a table was laid for dinner; under the table sat old Churkin, the dog, picking burs out of his tail; on the porch steps sat his wife, her feet set wide apart; his daughter, three-year old little Olga, tumbled about on the trodden grass. and when she caught sight of her father. held out a pair of grimy little paws with outspread fingers and chanted:

"Dad-da! Dad-da come 'oom!"

"Why so late?" asked his wife eyeing him suspiciously. "All the men are home a long time...."

He sighed, imperceptibly—everything was the same. And snapping a finger under his little daughter's nose he threw a guilty glance at his wife's protuberant abdomen.

"Hurry up, get a wash!" she said.

He went, followed by a hail of querulous words.

"Again you've given father money for a drink? I've told you thousands of times not to do it! But there—what do my words mean to you.... I'm not one of your female comrades, you won't catch me knocking about at meetings of a night, like those hussies of yours..."

Pavel washed and contrived to fill his ears with soap suds not to hear the familiar harangue, whose words coiled around him like the dry rustling of wood shavings. It seemed to him that his wife was whittling away his heart with some idiotic blunt plane.

He recalled the days when he had first met his wife—the nightly strolls about the streets of the town in the frosty moonlight, the tobogganing down the hill, the show nights in the gallery and the glorious minutes at the cinema—it was good to sit in the dark pressed close together, while the life of dumb shadows flickered on the screen, so very touching, so wildly comical.

Those had been painful days. He had just been released from prison and found everything wrecked and trampled underfoot. Those who had rapturously applauded now hissed viciously at what had previously excited their rapture....

Little curly, grey-eyed Olga romped about his legs, singing:

"Dadda lubs me, dadda buy me *dolly, buy me gee-gee, tomolla, tomolla....*"

He shook the drops of moisture from his finger into the child's face—the little girl rolled away with a squeal of laughter, and he said to his wife in a gentle voice:

"Come on Dasha, don't nag!"

Little Olga raised the heavy head of old Churkin with no little effort and commanded:

"Look! Look, I tell 'oo!"

The dog wagged an unresponsive head—he had seen enough. Opening his jaws wide he whined briefly.

"When the husband's such a clever fellow that his comrades are dearer to him than his family," his wife went on, relentlessly whittling away at his heart. Pavel stood in the middle of the yard; through the open gate he could see the endless vista of the woods. Once he had sat with Dasha on a bench near the down slope drive, and gazing at this distant view, had said:

"Gee, aren't we going to be happy together."

"I suppose it's because she's pregnant now," he tried to cheer himself with the reflection and picked up his daughter.

Makov sat down to the table in silence, and his daughter climbed to his knees, smoothing out the moist curly hairs of his beard with baby fingers, prattling:

"Ola go tomolla with Dadda and Mummy far 'way. On cabby —gee-up!"

"Shut up, Olga! I've enough of you all day long!" said her mother sternly.

Pavel longed to fetch his wife a whack over her forehead with the back of his spoon, a resounding whack that would be audible through the yard and outside on the street. He restrained the impulse with a scowl and a self-deprecatory thought:

"You ought to know better...."

Father-in-law came in, sat down to the table, and stretching his thin lips across his skinny face in a beatific smirk, pulled a small bottle out of his pocket.

"There he goes!" said Dasha with a snort.

Makov lowered his head to conceal a smile—he knew beforehand what Valek's answer would be:

"Unless you go you won't get there!"

The old man's solitary eye rolled comically as he watched the gurgling liquor spouting from the neck of the bottle. Having drained his glass he smacked his lips with relish. Churkin stared unflinchingly into his face, and the shoemaker addressed himself to the dog:

"You won't get any. If you drink vodka you'll get a scolding."

These words too were familiar to Pavel. Everything here was starkly familiar.

His wife complained:

"All day long you haven't a moment you could call your own—sewing, cooking, washing—and all that brat knows is to go shrieking over the fence that somebody steals the cucumbers...."

She was a large buxom woman with a round face and a fine smooth white brow. Her ears were small and sharp and had an engaging way of moving when she spoke.

Just now, however, she was not too attractive. Her uncombed head looked enormous, the untidy hair clotted with many a day's dust and sweat straggled down her forehead and over her ears, her nose dilated in angry sniffs and her large red lips seemed swollen with wrath. When a wisp of hair got into her mouth Dasha tossed it aside with the handle of her spoon. Her soiled blouse was torn under the armpits and carelessly fastened in front. Pink rounded arms, bared to the elbow, were smeared with dirt. And from her chin hung a yellow drop of kvass.

"It wouldn't take her long to comb her hair and wash herself," Pavel reflected.

She will comb her hair tomorrow, after dinner, put on a striped yellow-green blouse and a lilac skirt. The skirt will be hitched up on her stomach, bringing into view a pair of button boots and even a glimpse of stocking—black, with a yellow sheen—they were her favourite stockings, and she had been very pleased with the purchase.

In the evening, walking by his side, she will carry her belly through the main street of the town, her lips severely compressed, her brows knitted in a solemn frown. This imparts to her the air of a shopkeeper—and when they'd meet his comrades Pavel would imagine a mocking, provoking twinkle in their eyes.

He would feel hot all over, as though an invisible but heavy body clutched him in a loathsome warm, suffocating embrace. He preferred to think of something else, think aloud.

"Today during lunch Kuliga, the timekeeper, told us about the French electricians. . . ."

His wife began to eat hurriedly, and his father-in-law more slowly. The latter's lips twitched and his face and bald head were suffused with grim mirth.

"That's an organization for you!" Pavel said dreamily.

"And how are things in Germany?" asked Valek in honied tones, raising his eyes skyward.

"It's all right there—the party machine there works like clockwork. . . ."

"Thank God for that!" said the old fellow. "I was beginning to worry whether everything was all right with the Germans!"

Valek's voice rose on a shrill note and Pavel felt uncomfortable. He knew the words that would come tumbling through the old man's dark loose teeth. The old man had already blown out his cheeks, cocked his head to one side like a crow and fastening his eye on his son-in-law, he commenced in a thin chirp that had an undertone of maliciousness in it:

"So everything's fine in Germany, eh? And what about the home-money?"

And he broke out into a cackle, bouncing up and down on his chair. Little Olga too caught the infection of his mirth, clapped her hands, and dropping the spoon under the table, received a cuff on the back of her head from her mother with a shouted injunction:

"Pick it up, you brat!"

The child began to cry, piteously and softly, and her father, pressing the sobbing girl to him, looked around him: dusk was falling, it was an hour when light and gloom meet and mingle in a grey murk. The carols of some gay bachelors and the annoying sounds of accordions are wafted down on the air, and the words of his father-in-law flit about him like winged bats:

"No, you'd do better to think about your pocket and not about Germany, you take my word! Once you've gone and married you've got to think about your pocket, yes, sir! And if you've started bringing kids into the world—you fix 'em up properly in this world, and

that you can only do on a sound pocket, yes, sir, on a well-filled pocket!"

Rocking his dozing daughter in his arms Makov was thinking of his father-in-law. Four years ago he had known a different Valek. He remembered how, at a meeting in the brickyard shed, the shoemaker had shouted, wiping the small teardrops from his eyes:

"Boys! I'm sorry for you—but all the same! Go straight ahead with it! March on bravely! Now, we spared ourselves, lived as we were told to, we endured patiently for your sake—now you must suffer and go through with it for your children's sake...."

And to him, Pavel, the shoemaker had one day said:

"When I look at you, my boy, and hear you speak I'm sorry I haven't a son instead of a daughter. What wouldn't I give to have a son like you!..."

But ever since the hooligan "patriots" of the town had knocked Valek's right eye out for him, the old man had made a sheer change of front.

"He's not the only one that's turned tail," thought Pavel sorrowfully.

His wife began clearing the table with brusque movements, removing the dirty dishes, rattling the plates, dropping spoons and shouting:

"Pick it up! You know it's hard for me to bend down."

"No, you leave politics to the foreign countries, and look after your domestic affairs!"

Makov carried the sleeping child indoors. The porch steps creaked and his wife nagged in the same creaking key:

"If it wasn't for all that nonsense...."

"Yes, yes, yes!" hammered the wooden voice of her father.

The ruddy orb of the moon rose above the dark trees. Pavel Makov sat on the porch steps next to his wife, stroking her hair and talking to her almost in a whisper:

"If I get put in prison the comrades will help you...."

"I dare say, not likely!" Dasha snorted.

"We've all got to try and get organized.

"Try! What did you marry for?"

Cherished thoughts flashed through his head and his heart, he did not hear Dasha's dreary objections and she did not listen to him.

"Don't tell me any more of that drivel. You used to bring home a hundred rubles a month, and now—what?"

"It's not my fault, it's the general situation...."

"Damn the situation... drop your comrades and settle down to your work...."

She wished to speak kindly, coaxingly, but she was tired out by the day's drudgery and wanted to sleep. These talks had been dragging on for over three years and nothing had changed—she was sorry for her husband, afraid for his sake, he was almost as kind and unpractical as he had always been, and just as obstinate. She knew that she could not overcome that obstinacy, and ever stronger in her breast grew the fear for her own and her daughter's fate. Pity for her husband waxed into an oppressive ache that, finding no outlet in speech, was lashed into bitterness.

And he sat watching the shadow of the rowan-tree creeping across the courtyard to his feet with its innumerable pointed fingers spread in quivering clutching movements; his thoughts drifting ever more into the future, he confided to his wife in a mysterious whisper:

"There, you see... in France already...."

"Oh, shut up!" she blurted out in a sullen tone, and tossing back her head she almost shouted in a choking voice: "But we shan't live to see it... don't forget the children...."

He fell silent, knocked from the remote and limpid heights into the little courtyard and the cramped circle of crooked little paths.

She felt like crying, but resentment dried the font of tears and only her voice quivered in her throat as she pulled herself to her feet and said:

"I'm going to sleep. I suppose you're going to your comrades?..."

"Yes," he said after a pause.

She grumbled loudly as she went.

"If only they'd round you up quickly, the whole damn lot of you—it's got to happen sooner or later! Maybe that'll knock some sense into your heads...."

The moon was now high in the sky, and the shadows were shortened. Dogs were barking.

Somewhere from the garden plots came the raucous voice of Fenka Lukovitsa, the woman of the town, singing in a maudlin, sobbing voice:

My sweetheart sailed on a Volga lighter,
He went and got drowned the dirty blighter....

Sometimes these talks culminated in stormy scenes. Dasha shouted, choking with passion, waving her arms while her big breasts shook disgustingly beneath her dirty blouse. The sight of her at such moments nauseated Pavel, and while he silently brushed aside the angry torrent of coarse abuse he asked himself in bewilderment:

"How is it I didn't see she was that kind of woman?"

And then, after one of these scenes, had come that thing in his life which had left him with a sense of duality and deception, under which he had been fretting for nearly a year, a thing he was ashamed of but which he could not undo.

One Saturday he had brought home little money and this had thrown his wife into a passion of rage. She had flung the money on the floor and begun shouting at him. And when, touched to the quick, he had said, firmly and sternly:

"Shut your mouth!" she had given him a push towards the door, wildly shrieking:

"Get out, you beggar! This is my father's house—my house! And you're a good-for-nothing, your place is in jail, that's where it is—get out!"

He had understood the reason for this outburst—it was the cabbage pickling season and she did not have enough money for buying cabbage. Deeply hurt, beyond himself with rage, he had rushed into the street, sat for a long time in somebody's vegetable garden, endeavouring to hide his pain and resentment, then he had gone into town where, in a filthy little public house, he had drunk vodka, and suddenly found himself in Cathedral Square—a wretched little garden facing a squat five-domed cathedral.

A wind was blowing, and a dangling rope scraped against the bells, drawing soft sighs from the brass. The lights of the street lamps glimmered fitfully in a ring round the cathedral, and grey ragged clouds sped past over the crosses on the domes, laying

bare cold, blue hollows in the sky, and it seemed as if the wind was sweeping from out these heavenly casements in a rushing torrent.

Now and then an affrighted moon showed its face among the clouds which flung themselves on it like a drab mob of beggars on a silver coin, smearing it across the sky with their wet hulk into a dismal lurid smudge. The wind rocked the earth like a cross-grained nurse the cot of an unbeloved child.

Makov sat on a seat holding a fuddled head in his hands, thinking dazedly of life's cruel jests—the more a man hankers after the good things the worse does he get.

Some one sat down beside him. He raised his head—of course it was a girl, and it struck him that this was as it should be. Who, save a thief or a prostitute would accost a lonely man sitting in foul weather in such a desolate spot?

They exchanged words, then walked for a long time about the streets of the town, and all the way Pavel, in a state of intoxication, spoke about his unhappy marriage, about his wife in whom he had failed to find a kindred soul and to whom he could not unburden his heart.

The girl said:

"That often happens...."

"Often?" asked Pavel. "How do you know?"

"Men often complain...."

Pavel glanced at her face—nothing much, the ordinary face of a street girl.

Then, remembering his wife, he thought maliciously:

"You've asked for it! Just watch me going with this here...."

At her lodging he resumed his discourse on life, his thoughts, then he went to bed and fell asleep before she joined him.

In the morning, looking rather sheepish, he drank tea with her, trying to avoid the girl's eyes, and before leaving he offered her thirty-five kopeks—all that he had on him.

But she calmly pushed his hand aside and said very distinctly:

"What for? There's no need."

He did not like the gesture and the words too struck him unpleasantly.

"Come, take it, please!"

"All right!" she agreed, taking only two silver coins. Then, with a shrug, she repeated:

"Really—there's no need...."

"Now she'll invite me to drop in," thought Pavel, getting into his coat. "She'll tell me her name, when she's at home...."

Staring at the floor at a spot somewhere under his feet she said thoughtfully:

"You spoke very well yesterday ... about our sisterhood, us women...."

These words flattered him, and for a moment stifled the sense of loathing she had aroused in him. Smiling apologetically he murmured:

"Very glad you think so.... I was drunk—I don't usually drink, you know.... Good-bye!"

She held out her hand in silence.

Out in the street he thought:

"She did not ask me to come! Didn't want to take the money—I wonder why?"

He could not recollect what he had been saying and even her face was a vague blur.

Approaching his house he thought with a mixed feeling of pleasure and regret:

"If I met her again I wouldn't recognize her...."

Rain was falling in a drizzle, his coat was wet and clung heavily to his shoulders, his head ached and he was overcome by sleepiness.

His wife met him in silence—she did not even glance at him. He sat long in a corner watching her kneading the dough with her strong arms, and the engaging dimples coming and going in her elbows. She was so comely and firm of flesh.

To break the ice he said:

"Where's Olga?"

"Where indeed? Don't you know it's a holiday today with all good people—she's gone to church with Grandpa...."

Pavel said amicably:

"Really, I don't see the point in that—why take the child out in the rain to such a stuffy place?"

He stopped as it dawned on him that he had more than once replied in the very same words to a similar taunt.

The dough squeaked under her hands and the table creaked.

"Should I tell her—this is what you've brought me to, d'you see? See what you are driving me to—should I tell her?"

Under the impulse of a sudden emotion he went up to her and put his hand on her round shoulder.

"Keep your hands off!" she shouted, shaking his hand off and the angry colour swept in a deep flush over her face and neck.

"Go to the devil—or I'll smack your face for you!"

She straightened up and patted her hair with doughy hands making it grey.

Valek came in with Olga in his arms, took off his spectacles, and, with a gleam of his one eye, exclaimed:

"God's blessings. . . ."

"Dadda, dadda!" cried the child.

Pavel wanted to take her, then remembered where he had spent the night, and slouched out of the room to wash his hands.

All day his wife groused and snorted and his father-in-law scoffed and sneered without intermission:

"Well, mister social-politician, why don't you munch some pie? Munch away till the final victory of the working class, when all the beggars'll have pie to eat—that's a good way off yet!"

"At least you might stop nagging!" Pavel demurred. "Nothing'll come of it anyway. . . ."

"That's true!" agreed Valek. "You said it—nothing will come of it. . . ."

After an interval of several minutes he resumed:

"I've mended your boots—did you notice?"

"Yes."

"Are you pleased?"

"Thanks."

"Dasha, pickle the thanks, will you, I'll eat it when there's nothing left in the pantry. . . ."

The rain spattered against the windowpanes, the wind ran riot in the attic, swinging some object with a bang. A pine tree creaked over the house top, somewhere an unfastened wicket slammed loudly, a latch rattled, and the rain sang and sobbed as it dripped into the the water-butt. The room was pervaded by a gloom and the smell of roasted onions, leather and tar.

Makov observed that his daughter sensed the prevailing atmosphere—she gazed at every one with apprehensive, questioning eyes, and her face began to crumple up preparatory to bursting into tears.

"What's going to happen to her?" he thought as he watched the child, feeling himself guilty before her.

"Here, come to me girlie!" he called, holding out his arms. But when Olga jumped up to run to him her mother caught hold of her and shouted:

"Don't you dare!"

Olga burst into tears, her little face buried in her mother's lap, but her mother sprang to her feet and pushed the child away into a corner:

"Go to sleep, you brat! Don't let me see anything more of you. . . ."

Pavel too got up. His face burned, and a sharp chill ran up his spine.

"If you dare," he said, moving up to his wife, "ever again. . . ."

His wife held up her face defiantly and urged him in a whisper full of pain and hatred:

"Hit me, come on! Hit me!"

Her father grabbed a last and danced around, yelling:

"So that's it, eh? There's s-solidarity for yer!"

Pavel thrust his wife aside, and seizing his cap he rushed out.

He ran under the rain, thinking in despair:

"If he hadn't butted in, I'd have. . . ."

Streams of dirty water rushed to meet him, splashing his feet, and the wind drove the cold stinging spray of the autumn rain into his face.

And now he was again in that girl's room, sitting at the table, his sodden jacket thrown on the floor, waving one arm, rubbing his throat with the other and speaking hurriedly:

"I'm not a brute! I understand—she's not to blame. . . ."

The girl darted anxiously about the room like a peg-top whipped into spurts of activity by an invisible hand. She was preparing the samovar, breaking firewood splinters across her knee, making a rustling noise with the charcoal, while behind her floated the ends of a shawl she had thrown over her bare shoulders.

"You see, I've come to you—though I have comrades, but I feel ashamed to tell them about this—though I daresay they too have such days when everyone in the house torments one another—why? Tell me—why?"

"How do I know?" he heard a low reply.

"This rotten life eats into every one's bones, into one's heart—and one day you suddenly find your heart burning with a maddening pain and hatred...."

The girl went up to him, lightly touched his shirt, and said, her eyes blinking:

"You're all wet—and I haven't anything to give you.... What's to be done?"

"Don't worry about it," he said, seizing her hand.

She gently extricated her fingers and went on solicitously:

"You'll catch a cold and get ill! That's a bad thing for a working man!"

She went out into the passage and instantly reappeared with a coloured tattered garment which she warmed up over the samovar, urging the visitor in impersonal tones:

"You change your things... this is a woman's dress, but at least it's dry...."

Throwing the shred of garment on the table she went out again into the passage. Makov followed her with his eyes, and his thoughts were hazy, like in a dream:

"Fate! Fate?—what nonsense. For me it's just a place to go to, and to her—it's all the same."

Bitter reproaches slithered up, squirming into his consciousness like the thin-lipped whispers of his father-in-law:

"Fed up, eh? Comrades? Why didn't you go to your comrades in this difficult hour—why don't you go to them? Aha-a! Ashamed, are you?"

He smoothed down his cropped hair and his lips twisted in a painful smile.

"Why haven't you changed?" asked the hostess in a business-like tone, looking in at the door.

His wet clothes clung to his body with a disagreeable sensation of chilliness. Pavel swiftly tore them off and wrapped himself in the long woman's dress.

"That's right," said the girl, coming in.

"Do I look funny?" he asked.

"You do," acquiesced the girl, but there was not the ghost of a smile on her face.

Pavel for the first time subjected her to a close unceremonious scrutiny. She had a stocky little figure, high cheek bones and slits of eyes.

"It's funny, yet you don't laugh!" he said, taking a look round.

The little room was crowded with a bed, a table, two chairs, a cupboard, and, near the door, a big stove. In the front corner hung a little icon, above it a twig of pussy willow with a paper blossom. Gaudy little pictures looked down from blackened walls and cockroaches crawled over them with a rustling sound. Between the logs hung tufts of oakum. The window was a tiny square of glass, dim with age.

The girl, bending over the samovar, did not answer Pavel. He felt awkward and thought to himself with a feeling of animosity:

"Probably stupid."

Aloud he asked:

"Is this the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"Does any one else live in the house?"

She placed the boiling samovar on the table, cut a big slice of rye bread and poured out the tea, speaking in a voice that was as low and monotonous as the sound of the rain outside:

"Two old women live here—old maids. But they practically do no cooking at home, they make calls on rich acquaintances and have their meals there. Very often they don't come home for the night. I've got nothing but bread—I'm sorry!"

"I'm not hungry," said Pavel, conscious of a growing sense of embarrassment. What had made him come here?

Suddenly, before he realized it himself, he had asked, loudly and sternly:

"Are you registered?"

"Where?"

"At the police?"

She replied calmly:

"Yes, of course, my passport's registered. I'm employed here as cook and housemaid. There's nothing to do all day...."

Pavel felt there was something wrong here, something he could not understand.

"I didn't mean that...."

She guessed. Her face with its high cheek bones darkened, her eyes closed entirely.

"Oh," she murmured, "I see.... My being on the boulevard yesterday? No, I don't do that...."

He didn't believe it. He swung back on his chair, smiling, contemplating her—it amused him that she concealed her calling, he was both amused and sorry for her.

The girl's oblique eyes suddenly opened—they were blue and warm and agreeably lighted up her face with a slightly beautifying effect.

"I went out yesterday just like that," she was saying, breaking off pinches of bread and rolling them into little balls—"I felt so sick of everything, and went out. Maybe I'd have thrown myself in the river, but I caught sight of you. There, I thought, he's a man and also feels miserable! So I went up. And you started talking right away—I could see you were very upset. I had a suspicion you intended to do away with yourself too.... It happens every day—people shoot themselves, hang themselves...."

He listened, still incredulous, making a mental note:

"Went out.... So I went up.... Not much of a talker. Uninteresting girl...."

And the girl went on talking in the same level tone, laconically. She was a Mordvinian, of a well-to-do family, and had received a schooling—had attended the parish school. A fire ruined the family, her father went to Siberia to look for land and never came back. She went to work as maid at the railway station—she lived there for three years. The station-master had a brother, he was the telegraph operator.

"When you speak you remind me of him."

Covering her eyes with her light lashes she repeated with conviction:

"Yes, exactly like him...."

"Where is he?" asked Pavel.

"He's been arrested."

There was no trace of sadness in her voice, but she twisted her neck queerly, her cheek bones looked suddenly drawn and her face puckered up like that of a dog about to whimper.

Pavel no longer speculated whether she was to be believed or not—he did not want to think of it.

Suddenly she said loudly:

"I had a baby too. . . ."

"The telegraph man's?"

"Yes. It was born dead."

"Was the telegraph man a good fellow?"

She smiled broadly.

"Y-yes. He used to speak very interesting, like you, but he was all on his own—every one used to laugh at him. They took him alone. Me they kicked out."

The wind howled in the chimney like a homeless old dog.

Life became an utter falsehood, and the deception, like a canker, gnawed at the roots of Pavel's self-respect.

He loved his wife, loved to take her large, healthy, warm body in his arms. The seductive appeal of her dark eyes exercised an irresistible power over him.

Sometimes, when she was in one of her rare good moods, she spoke to him in a muffled voice, slightly through the nose:

"What about going up to your wife, fondling her and giving her a kiss, you sulky boy!"

There were days and weeks when he almost forgot the dark decrepit little house on the outskirts of the town. The house itself, looking like a mud-hut sunk into the ground, with its two sightless windows, its moss-grown roof and the dark end of a room and its tenant—that mute, timid, nocturnal creature—all these memories melted away, became nothing, and if, at times, they rose to his mind like a cheerless dream, Pavel thought with relief:

"That's all over!"

At first he was strongly tempted to tell his wife about it—tell it to her in a way that would excite her sense of guilt, make her realize the danger which lay for both of them in their spiritual feud.

But he was afraid to broach the subject. The hours when she was sweet-tempered and lovable fled with such imperceptible speed, and whenever he approached a topic that had no immediate bearing on the home, she would yawn languidly, satiated with his caresses, and stem the current of his speech with a drowsy:

"For goodness' sake, don't start harping on that string again. . . ."

She would implore, command:

"Love me without those words of yours. . . ."

If he persisted a sullen furrow would settle between his wife's brows, her eyes would grow bright and dry and she would urge him in a voice of irritation:

"You drop all that, I tell you—remember you have children! Goodness knows we have enough of those books at home—a whole shelf of 'em. . . . A married man shouldn't have anything to do with comrades and books. . . . Look how all the men with families have dropped out of it—they're just working quietly, for their wives and children. Only Serdyukov with that Masha of his are still mixed up with your lot—but how comes he to you. Why, last month he only brought home thirty-six rubles, he was fined twice. . . ."

Jealously and zealously picking up all the scandal about the suburb she knew a good deal of bad about people, never spoke a good word about any one, and emptied sackfulls of malicious, very often mendacious rubbish onto her husband's head with avid enjoyment and keen relish.

"It's not true, Dasha!" he hazarded a protest.

She retorted querulously:

"To be sure! Your comrades you believe, I know, but not your wife. . . ."

Under the weight of her speeches all the blood, as it were, was drained out of Pavel's good intentions which, paralyzed and crushed, perished in a heart that had grown increasingly accustomed to remain silent to his wife.

He listened to her speeches without saying anything, merely whistling softly to himself and musing gloomily:

"She doesn't understand. I wonder—won't she ever understand?"

He craved for a woman's exquisite tenderness, something deep and brimming, something that would help kindle the soul into a brighter flame while stirring the blood. But that caress for the soul he

had to seek on the outskirts of the town, from the ugly Mordvinian girl Liza, who evinced an ability, and obviously a pleasure, in listening to his stories about life and his dreams of the future. It was pleasant to see a person sitting opposite you and greedily taking in your every word like a person gulping air after having recovered from a deep swoon.

In her dry bosom, too, there lived something that was alien and inscrutable to Pavel—it was as though a little grey bird sang there at times.

"Do you go to church?" she once asked him, nestling up to him.

"No, you see...."

Pavel explained to her at great length and with warmth why he did not go to church, but when he had finished the girl said quietly:

"It works out the same way: you speak about peace on earth and in church too they pray for 'peace throughout the world....'"

"No, wait a minute! I speak about the struggle...."

"But that's what the struggle's for, to bring peace everywhere...."

He argued with her again, growing excited, waving his arms, hitting the table with his fist, and waxing more enthusiastic as the realization dawned on him with a thrill of pleasure that he was expressing his thoughts with growing ease and eloquence.

The Mordvinian girl retorted with quiet obstinacy:

"No, I love it when the priest says in his deep voice: 'The peace of the Lord unto ye all.' I don't care who says it, as long as people hear the words of peace!"

And standing close to him, looking into his eyes, she spoke softly and fearfully:

"You just look—every one's bad tempered, everywhere people are fighting! In the pubs and in the markets—everywhere. If they begin to play, they'll end up by fighting. Even in church people are touchy, quarrel over places. Little children are beaten. People are arrested and hung. And how many are killed! The police beat people terribly! But people beat one another too—it's just purely out of spite, they beat one another! That time I wanted to do that out of spite, I got furious with myself—what are you living for, you wretch? There aren't any good people, and that makes it so awful. Maybe there are a few—one here, another there—they're hardly noticeable...."

He laughed at her, but her words were uttered so simply, without a shadow of pretension or presumption that they roused in Pavel's heart a feeling of indulgence towards her and drew them together by a delicate thread of understanding stretched between her unassuming faith and his stern knowledge.

Many times did he revert to this subject, humorously and seriously, but always he met a supple resistance—she neither protested nor let herself be persuaded by his arguments.

"You're looking too far ahead—you want too much!" he said with a laugh. "You and I won't see peace, our lives will pass in struggle. . . ."

She pondered this and replied:

"If you know tomorrow's going to be good, the bad things today are not so very frightening, and they don't seem so powerful. . . ."

At times, when sitting in Liza's room, Pavel would think of his wife, and his hands would become limp, his heart—suffused with bitterness and gall, and he would grow cold, and reproach himself in shame and anger:

"Call yourself a progressive man and all the rest of it. A denouncer of bourgeois immorality, and here you are. . . ."

From this disturbing thought, however, he was diverted by many other thoughts that ran deep and wide, thoughts that were still hazy and which he was eager to speak about. Again and again he unfolded to Liza the burden of his heart and spoke about his wife, of how he loved her and yet how difficult it was for him to get along without her, Liza.

"I can't speak to anybody like I do to you. It seems that there is always something in a man which he can tell only to a woman—yet I can't tell my wife. Neither can I tell my comrades. . . . It's awkward somehow, one feels ashamed to talk about himself, but you must get it off your chest!"

She stroked his head with a rough palm and the long fingers of a thin hand, listening to what he said.

"I tried talking about it, but people answer in a bookish way—I can read books myself. People are shy to speak frankly about themselves. . . . I suppose many people have the same troubles that I have, things that are not written anywhere except in the heart, things one

is ashamed to utter, but which have got to be said, otherwise it's torture!"

He gazed into a pair of shining blue eyes and forgot that those narrow eyes were set at an oblique angle. Liza's hand trembled on his head, on his shoulder, responsive to his agitation.

He sat her on his knees and with a heartache and passion that swept over him in a sudden wave he kissed her rough hot cheeks and lips.

"Never mind, dearest," she whispered with ever widening eyes. "You'll get over it, it'll pass...."

Sometimes he would fall fast asleep with his head on her lap, while she would sit motionless until it was time to waken him, stroking his cropped head softly like a loving nurse.

... Pavel would bring a newspaper with him, unfold the closely printed sheet on the table, and bending over it read with a certain degree of solemnity about the comrades in Europe and the whole world, about their untiring efforts and struggle, would speak about the leaders of the party, and the indefatigable fighters in the daily war.

She sat motionless, quietly and rarely asking him a question, but Pavel was sure the girl understood everything.

He noticed that when heroes or teachers were mentioned her face grew oddly tense and her blue eyes gleamed like those of a child listening to a fairy tale. At times this fixed stare was disconcerting, reminding him of the gaze of a sagacious faithful dog deeply pondering over something that was intelligible only to its own dumb ferine soul. At moments such as these he had the impression that this soft-spoken thick-set girl was quietly capable of doing anything....

Very often she asked:

"What name did you say?"

After a pause she distinctly repeated the name, asking once more:

"How will it be in Russian?"

"I don't know. We haven't got such names."

"Didn't we have such holy martyrs?" she queried, incredulous and dejected.

Pavel burst out laughing.

"Holy martyrs are not in our line, my dear girl! We live in hell, they don't breed there...."

"They will!" Liza once declared.

That exclamation sounded very queer, like the first stroke of a bell after midnight heralding the birth of a new day amid the tenebrous night. Pavel looked into his friend's face, but he found nothing unusual there. He remained thoughtful for a moment, then asked:

"What makes you ask their names?"

She bent her head without replying. Then he tenderly raised her head and pursued laughingly:

"Maybe you intend to pray for them, eh?"

"What of it," she said, "so I do. Only I pray without the names, just simply: please God help those who are doing good to people! You can laugh, I don't care."

"It's useless, Liza!"

"Every one tries to help good people to the best of his ability."

"That's no good, Liza! No, you've got to learn another way of helping...."

"I will, when I learn...."

And nestling close to him she said:

"It doesn't matter, does it? It can't hurt them, can it?"

Pavel put his arm around her and said nothing, his thoughts dwelling on vague but significant things.

His comrades noticed that he was keeping some of his time from them and his wife and spending it elsewhere, but they held their peace, pretending to believe his explanations.

Only Serdyukov, the jovial foundry man, one day asked him:

"I see you've got yourself a lady-love too Pavel, eh?"

The question took him unawares and in his confusion he asked:

"Who else?"

Pock-marked shaggy-haired Serdyukov threw up his scorched hands with a guffaw.

"I caught you properly there! What do you say to that? Look out, I'll tell your wife now...."

"No, don't say anything!" Pavel said gravely.

"What'll you give me? Give me a book—give me Nekrassov, eh?"

"I won't. But I'll tell her myself...."

Serdyukov stared at him in amazement.

"You'll tell her? Your wife?"

"Well, yes."

"What for?"

"I'd better!"

Serdyukov knitted a furrowed brow, glanced aside and sighed.

"It's that serious, then? Well, that's good! Every one can see she's not your equal. She was born a philistine, it's in her bones. You can't wash a black horse white—and it's not worth wasting time over...."

"He doesn't understand," thought Pavel.

"You don't love her," he said quietly.

"You said it!" retorted Serdyukov with a tinge of irony. "I don't—I love another...."

Then Pavel asked:

"Are you in the same boat?"

"What boat? Oh, yes...."

The foundry man said soberly, with a humourless smile:

"Yes, brother, I'm in the same fix!"

Pavel looked at him in astonishment and offered the comment:

"How is that? Don't you get along together ... isn't your wife a comrade to you...."

"That's just the point—she is a comrade!" said Serdyukov morosely. That's the trouble—she coughs all the time something terrible, that comrade of mine—she's fading away...."

They were chatting in the factory yard by a soot-covered wall and somewhere above their heads a steam exhaust was spluttering angrily all the time:

"Puff, puff...."

The soot-laden air was filled with groaning, screeching, grating sounds, the roaring of the furnace and the clank of iron.

"Two child-births in three years," Serdyukov was growling moodily, rolling himself a cigarette. "And that, it appears, is a thing that people of our class can't afford. The doctor advises abstinence. Well, I began trying to keep away from her—out of pity. It was the devil to pay, I can tell you brother. Well, I kept away from her so long until I ran into a place I shouldn't have run into! I guess there'll be trouble brewing for me. And there's no turning back—the way is blocked. Turning back!—it means nothing anyway! My wife's

got to go to live in the country, not bear children. Children are not for us, it looks like, my dear fellow. What is for us here, anyway?"

He looked round at the piles of scrap iron, the coal blackened earth and the roofs of the factory buildings emitting smoke and steam.

"They've walked off with our ball all right. And we haven't got a single trump to play back—pretty rotten, Pavel!"

He threw his cigarette end over his shoulder and went into his shop. Pavel had never seen him like that before, walking with bent head and looking nervously about him as though fearing a sudden attack. And when he was swallowed in the black jaws of the foundry shop Pavel remembered what a gay lark he had been, a laughter-loving wag, enthusiastic theatre-goer and singer, and Pavel fell deep in thought. It seemed to him that somebody else had been speaking to him just now, somebody more intimate than the Serdyukov of old. This was the first time he had heard a comrade speak so simply of the things that preyed on his mind, and standing at his lathe Pavel thought:

"He'll understand me now, I'll have to get on closer terms with him. It's no good, living the way I do...."

His intentions were not carried out. Within less than a week Serdyukov was picked up among the bushes by the brickyard—he had been cruelly beaten up by somebody and was confined to hospital for a long time.

"What a life!" Pavel was saying, pacing up and down the room in his home. "I'm sorry for him, so terribly sorry you can't imagine. Dasha! He's such a fine chap...."

He sat down beside her, and dropping his voice, continued:

"D'you know he recently spoke to me about his wife...."

"He'd have better kept his mouth shut, the rotter!" muttered Dasha. "D'you think I don't know why he got that beating?"

"Look here, Dasha!"

"Of course, you're ready to find excuses for every scoundrel, once he's a comrade of yours...."

He said sternly:

"Darya! There are no scoundrels among my comrades!"

"Don't shout!"

Despite the resistance of her elbows he put his arms round his wife and told her about Serdyukov. She was very amused at first, then pushing her husband away in indignation she began to scold:

"Oh, you miserable devils! D'you mean to say that Marya knew all about these goings on?"

"Don't you get it into your head to tell her!" Pavel cried in alarm.

"Ah, that I will! Damn it if I won't tell her!" exclaimed Dasha with a grim smile. "That's where their learning has brought them, scoundrels! Sorry for his wife, indeed—bears children too often—what d'you think of that, eh? Ugh!"

When her ire was roused she had a way of throwing her head up, breathing heavily through her nose, while her nostrils dilated and quivered like those of a horse. This made her all the more seductive, but it also repelled Pavel, stirring within him a savage rancour. He would like to see her ill and wretched and cowed, or a beggar walking the streets in filthy rags, bowing humbly and begging for alms from Serdyukov's wife—that shrewd subtle woman—from the people who were so alien to her heart, the dark, heavy oval thing that was like a ball of iron.

Saturday evening found Pavel in Liza's room, speaking softly:

"They've brought men to such a state when even the good and human that's in a man is looked on as dirt. A noose has been tied round my very soul—I don't know how I'll throw it off! I love that woman, and my daughter, too, of course—but what can she give my daughter? And I can't live without you. Liza. Ah, Mordvinian lass, you've a lovely soul, it's my friend you are...."

She listened to him with drooping head, and gravely, quietly inserted her laconic remarks:

"I don't know what you'll do. I can't think of any way to help you...."

But she did think of a way.

Once, feeling depressed after a new quarrel with his father-in-law and his wife, Pavel plodded wearily through the quiet streets of the town past fences, heavily locked gates and dark windows behind which the spring night lay hid from the cold light of the moon.

"One side, the other side!" he thought to himself, stepping into the light and back again into the shadows of the trees and houses.

"No, to hell with it all! It's got to be life as I want it, or love as she wants it. I'm for life.... I'm fed up!"

He walked with difficulty, his feet seemed to flounder in the shadows as if they were quicksands or a quagmire. He crossed to the other side of the street that was all bathed in the pale moonlight.

The town dropped reluctantly into the uneasy sleep of vernal night, but dark figures still roamed the streets like men after a hopeless quest. A black rider rode past swaying in his saddle, and the horse's hoofs struck two bluish sparks out of the roadway.

A burly policeman was leading a long-haired workman with a strap on his head. The latter lurched from side to side, raised his hand in a threatening gesture and buzzed like an enormous bumble-bee:

"I'll sh-show you, j-just wait and sh-shee...."

A post office official went by arm in arm with a willowy young lady, leaving a curious train of words in his wake:

"Just a little bit open, and nobody can go through...."

Dogs emitted sleepy little yelps as they thrust their muzzles through the gates; the church watchman leisurely struck the hours: he would strike once and wait until the sound melted in the blue air, like a teardrop in a bowl of cold water.

"Ten," counted Pavel.

He conjured up the little Mordvinian girl in a grey skirt and a yellow blouse with lace in front. She had three blouses, and all were different shades of yellow and all too short for her. When she raised her arms the ends would slip out of her waistband, and when she bent her body one could glimpse a strip of homespun chemise of country linen. Her skirt too sat awkwardly on her, awry.

"Her hair's nice," he reminded himself, feeling a desire to find in Liza something equal to his wife's beauty.

"Lovely hair, so soft. Her eyes too. Very sweet...."

An inner voice protested:

"She's got bony knees. Shoulders too...."

...Darkness gazed at him from the window of Liza's room. He pressed his face against the pane and began drumming on the little ventilator window as he always did. There was a long silence, and then a strange feeble voice came through the ventilator:

"Who d'you want?"

"Is Liza at home?"

There came a muffled reply:

"She doesn't live here."

"What do you mean?"

"She's gone."

"When did she go?"

"Four days ago. Be gone now."

"Wait a minute!" said Pavel loudly, his chest pressed against the wall of the house. "Didn't she leave me any message?"

"Who'll you be?"

"Makov—Pavel Makov."

"There's a note for you—here, I'll push it through the window...."

A light flashed for a moment and went out.

There was another flash of light and the window glimmered like a big yellow face marred by a black diagonal scar.

The white corner of a rustling slip of paper was thrust out of the window. Pavel seized it, unfolded it, and by the dim light of the window he read in big sprawling characters:

"Pavel Mitrich, my dear man, I love you very much but it will be bad as it is with your wife just the same. Because I have begun to grow jealous of her and I hate her and it's the same thing for you again therefore I am going away I don't know where Lizaveta."

He crushed the note in his hand, but instantly spread it out again, looked once more at the straggling lines, tore it into shreds and said to himself with a sneer:

"Couldn't think of anything better, ugly bitch...."

He slowly let the pieces flutter to the ground as he gazed out at the field, empty and desolate like his heart gripped by a sudden terror.

"Silly girl...."

Very quietly he retraced his steps, rubbing the fences with his shoulder, and sadly muttering:

"Oh, Liza, where have you gone?..."

A MAN IS BORN

IT WAS in '92 the famine year, between Sukhum and Ochemchiry, on the river Kodor, not far from the coast—hollow sounding above the merry ripple of the glittering mountain stream I heard the roling sea.

Autumn. Small, yellowed bay leaves were darting hither and thither in the white surf of the Kodor like nimble salmon-trout. I was sitting on the high stony bank overlooking the river and thinking that the gulls and cormorants were also, probably, taking the leaves for fish and being fooled—and that was why they were screaming so plaintively over there, on the right, beyond the trees, where the waves were lapping the shore.

The chestnut trees spreading above me were decorated with gold—at my feet lay numerous leaves that looked like hands severed from human wrists. The branches of the hornbeam on the opposite bank were already bare and hung in the air like a torn net. Inside the net, as if caught in it, hopped a yellow and red mountain woodpecker, tapping at the bark of the trunk with its black beak, driving out the insects, which were at once gobbled up by those guests from the north—the agile tomtits and grey nut-hatches.

On my left, smoky clouds hung low over the mountain tops, threatening rain, and causing shadows to glide across the green slopes on which the boxwood trees grew, and where, in the hollows of the ancient beeches and lindens, one can find the "grog honey" which in the days of old nearly sealed the fate of the troops of Pompeius the Great. It knocked a whole legion of the Roman ironsides off their feet with its inebriating sweetness. The wild bees make this honey from the pollen of bay and azalea blossoms, and "wayfarers" scoop it from the hollows and eat it, spreading it on their *lavash*—flat cakes made from wheat flour.

This is what I was doing, sitting on the stones under a chestnut tree, frightfully stung by an angry bee—I dipped my bread into my

tea can, filled with honey, and ate, meanwhile admiring the idle play of the tired autumn sun.

The Caucasus in the autumn is like the interior of a magnificent cathedral which the great sages—being also great sinners—built to hide their shame for their past from prying eyes. They built a vast temple of gold, turquoise and emerald, and hung the mountain sides with the finest carpets embroidered in silk by the Turkmen in Samarkand and Shemaha; they plundered the whole world and brought all their loot here as a gift to the sun, as much as to say:

"Thine—from Thine—to Thee!"

...I saw a vision of long-bearded, hoary giants, large-eyed like merry children, descending from the mountains, beautifying the earth, scattering their multi-coloured treasures with a lavish hand, covering the mountain tops with thick layers of silver and the terraces with the living fabric of a vast variety of trees—and under their hands this patch of heaven-blessed earth was endowed with enchanting beauty.

It's a fine job—being a man in this world! What wonderful things one sees! How the heart is stirred by pleasure almost akin to pain in one's calm contemplation of beauty!

Yes, it's true, sometimes you find it hard. Your breast is filled with burning hatred, and grief greedily sucks the blood from your heart—but this cannot last for ever. Even the sun often looks down on men in infinite sadness: it has laboured so hard for them, and what wretched manikins they have turned out to be! ...

Of course, there's a lot of good ones—but they need repair, or better still, to be made all over again.

... Above the bushes on my left I saw dark heads bobbing; barely perceptible above the murmur of the waves and the rippling sounds of the river. I heard human voices—those were the "starving" on their way from Sukhum, where they had been building a road, to Ochemchiry, in the hope of getting another job.

I knew them—they were from Orel. I had worked with them in Sukhum and we had been paid off together the day before. I had left before them, at night, so as to reach the seashore in time to see the sunrise.

They were four muzhiks and a young peasant woman with high cheekbones; she was pregnant, her huge abdomen protruded upward;

she had bluish-grey eyes, seemingly bulging with fright. I could see her head above the bushes too, covered with a yellow kerchief, nodding like a sunflower in full bloom swaying in the wind. Her husband had died in Sukhum from overeating himself with fruit. I had lived in the same hutment with these people: from the good old Russian habit they had complained about their misfortunes so much, and so loudly, that their lamentations must have been heard a good five versts away.

They were dull people, crushed by sorrow, which had torn them from their native, worn out, barren soil and had swept them like autumn leaves to this place, where the strange, luxuriant clime amazed and dazzled them, and where the hard conditions of labour had finally broken them. They gazed at everything about them, blinking their sad, faded eyes in perplexity, smiling pitifully to each other and saying in low voices:

"Ai-e-e ... what a soil!"

"The stuff just shoots up!"

"Ye-e-es ... but still ... it's very stony."

"It's not so good, you have to admit."

And then they recalled Kobili Lozhok, Sukhoi Gon, Mokrenki—their native villages, where every handful of earth contained the ashes of their forefathers; they remembered it, it was familiar and dear to them, they had watered it with the sweat of their brows.

There was another woman with them—tall, upright, with a chest as flat as a board, a heavy jaw and dull, squinting eyes as black as coal.

In the evening she, together with the woman in the yellow kerchief, would go a little distance behind the hutment, squat down on a heap of stones, and resting her chin in the palm of her hand and inclining her head to the side, would sing in a high-pitched angry voice:

Beyond the village churchyard,
Among the bushes green,
On the yellow sand I'll spread
My shawl so white and clean
And there I'll wait....
Until my darling comes....
And when he comes....
I'll greet him heartily....

Usually the one in the yellow kerchief would sit silently looking down at her abdomen; but sometimes she would suddenly join in and in a deep, drawling, masculine voice would sing the words of the sad refrain:

Oh my darling....
My dear darling....
I am not fated....
To see thee more....

In the black, suffocating darkness of the southern night, these wailing voices awakened in me the memory of the snowy wilderness of the north, of the shrieking blizzard, and the howling of the wolves....

Later the cross-eyed woman was struck down by fever and she was carried to the town on a canvas stretcher—on the way she shivered and moaned, and the moaning sounded as if she was continuing her song about the churchyard and the sand.

...The head in the yellow kerchief dived below the bush and vanished.

I finished my breakfast, covered the honey in my tea can with leaves, tied up my knapsack and leisurely followed in the track of the other people, tapping the firm ground with my cornel-wood walking stick.

And so, there I was on the narrow, grey strip of road. On my right heaved the deep blue sea. It looked as though thousands of invisible carpenters were planing it with their planes, and the white shavings rustled on the beach, blown there by the wind, which was moist, warm and fragrant, like the breath of a robust woman. A Turkish felucca, listing heavily to port, was gliding towards Sukhum, its sails puffed out like the fat cheeks of the pompous road engineer in Sukhum—a most important fellow. For some reason he always said "shoot oop" for "shut up," and "mebbe" for "may be."

"Shoot oop! Mebbe you think you can fight, but in two ticks I'll have you hauled off to the police station!"

He used to take a delight in having people dragged off to the police station, and it is good to think that by now the worms in his grave must have eaten his body right down to the bones.

... How easy it was to walk! Like treading on air. Pleasant thoughts, brightly-clad reminiscences, sang in soft chorus in my

memory. These voices in my soul were like the white-crested waves of the sea—on the surface; deep down, however, my soul was calm. The bright and joyous hopes of youth swam leisurely, like silvery fish in the depths of the sea.

The road led to the seashore, winding its way nearer and nearer to the sandy strip that was lapped by the waves—the bushes too seemed to be striving to get a glimpse of the sea and swayed over the ribbon of road as if nodding greetings to the blue expanse.

The wind was blowing from the mountains—threatening rain.

... A low moan in the bushes—a human moan, which always goes to the heart.

Pushing the bushes apart I saw the woman in the yellow kerchief sitting with her back against the trunk of a walnut tree; her head was dropped on one shoulder. her mouth was contorted, her eyes bulged with a look of insanity. She was supporting her huge abdomen with her hands and breathing with such unnatural effort that her abdomen positively leapt convulsively. The woman moaned faintly, exposing her yellow wolfish teeth.

"What's the matter? Did somebody hit you?" I asked, bending over her. She rubbed one bare foot against the other in the grey dust like a fly cleaning itself and, rolling her heavy head, she gasped:

"Go away! ... Ain't you got no shame? ... Go away! ..."

I realized what was the matter—I had seen something like this before—of course I was scared and skipped back into the road, but the woman uttered a loud prolonged shriek, her bulging eyes seemed to burst and tears rolled down her flushed and swollen cheeks.

This compelled me to go back to her. I threw my knapsack, kettle and tea can to the ground, lay the woman flat on her back and was about to bend her legs at the knees when she pushed me away, punched me in the face and chest and turning over, she crept off on all fours deeper into the bushes, grunting and growling like a she-bear:

"Devil! ... Beast!"

Her arms gave way and she dropped, striking her face on the ground. She shrieked again, convulsively stretching her legs.

In the heat of the excitement I suddenly remembered all I had known about this business. I turned the woman over on her back and bent up her legs—the chorion was already visible.

"Lie still, it's coming!" I said to her.

I ran to the beach, rolled up my sleeves, washed my hands and returned, ready to act as midwife.

The woman writhed like birch-bark in the flames. She tapped the ground around her with the palms of her hands and tearing up handfuls of faded grass she wanted to stuff it into her mouth; and in doing so she dropped earth on to her frightful, inhumanly contorted face and into her wild, bloodshot eyes—and now the chorion burst and the child's head appeared. I had to restrain the convulsive jerking of her legs, help the child emerge, and see that she did not stuff grass into her distorted mouth....

We swore at each other a bit—she through her clenched teeth, and I in a low voice; she from pain and, perhaps, from shame. I from embarrassment and heartrending pity for her....

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord!" she cried hoarsely. Her livid lips were bitten through, there was foam at the corners of her mouth, and from her eyes, which seemed suddenly to have faded in the sun, flowed those abundant tears of a mother's unbearable pain. Her whole body was taut, as if it were being torn in two.

"Go ... away ... you ... devil!"

She kept pushing me away with her feeble, seemingly dislocated arms. I said to her appealingly:

"Don't be a fool! Try, try hard. It'll be over soon."

My heart was torn with pity for her, it seemed to me that her tears had splashed into my eyes. I felt as if my heart would burst. I wanted to shout, and I did shout:

"Come on! Hurry up!"

And lo—a tiny human being lay in my arms—as red as a beetroot. Tears streamed from my eyes, but through the tears I saw that this tiny red creature was already discontented with the world, kicking, struggling and yelling, although it was still tied to its mother. It had blue eyes, its funny little nose looked squashed on its red, crumpled face, and its lips were moving as it bawled:

"Ya-a-a-ah.... Ya-a-a-ah."

Its body was so slimy that I was afraid it would slip out of my arms. I was on my knees looking into its face and laughing—laughing with joy at the sight of him ... and I forgot what had to be done next....

"Cut the cord..." the mother whispered. Her eyes were closed. Her face was haggard and grey, like that of a corpse, her livid lips barely moved as she said:

"Cut it... with your knife...."

But somebody in the hut had stolen my knife—so I bit the navel cord through with my teeth. The child yelled in a real, Orel bass voice. The mother smiled. I saw her eyes miraculously revive, and a blue flame burned in their bottomless depths. Her dark hand groped in her skirt, searching for her pocket, and her blood-stained, bitten lips moved.

"I've... no ... strength.... Bit of tape ... in my pocket ... tie up ... navel," she said.

I found the piece of tape and tied up the child's navel. The mother smiled still more happily; that smile was so bright that it almost dazzled me.

"Put yourself straight while I go and wash him," I said.

"Take care. Do it gently now. Take care," she muttered anxiously.

But this red manikin didn't need gentle handling. He waved his fists and yelled as if challenging me to fight:

"Ya-a-a-ah ... ya-a-a-ah."

"That's it! That's it, little brother! Assert yourself. The neighbours will pull your head off if you don't," I warned him.

He emitted a particularly savage yell at the first impact of the surf which splashed us both, but when I began to slap his chest and back he screwed up his eyes, and he struggled and shrieked as wave after wave washed his body.

"Go on, yell! Yell at the top of your lungs! Show 'em you come from Orel!" I shouted encouragingly.

When I brought him back to his mother she was lying on the ground with her eyes closed again, biting her lips from the fits of after-pain; but amidst her groaning and moaning I heard her whisper:

"Give ... give him ... to me."

"He can wait!"

"No! Give ... him ... to ... me!"

She unbuttoned her blouse with trembling uncertain hands. I helped her to uncover her breast, which nature had made fit to feed

twenty children, and put the struggling Orelian to her warm body. The Orelian understood at once what was coming and stopped yelling.

"Holy Virgin, Mother of God," the mother muttered with a sigh, rolling her dishevelled head from side to side on the knapsack.

Suddenly she uttered a low shriek, fell silent again, and then opened her inexpressively beautiful eyes—the sacred eyes of a mother who has just given birth to a child. They were blue, and they gazed into the blue sky. A grateful, joyful smile gleamed and melted in them. Raising her weary arm the mother slowly crossed herself and her child....

"Bless you, Holy Virgin, Mother of God.... Oh ... bless you...."

The light in her eyes died out again. Her face again assumed that haggard hue. She remained silent for a long time, scarcely breathing. But suddenly she said in a firm, matter-of-fact tone:

"Laddie, untie my bag."

I untied the bag. She looked hard at me, smiled faintly, and I thought I saw a blush, ever so faint, pass over her hollow cheeks and perspiring brow.

"Go off a little way," she said.

"Take care, don't disturb yourself too much," I warned her.

"All right.... All right.... Go away!"

I retired into the bushes nearby. I felt very tired, and it seemed as though beautiful birds were singing softly in my heart—and together with the unceasing murmur of the sea this singing sounded so good that I thought I could listen to it for a whole year....

Somewhere, not far away, a brook was bubbling—it sounded like the voice of a girl telling her friend about her lover....

A head rose above the bushes, covered with a yellow kerchief, already tied, in the regular way.

"Hey! What's this? You've got up rather soon, haven't you?" I cried in amazement.

The woman sat down on the ground, holding on to the branches for support; she looked as if all the strength had been drained from her. There was not a hint of colour in her ashen-grey face, except for her eyes, which looked like large, blue pools. She smiled a tender smile and whispered:

"Look—he's asleep."

Yes, he was sleeping all right, but no different from any other kid as far as I could see; if there was any difference it was only in the surroundings. He was lying on a heap of bright autumn leaves, under a bush, of the kind that don't grow in the Orel Gubernia.

"You ought to lie down for a bit, mother," I said.

"No-o-o," she answered, shaking her head weakly. "I've got to collect my things and go on to that place ... what do they call it?"

"Ochemchiry?"

"Yes, that's right! I suppose my folks are a good few versts from here now."

"But will you be able to walk?"

"What about the Virgin Mary? Won't she help me?"

Well, since she was going with the Virgin Mary—I had nothing more to say!

She gazed down at the tiny, puckered, discontented face, warm rays of kindly light radiating from her eyes. She licked her lips and slowly stroked her breast.

I lit a fire and heaped some stones near it on which to place the kettle.

"I'll give you some tea in a minute, mother," I said.

"Oh! That will be fine.... My breasts feel dried up," she answered.

"Have your folks deserted you?"

"No! Why should they? I dropped behind. They had had a drink or two.... And a good thing, too. I don't know what I'd have done if they were around...."

She glanced at me, covered her face with her arm, spat out with blood and then smiled shamefacedly.

"Is he your first?" I asked.

"Yes, my first.... Who are you?"

"It looks like I'm a man...."

"You're a man all right! Are you married?"

"I haven't had the honour."

"You are fibbing, aren't you?"

"No, why should I?"

She cast her eyes down in reflection. Then she asked:

"How is it you know about this women's business?"

Now I did tell a fib. I said:

"I learned about it. I'm a student. Do you know what that is?"

"Of course, I do! Our priest's eldest son is a student. He's learning to be a priest...."

"Well, I'm one of those.... I had better go and fill the kettle."

The woman inclined her head towards her baby to hear whether he was breathing. Then she looked in the direction of the sea and said:

"I'd like to have a wash, but I don't know what the water's like.... What kind of water is it? It's both salty and bitter."

"Well, you go and wash in it. It's healthy water!"

"What!"

"I'm telling you the truth. And it's warmer than the water in the brook. The brook here is as cold as ice."

"You ought to know."

An Abkhazian, wearing a shaggy sheepskin hat, rode past at a walking pace, his head drooped on his chest. He was dozing. His little wiry horse, twitching its ears, looked at us askance with its round black eyes and snorted. The rider raised his head with a jerk, also glanced in our directon, and then allowed his head to droop again.

"They're funny people here. And they look so fierce too," the Orel woman said softly.

I went to the brook. The water, as bright and volatile as quicksilver, bubbled and gurgled over the stones, and the autumn leaves were merrily tumbling over and over in it. It was wonderful! I washed my hands and face and filled the kettle. Through the bushes, on my way back, I saw the woman on her hands and knees crawling over the ground, over the stones, looking back anxiously.

"What's the matter?" I enquired.

The woman stopped short as if she were scared, her face became ashen grey, and she tried to conceal something under her body. I guessed what it was.

"Give it to me, I'll bury it," I said.

"Oh, my dear! What are you talking about? It's got to be taken to a bathhouse and buried under the floor...."

"Do you think they'll build a bathhouse here soon?"

"You are joking, but I am afraid! Suppose a wild beast eats it.... Still, it's got to be buried...."

And with that she turned her face away and handing me a moist, heavy bundle, she said shamefacedly, in a soft imploring voice:

"You'll do it thoroughly, won't you? Bury it as deep as you can, for the sake of Christ ... and my little one. You will, won't you?"

...When I returned I saw her walking from the seashore with faltering steps and outstretched arm. Her skirt was wet to the waist. Her face had a touch of colour in it and seemed to be shining with an inner light. I helped her to the fire, thinking to myself in amazement:

"She has the strength of an ox!"

Later, as we were drinking tea with honey, she asked me quietly.

"Have you stopped your book learning?"

"Yes."

"Why? Did you take to drink?"

"Yes, mother. I went to the dogs!"

"That was a nice thing to do! I remember you, though. I noticed you in Sukhum when you had a row with the boss over the food. I said to myself then: He must be a drunkard. He's not afraid of anything...."

Licking the honey from her swollen lips she kept turning her blue eyes to the bush where the latest Orelian was sleeping peacefully.

"How's he going to live?" she said with a sigh, looking into my face. "You helped me. For that I thank you.... But whether it will be good for him ... I don't know."

When she had finished her meal she crossed herself, and while I was collecting my things she sat drowsily swaying her body and gazing at the ground with eyes that seemed to have faded again, evidently engrossed in thought. A little later she got up.

"Are you really going?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Take care of yourself, mother."

"What about the Virgin Mary?... Pick him up and give him to me!"

"I'll carry him."

We argued about it for a bit and then she yielded, and we set out, walking side by side, shoulder to shoulder.

"I hope I won't stumble," she said, laughing guiltily and placing her arm on my shoulder.

The new inhabitant of the land of Russia, the man of unknown destiny, was lying in my arms, snoring heavily. The sea, all covered with white lace trimmings, splashed and surged on the shore. The bushes whispered to each other. The sun shone as it passed the meridian.

We walked on slowly. Now and again the mother halted, heaved a deep sigh, and throwing her head back she looked around, at the sea, at the woods, at the mountains, and then into the face of her son—and her eyes, thoroughly washed with the tears of suffering, were again wonderfully clear, again they shone with the blue light of inexhaustible love.

Once she halted and said:

"Lord! Dear, good God! How good it is. How good! Oh, if I could go on like this, all the time, to the very end of the world, and he, my little one, would grow, would keep on growing in freedom, near his mother's breast, my darling little boy...."

...The sea murmured and murmured....

THE BREAK-UP

ON THE RIVER opposite the city, seven carpenters were hurriedly repairing an ice apron the townsfolk had taken apart for firewood during the winter.

The spring was late that year—the stripling March looked more like October; only around midday, and not every day at that, a pale, wintry sun would appear in a sky shot through with sunbeams, and diving through the blue rents in the clouds, squint down ill-naturedly at the earth.

It was already Friday of Passion Week and still at night the dripping eaves froze into blue icicles a good half-arshin long; the ice on the river, now bare of snow, had the same bluish tint as the wintry clouds.

While the carpenters worked, the church bells in the town rang out their mournful, metallic appeal. The workers raised their heads and gazed into the murky haze that enveloped the town, and often an axe poised for a blow would hang for a moment in mid air as though reluctant to cleave the gentle sound.

Here and there on the broad surface of the river fir branches, stuck into the ice to mark the paths, cracks and fissures, pointed skywards like the hands of a drowning man twisted with the ague.

The river presented a dreary spectacle; deserted and bare, its surface a scabrous mass, it spread desolately away into the gloomy space from which a dank, chill wind breathed lazily and dismally.

... Foreman Osip, a neat well-built little chap with a tidy silver beard that clung in tiny curls to his pink cheeks and mobile neck, old Osip always in the fore, was shouting:

"Get a move on there, you hen's spawn!"

And turning to me, he said mockingly:

"Now then, overseer. What're you standing there mooning for? What do you think you're supposed to be doing? Didn't Vassil Sergeich, the contractor, put you here? Well, then it's your job to keep

us at it, 'Get a move on you so-and-so!' You're supposed to yell at us. That's what you're here for, and you stand there blinking like a fish. You're not supposed to blink, you're supposed to keep your eyes open, and do some shouting too. You're a sort of boss around here. Well, then, go ahead and give orders, you cuckoo's egg!"

"Get moving there, you demons!" he yelled at the men. "We've got to finish the work today, don't we?"

He himself was the laziest of the lot. He knew his business quite well, and could work with dexterity and zeal when he had a mind to, but he didn't care to take the trouble and preferred to entertain the others with tall stories. And so when work would be forging ahead and the men would be at it in silent absorption, suddenly obsessed by the desire to do everything well and smoothly, Osip would begin in his purring voice:

"Did I ever tell you about the time...."

For two or three minutes the men would appear to pay no heed to him, engrossed in their sawing and planing, and his soft tenor would flow dreamily on, meandering around them and claiming their attention. His light-blue eyes half-closed, Osip fingered his curly beard and, smacking his lips with pleasure, mulled happily over each word.

"So he catches this here carp, puts it away in his basket and goes off into the woods, thinking about the fine fish soup he's going to have.... And all of a sudden he hears a woman's voice pipe up, he can't tell from where: 'Yelesy-a-a, Yelesy-a-a!...'"

Lyonka, the lanky, angular Mordvinian, nicknamed Narodets, a young man with small eyes full of wonderment, lowered his axe and stood gaping.

"And from the basket a deep bass voice answers: 'Here I am!' And that very same minute the lid of the basket snaps back and out jumps the fish and darts straight back into the pool...."

Sanyavin, an old discharged soldier and a saturnine drunk who suffered from asthma and had a grudge of long-standing against life, croaked hoarsely:

"How could a carp move about on land?"

"Have you ever heard of a fish that could talk?" Osip retorted sweetly.

Mokei *Budyrin, a dull-witted muzhik* whose prominent cheek-bones, jutting chin and receding forehead lent his face a canine appearance, a silent unprepossessing fellow, gave vent to his three favourite words in his slow nasal drawl:

"That's true enough. . . ."

His unfailing response to any story—incredible, horrible, filthy or malicious—would be those three words uttered in a low voice that rang with conviction.

"That's true enough."

Each time I heard them it was as though some heavy fist struck me thrice on the chest.

Work stopped because lame and stuttering Yakov Boyev also wanted to tell a fish story, in fact he had already begun his tale, but no one listened to him; instead everybody laughed at his painful efforts to speak. He cursed and swore, brandished his chisel and foaming at the mouth yelled to everyone's amusement:

"When one man lies like a trooper you take it for gospel, but I'm telling you a true story and all you can do is cackle like a lot of numbskulls, blast you. . . ."

By now the men had dropped their tools and were shouting and gesticulating, whereupon Osip took off his cap, baring his venerable silver head with its bald pate, and sternly admonished:

"Hey that'll do now! You've had your breathing spell, now get back to work!"

"You started it," croaked the ex-soldier spitting disgustedly on his hands.

Osip began nagging at me:

"Now then, overseer. . . ."

I felt that he had some definite purpose in distracting the men from their work with his chatter, but what I did not understand was whether he did it to conceal his own laziness or to give the workers a breather. When the contractor was around, Osip behaved with the utmost servility, acting the simpleton in front of the boss, contriving every Saturday to wheedle a little extra money out of him for the artel.

On the whole he was devoted to the men, but the old workers had no use for him—they considered him a clown and a good-for-nothing and had little respect for him: and even the young folk who enjoyed

listening to his stories did not take him seriously, regarding him rather with ill-concealed mistrust and often with hostility.

I once asked the Mordvinian, an intelligent chap with whom I often had some heart-to-heart talks, what he thought of Osip.

"I dunno..." he replied with a grin. "Devil knows... he's all right, I suppose...." Then after a pause he went on:

"Mikhailo, the chap who died a sharp-tongued fellow he was, and clever too, quarrelled with him once, with Osip, that is, and lammed into Osip something fierce. 'What kind of a man are you?' says he. 'As a workingman you're finished and you haven't learned to be a boss, so you'll spend your days dangling like a forgotten plummet on a string.' That's pretty near the truth, and no mistake...."

Then after another pause he added uneasily:

"But he's all right, a good chap on the whole...."

My own position among these men was an extremely embarrassing one. Here I was, a lad of fifteen, put there by the contractor to keep accounts, to see that the carpenters did not steal the nails or turn the boards in at the saloon. Of course, they filched nails right under my nose, going out of their way to show me that I was quite superfluous, a downright nuisance, in fact. And if any opportunity afforded itself to bump me with a board or to do me some other minor injury, as if by accident, they would not hesitate to make the most of it.

I felt awkward and ashamed in their midst: I would have liked to say something to reconcile them to my presence, but I could not find the words and the oppressive sense of my own uselessness weighed heavily upon me.

Whenever I entered in my book the materials taken, Osip would walk over to me in his deliberate way and say:

"Got it? Now then, let's have a look...."

And he would screw up his eyes and scrutinize the entry.

"You don't write clearly enough," he would comment somewhat vaguely.

He could read only printed lettering and he wrote in church Slavonic letters, too. Ordinary writing was unintelligible to him.

"What's that funny-looking curlicue there?"

"It's the letter 'D.'"

"*Ah, D! What a fancy loop.... And what've you written on* that line?"

"Boards, nine arshin, five."

"Six, you mean."

"No, five."

"What do you mean, five? Look, Soldier cut up one...."

"He shouldn't have...."

"Who says he shouldn't? He took half to the pub...."

He looked straight at me with his eyes as blue as corn-flowers, twinkling merrily, and, fingering his beard, said with shameless imperturbability:

"Come on, now, put down six! Look here, you cuckoo's egg, it's wet and cold and the work's hard; a fellow's got to have a little drink now and again to warm his soul, don't he? Don't be so upright, you won't bribe God that way...."

He talked long and earnestly, his gentle, caressing words seemed to engulf me like a shower of sawdust until I felt dazed and blinded by them and found myself altering the figure without protest.

"Now that's more like it! Why, the figure even looks nicer, sitting there on the line like a nice, fat kind-hearted wench...."

I saw him triumphantly reporting his victory to the carpenters and knew that they all despised me for my weakness, and my fifteen-year-old heart wept with humiliation and ugly, dreary thoughts whirled in my head.

"How strange and stupid all this is. Why is he so sure that I won't go and change the six back to a five, and that I won't tell the contractor they sold the board for drinks?"

Once they stole two pounds of eight-inch spikes and clamps.

"Listen here," I warned Osip, "I'm going to put that down!"

"Go ahead!" he replied lightly, his grey eyebrows twitching. "It's time to put a stop to all this nonsense! Go ahead, write it down, that'll teach the sons of bitches...."

And he shouted to the men:

"Hey you, loafers, you'll be paying a fine for those spikes and clamps!"

"What for?" the ex-soldier demanded grimly.

"You can't get away with that sort of thing all the time," Osip calmly explained.

The carpenters grumbled and looked askance at me, and I was not at all sure that I would carry out my threat and whether, if I did, I would be doing right.

"I'm going to quit this job," I said to Osip. "You can all go to the devil! I'll be taking to thieving myself if I stay with you fellows much longer."

Osip pondered this for a while, stroking his beard thoughtfully. Then he squatted down beside me and said softly:

"You know, lad, you're quite right!"

"Eh?"

"You've got to clear out. What sort of a foreman or overseer are you? In a job like this a man must have respect for property, he's got to have the soul of a watchdog to guard his master's belongings like his own hide.... A pup like you's no good for a job like this, you haven't any feeling for property. If Vassil Sergeich knew how you let us carry on he would take you by the scruff of your neck and throw you right out, he would! Because you're not an asset to him, you're a liability and a man has to be an asset to his master. See what I mean?"

He rolled a cigarette and handed it to me.

"Have a smoke, penpusher, it'll clear your head. If you weren't such a smart, handy lad, my advice to you would be: take the holy orders! But you haven't got the character for that; you're a stubborn, hard sort of chap, you wouldn't give in to the abbot himself. With a character like yours you'll never get on in the world. And a monk's like a jackdaw, he don't care what he pecks; so long as there are seeds he don't care where they come from. I'm telling you all this from the bottom of my heart because I can see that you're out of place here, a cuckoo's egg in a strange nest...."

He took off his cap, as he always did when he was about to say something particularly important—stared up at the bleak sky and observed piously:

"God knows we're a thieving lot and he won't forgive us for it...."

"That's true enough," Mokei Budyrin trumpeted.

From that moment silver-haired Osip with his bright eyes and dusky soul had a pleasant fascination for me; a sort of friendship sprang up between us, although I noticed that his good relations with me embarrassed him somehow; in front of the others he looked

at me vacantly, his corn-flower blue eyes darting this way and that, and his lips twisted in a false, unpleasant grimace as he addressed me:

"Now then, keep you eyes peeled, earn your living, can't you see Soldier over there chewing nails for all he's worth. . . ."

But when we were alone he spoke with a gentle wisdom and a clever little gleam played in his bright blue eyes as they looked straight into mine. I listened carefully to what this old man had to say, for his words were true and honestly weighed, although sometimes he spoke strangely.

"A man ought to be good," I remarked once.

"Yes, indeed!" he agreed. Then he chuckled and with downcast eyes, he went on softly:

"But what exactly do you mean by 'good'? The way I see it, people don't care a hang about your goodness or honesty so long as it doesn't benefit them. No, it pays to be nice to them, amuse them, humour them . . . and someday perhaps it will bring you good returns! Of course, I don't deny it must be a fine thing to look at yourself in the mirror and know you're a good man. But as far as I can see it's all the same to folks whether you're a ruffian or a saint so long as you're nice to them. . . . That's about the size of it, lad!"

I am in the habit of observing people carefully for I feel that each individual I come in contact with might help me fathom the secret of this mysterious, muddled, painful business called life; moreover, there is one question that has never ceased to torment me:

What is the human soul?

It seems to me that some souls must be like brass globes fixed rigidly to the breast so that the reflection they cast back is distorted, ugly and repulsive. And then there are souls that are as flat as mirrors. Such souls might just as well not be there at all.

But most human souls I imagine to be formless as clouds, of an indeterminate opaqueness like the fickle opal always ready to change its hue to conform to whatever colour comes in contact with it.

I did not know, nor could I imagine what comely old Osip's soul was like; it was something my mind could not fathom.

I pondered these things as I gazed out over the river to where the town clung to the hillside, vibrating with the peal of bells from all of its belfries that soared skywards like the white pipes of my

beloved organ in the Polish church. The crosses on the churches, like blurred stars captured by the dreary sky, winked and trembled and seemed to be reaching out toward the clear sky behind the grey blanket of wind-torn clouds; but the clouds scurried along, effacing with dark shadows the gay colours down below, and each time the sunbeams emerged from the bottomless abysses between them to bathe the town in bright hues, they hastened to blot them out again, the dank shadows grew heavier, and after one instant of gladness all was gloomy and dreary again.

The buildings of the town were like heaps of soiled snow, the ground beneath them was black and bare, and the trees in the gardens were like clods of earth: the dull gleam of the windowpanes in the grey house walls reminded one of winter, and the poignant sadness of the pale northern spring spreads softly over the whole scene.

Mishuk Dyatlov, a tow-headed, broad-shouldered, gawky lad with a harelip, essayed a song:

She came to him in the morning,
But he died the night before. . . .

"Shut up, you bastard," the ex-soldier shouted at him. "have you forgotten what day it is?"

Boyev was also angry. He shook his fist at Dyatlov, hissing: "S-swine!"

"We're a hardy, tough lot," Osip said to Budyrin as he sat astride the top of the icebreak measuring its slant with narrowed eyes. "Slip it out an inch to the left . . . that's it! A savage lot, that's what we are: Once I saw a bishop come along and the people crowded around him, fell on their knees and begged and implored him: 'Your Reverence,' they said, 'drive away the wolves, the wolves are ruining us!' And he towered over them and thundered: 'You're supposed to be Orthodox Christians? I'll have you all severely punished!' Very wrathful he was, why he even spat in their faces. A little old chap he was, with a kindly face, bleary-eyed. . . ."

About fifty yards down the river from the ice aprons some boatmen and tramps were chopping the ice around the barges; the crowbars cracked into the ice, crushing the brittle, greyish-blue crust of the river, the slender handles of the boat-hooks swayed back and forth pushing the broken pieces under the solid ice, the current

gurgled and from the sandy beach came the murmur of streamlets. On the ice apron planes cut into wood, saws screeched and hammers pounded, driving clamps into the yellow, smoothly planed wood—and all these sounds mingled with the ringing of the bells which, softened by the distance, stirred the soul. It was as if all the labour of the bleak day had been a paean to spring, urging her to descend upon the thawing but still naked and wretched earth....

"Call the German!" someone yelled hoarsely. "we need more men...."

From shore came the response:

"Where is he?"

"Look in the pub...."

The voices floated heavily in the moisture-laden air and echoed drearily over the broad river.

The men worked feverishly but carelessly; everyone was anxious to get to town, to the bathhouse and then to church as quickly as possible. Sashok Dyatlov a well-built, agile lad with a shock of curly hair bleached white like his brother's was particularly worried. He kept glancing up-stream, saying softly to his brother:

"Don't you hear it crackling?"

The ice had stirred the night before and the river police had been keeping the horses off the river ever since the morning before; a few pedestrians were still slipping across over the foot-bridges, like beads sliding on strings, and you could hear the boards smacking against the water as they bent under the weight.

"It's cracking up," said Mishuk, blinking his white lashes.

Osip, who had been scanning the river his eyes shaded with his hand, cut him short.

"It's the sawdust in your noodle cracking!" he said. "You get on with the job, son of a sorceress! Overseer, take your nose out of your book and keep them at it!"

There was about two hours' work left; the sides of the icebreak were already covered with gleaming planks as yellow as butter, and only the thick iron bands remained to be spiked on. Boyev and Sanyavin had cut out the grooves for the strips of iron but it was now discovered that they had made them too narrow.

"You blind bat, you!" Osip scolded the Mordvinian, clasping his head in despair. "Call that work?"

Suddenly a voice raised in a joyful shout was heard from the shore.

"It's moving! Hoorray!"

As if in accompaniment to the howl, a faint crunching rustling sound came down the river; the gnarled claws of the pine-bough markers trembled and seemed to clutch at the air for support, and, waving their boat-hooks, the boatmen and tramps noisily clambered up rope ladders to board their barges.

It was strange to see the deserted river suddenly become crowded with people; they seemed to have popped up from under the ice and were now rushing back and forth like jackdaws scared by a gunshot, running hither and thither hauling boards and poles, dropping them and picking them up again.

"Get your tools together!" roared Osip. "Lively there, you.... We're going ashore!"

"There goes Easter Sunday!" exclaimed Sashok bitterly.

To us it seemed as if the river stood still, while the city shuddering and swaying, with the hill under it, began to sail slowly up the river. The grey sandy landslip about seventy feet ahead of us also stirred and floated away.

"Get moving!" Osip shouted, giving me a push. "What're you gaping at?"

A dread sensation of danger gripped me, and my feet, feeling the ice shift underneath, mechanically propelled my body to the sand spit where the willow wands broken and bent by the winter winds jutted up naked and bare. Boyev, Soldier, Budyrin and the two Dyatlovs got there ahead of me. The Mordvinian ran beside me swearing angrily while Osip brought up the rear.

"Stop your howling, Narodets..." I heard Osip shout.

"But what are we going to do, Uncle Osip...."

"Everything's all right, you'll see."

"We'll be stuck here for a couple of days."

"Then you'll sit it out...."

"What about the holiday?"

"They'll manage this year without you."

"Bunch of cowards," sneered Soldier, sitting on the sand and smoking his pipe. "It's only a hop skip and a jump to the shore and you're ready to run like mad."

"You were the first to take to your heels," Mokei put in.

"What're you afraid of?" Soldier continued. "Christ was the Saviour and even he had to die...."

"But he was resurrected, wasn't he?" the Mordvinian muttered, hurt by the other's remarks.

"Shut up, you pup!" Boyev shouted at him. "Sure he was resurrected. Today's Friday, not Sunday!"*

The March sun broke through a blue gulf between the clouds, and the ice glistened as if mocking at us. Osip scanned the deserted river, shading his eyes with his hand.

"She's stopped," he said. "But not for long...."

"No holiday for us," Sashok muttered sullenly.

Angry furrows cleft the Mordvinian's beardless, moustacheless face, as dark and rough-hewn as an unpared potato.

"So we can sit right here," he muttered, blinking, "with nothing to eat and no money. People are enjoying themselves, but we.... Victims of greed, that's what we are...."

"It's a matter of need, not greed!" Osip, his eyes glued to the river and his thoughts apparently far away, spoke as if talking in his sleep. "What are these ice breakers for? To protect the barges and everything else from the ice. The ice hasn't any sense, it'll just pile up on the string of boats—and good-bye property...."

"Spit on it. It isn't ours, is it?"

"No use reasoning with a fool...."

"Ought to've fixed them earlier...."

Soldier twisted his face in a frightful grimace.

"Shut up, Mordvinian!" he shouted.

"It's stopped," Osip repeated.

The boatmen were shouting on board their vessels. From the river a chill breath and an evil, ominous silence were wafted. The pattern of the markers scattered over the ice altered, and everything seemed altered, pregnant with tense expectation.

"Uncle Osip, what are we going to do?" one of the young lads asked timidly.

"Eh?" he responded absently.

"Are we going to stay here?"

* Sunday in Russian is "voskresenye" which also means resurrection.—*Trans.*

"Maybe the Lord doesn't want you sinners celebrating his holiday, eh?" Boyev said, in a mocking nasal twang.

Soldier came to the assistance of his comrade and pointing to the river with his pipe muttered:

"Want to go to town, eh? Who's stopping you? The ice'll go too. Maybe you'll get drowned—it'd save you from getting hauled to the clink anyway."

"That's true enough," said Mokei.

The sun slipped out of sight, the river grew dark, and the town was now more clearly visible. The young men gazed at it with impatient, longing eyes, silent and still.

I had that oppressive feeling which comes with the realization that everyone around you is concerned with his own thoughts and that there is no single purpose that might unite all into an integral, stubborn force. I wanted to get away from them and set off down the ice alone.

With a movement so sudden that he might have just awakened from a deep sleep, Osip got up, removed his cap and, making the sign of the cross in the direction of the town, said in a simple, calm tone of authority:

"Well, lads, let's go, and God be with us...."

"To town?" cried Sashok, jumping to his feet.

Soldier made no effort to move.

"We'll drown!" he declared.

"Stay here, then."

Casting his eye over the men around him, Osip cried:

"Come on, let's get going!"

Everybody was now on his feet and gathered in a huddle. Boyev, who was rearranging the tools in his basket complained:

"Once you're told to go, you might as well go.... But the one who gives the orders will have to answer...."

Osip seemed to have grown younger and stronger. The crafty, good-natured expression had faded from his rosy face, his eyes grew darker, graver and more matter-of-fact. The indolent swagger too disappeared and he now walked with a firm, confident tread.

"Pick up a board, each of you, and hold it cross-wise in front. In case the ice cracks, which God forbid, the ends will hit the solid ice and stop you from going under. They'll help in crossing the

cracks too. Anybody got a rope? Here, you, give me the level.... Ready? I'll go ahead, and after me ... who's the heaviest? I suppose you, Soldier. Then Mokei, Mordvinian, Boyev, Mishuk, Sashok. Maximych, being the lightest, will bring up the rear.... Off with your caps and let's pray to the Virgin. Here comes the sun to give us a send-off...."

With one accord the grey and brown heads of matted hair were bared, and the sun glanced down at them through a thin white cloud, only to hide again as if loth to raise unwarranted hopes.

"Let's go!" said Osip in a dry, strange voice. "God be with us! Keep your eyes on my feet. And no crowding. Keep at least a sagene apart and the more space the better. Come on, lads!"

Shoving his cap inside his coat and carrying the level, Osip stepped on the ice, cautiously sliding his feet along its surface. No sooner had he done so than a wild cry came from the river bank behind.

"Where're you going, you ... sheep."

"Keep going, no looking behind!" the leader commanded crisply.

"Get back, you devils!"

"Come on, lads, and keep God in your mind! He's not going to invite us for the holidays...."

A policeman's whistle was heard.

"Now we're in for it!" Soldier grumbled aloud. "They'll let the police know over on the other side—and if we get through alive we'll be locked up for sure.... I'm not going to take any responsibility for this...."

The string of men on the ice followed Osip's ringing voice as if it were something tangible to cling to.

"Watch the ice in front of your feet!"

We were crossing the river diagonally upstream, and being the last I had a good view of small, dapper Osip with his white, fluffy head as he skilfully slid along, barely lifting his feet from the ice. Behind him, as if threaded on an invisible string, filed six dark figures, doubled over and unsteady on their feet; now and then their shadows appeared next to them, then disappeared underfoot only to spread out on the ice once more. Their heads were bent low, as if they were coming down a mountainside and were afraid of stumbling.

On the shore behind us a crowd evidently had gathered, for the

outcry had risen to an unpleasant roar and you could no longer make out what they were shouting.

The cautious procession resolved itself into mechanical, tiresome work. Accustomed to walking fast, I now found myself sinking into that somnolent, detached frame of mind when the soul seems to grow void and all thought of self is forgotten, while vision and hearing become inordinately sharp. Underfoot was the bluish-grey, leaden ice worn thin by the current; its diffused glitter was blinding. Here and there it had cracked and jammed into hummocks, ground by the movement of the river into fragments porous like pumice-stone and as jagged as broken glass. Blue fissures yawned coldly, ready to trap the unwary foot. The wide-soled boots shuffled along and the voices of Boyev and Soldier, continually harping on the same theme, tried my patience.

"I'm not going to answer for this...."

"Neither will I...."

"Just because a man has the right to order you about doesn't mean someone else mightn't be a thousand times smarter...."

"You think being smart means anything—it's a glib tongue that counts around here...."

Osip had tucked the hem of his sheepskin jacket under his belt and his legs, encased in pants of grey army cloth, strode along with the ease and resilience of a spring. It was as if some creature visible to him alone were dancing in front of him, preventing him from walking straight ahead, and he was doing his best to circumvent it, slip away from it, darting to the left or the right, sometimes doubling sharply in his tracks, and doing it all at a dance-step describing loops and semicircles on the ice. His voice rang out clearly and resonantly, and it was pleasant to hear it merge with the ringing of the church bells.

We were half-way across the four-hundred-sagene strip of ice when an ominous rumble came from upstream and at the same moment the ice shifted under my feet; taken by surprise I lost my balance and fell down on one knee. I looked up the river and terror gripped me by the throat, throttled me and made the world turn black in my eyes: the grey crust of ice had sprung to life, it was buckling up, sharp angles appeared on the even surface, and a strange crunching like heavy boots walking over broken glass, filled the air.

With a quiet rush, clear water appeared next to me, somewhere splintering wood whined like a living thing, the men shouted huddling together, and through it all rang the voice of Osip:

"Scatter, there.... Get away from each other.... What are you crowding together for! She's going good and proper now.... Get a move on, lads!"

He leapt about as if attacked by wasps, jabbing the air around him with the level as though it were a gun and he were holding off some invisible assailant, while the town swam jerkily past him. Under me the ice crunched and crumpled into fine slivers, water washed against my feet and, springing up. I made a wild dash toward Osip.

"Where d'you think you're going!" he shouted, swinging the level. "Stop, you bloody fool!"

The man before us was not the old Osip; the face had grown strangely young. all the familiar features had gone. his blue eyes were now grey, and the man seemed to have grown a half-arshin taller. Straight as a brand-new nail. his feet firmly planted. he was shouting with his mouth wide open:

"If you don't stop running around and getting into a huddle I'll smash your skulls in!"

Again he swung at me with the level.

"Where're you going?"

"We'll drown!" I said in a whisper.

"Hush!" Then, observing my sorry plight, he added softly:

"Any fool can drown, you make it your business to get out of here!"

Again he began shouting encouragements to the others, his chest thrust out and his head thrown back.

The ice crackled and crunched as it broke up lazily. In the meantime we were slowly being carried past the town. Ashore it seemed some fabulous titan had awakened and was rending the earth asunder; the shoreline below us was stationary while the bank opposite was slowly moving upstream—it could only be a matter of moments before it was ripped apart.

This ominous, creeping movement seemed to cut off our last link with land; the familiar world was receding into oblivion and my breast was laden with grief and my knees quaked. Red clouds slowly sailed across the sky and the jagged chunks of ice catching their

reflection turned red too as if with the strain of reaching out for me. All the vast earth was in the throes of the birth pangs of spring, racked by convulsions, its shaggy, moist breast heaving and its joints cracking; and in the massive body of the earth the river was a vein pulsating with thick, warm blood.

It hurt to realize one's insignificance and helplessness in the midst of the calm, irresistible movement of the mass, and deep in the soul a bold dream took shape fed by this sensation of humiliation: if only I could reach out and lay my hand on the hill on shore and say:

"Stop until I reach you!"

The resonant pealing of the bells was now waning to a melancholy sigh, but I remembered that the next night they would once more speak out gaily to proclaim the resurrection.

If only I could live to hear them ringing!

... Seven dark figures danced before my eyes as they leapt from one foothold to another and paddled in thin air with the boards they were carrying; and ahead of them the old man turned and twisted like a groundling, reminiscent of Nicholas the Miracle-Maker, his imperative voice ringing out ceaselessly:

"Keep your eyes op-e-n!"

The ice buckled and the living back of the river shivered and heaved underfoot like the whale in the "Hunch-Backed Horse"; and with increasing frequency the fluid body of the stream gushed from under the armour of ice—the cold, murky water that greedily licked at the men's feet.

We moved along a narrow perch overhanging a deep abyss. The quiet, luring splash of the water conjured up visions of bottomless depths, of my body settling slowly, slowly into the dense icy mass, saw my eyes grow blind, my heart ceasing to beat. I recalled the drowned bodies I had seen, with their slimy skulls, bloated faces and glassy, bulging eyes, the fingers jutting out from swollen hands and the sodden skin that hung on the palms like a rag.

The first to get a ducking was Mokei Budyrin; he had been ahead of the Mordvinian, as silent and retiring as always; he had been calmer than the others and yet he disappeared as suddenly as if he had been pulled in by the legs, only his head and his hands gripping the plank remained above the ice.

"Lend a hand!" Osip cried. "Not all of you, one or two'll be enough."

"Never mind, boys," said Mokei to the Mordvinian and me, as he blew the water out of his mouth. "I'll manage ... myself."

He clambered onto the ice and shook himself.

"Damn it anyway, it looks as if you really might drown down here."

His teeth chattering, he licked his wet moustache with his large tongue, his resemblance to a big, genial dog more marked than ever.

A transient recollection flashed in my mind; I remembered how a month before he had chopped off the thumb of his left hand at the first joint and picking up the pallid, blue-nailed joint had looked at it darkly, with wondering eyes, and addressed it in a low, apologetic tone:

"I've hacked at the poor thing so many times I've just lost count.... It was out of joint anyway, didn't work properly.... So now I suppose I've got to bury it." He carefully wrapped the amputated thumb into some shavings and put it in his pocket. Only then did he proceed to bandage the wound.

The next to get a ducking was Boyev; it looked as if he had purposely dived under the ice. He let out a frenzied cry at once.

"O-ow, help! I'm drowning! Save me, brothers, don't let me go down...."

He thrashed about so hard out of sheer terror that we barely managed to haul him up, and in the fuss we almost lost the Mordvinian who went right under, head and all.

"That was pretty nearly a trip straight to the devils," he said with an abashed smile as he clambered back on the ice, looking lankier and more angular than ever.

A minute later Boyev went down again with a shriek.

"Shut up, Yashka, you soul of a goat!" Osip shouted, threatening him with the level. "Why must you scare everybody out of their wits? I'll teach you a lesson! Loosen your belts, boys, and turn your pockets inside out, it'll be easier that way...."

Every dozen paces or so the ice, crunching and spuming, opened wide, sharp-fanged jaws dripping a murky froth and the jagged blue teeth reached out for our feet; the river seemed anxious to suck us down as a snake swallows a frog. The sodden boots and clothes

hampered our movement and pulled us down; we were all clammy as if we had been licked down; clumsy and speechless, we plodded along slowly and submissively.

Osip, as wet as the rest of us, seemed to divine where the fissures were and leapt like a hare from floe to floe. After each leap we would pause for a moment, look around and give a resonant whoop:

"That's how it's done, see?"

He was playing with the river; the river stalked him, but so light and nimble on his feet was he that he easily dodged its passes and avoided the pitfalls. One might have thought he was steering the course of the ice and driving the large, solid floes for us to walk on.

"Keep your chin up, you children of God! Ho! ho!"

"Good for Uncle Osip!" the Mordvinian said in quiet admiration. "There's a man for you! The real sort...."

The closer we got to the shore the finer the ice was chopped and men kept falling through it more and more frequently. The town had already practically floated by and the Volga was not far ahead; there the ice had not moved yet and we were in danger of being sucked under.

"Looks like we'll drown," the Mordvinian said quietly, looking over his left shoulder at the blue haze of evening.

Suddenly, as if out of pity for us, a huge ice floe ran end on against the shore, climbed up it shivering and crunching, and then stopped.

"Run!" Osip shouted frenziedly. "Leg it for all you're worth!"

He jumped for the floe, slipped and fell down, and sitting on the edge of the ice where the water lapped up to him he let the rest of us pass. Five of us dashed for the shore jostling one another in an effort to get there first; the Mordvinian and I stopped to lend Osip a hand.

"Run, you pig's progeny, d'you hear me!"

His face was blue and trembling, his eyes had lost their lustre, and his jaw hung queerly.

"Come on, Uncle...."

His head dropped.

"Must have broken my leg.... Can't get up...."

We picked him up and carried him while he kept on mumbling through chattering teeth, clinging to our necks.

"You'll drown yourselves, you fools.... We'd better thank the Lord for pulling us through.... Look out, it won't carry three, step easy there! Follow the spots where there's no snow... it's more solid there.... Better drop me, though...."

Osip screwed up an eye and looked me in the face.

"That ledger of yours where our sins are recorded must've gotten all soaked up, or maybe you've lost it, eh?" he said.

As we stepped off the end of the ice floe that had piled up on the bank, smashing a boat into smithereens in the process, the other end of the floe which was still afloat scrunched, broke off and sailed away, rocking in the current.

"Well, well," the Mordvinian said approvingly. "It knew what it was about!"

Soaking wet and chilled to the marrow but in high spirits, we were now ashore surrounded by a crowd of townsfolk. Boyev and the ex-soldier were already having an altercation with them.

"Well boys," Osip cried gaily as we lowered him onto some timbers, "the book's all mucked up, soaked right through...."

The book, tucked away inside my coat, weighed like a brick; I pulled it out when no one was looking and threw it far out into the stream where it plunked into the dark water like a frog. The Dyatlovs were racing up the hillside to the saloon for some vodka, pounding each other with their fists as they ran and shouting:

"R-r-rah!"

"Ekh, you!"

A tall old man with the beard of an apostle and the eyes of a thief was speaking earnestly right into my ear.

"You ought to have your mugs bashed in for scaring peaceable folk, you anathemas, you..." he was saying.

"What the hell did we do to you?" shouted Boyev, who was busy pulling on his boots.

"Christian folk were drowning and what did you do?" Soldier complained, his voice hoarser than ever.

"What could we have done?"

Osip was lying on the ground, his leg stretched out, going over his jacket with trembling hands.

"Soaked all the way through. Oh mother mine," he moaned. "Done for, these clothes are, and I didn't wear them a year!"

He had shrunk and his face was wrinkled and he seemed to be growing smaller and smaller as he lay there on the ground.

Suddenly he raised himself, sat up, groaned and was off in an angry, high-pitched voice:

"So you had to get to the bathhouse and the church, you bloody fools. Devil's spawn! You can go straight to hell! As if the Lord couldn't celebrate his day without you.... Pretty nearly lost our lives.... And clothes all mucked up.... Hope you croak...."

Everybody else was draining the water from shoes and wringing clothes, wheezing and groaning from exhaustion and arguing back and forth with the townsfolk, but Osip went on still more vehemently:

"Of all the things to do, damn their hides! Had to get to the bathhouse—the police station is where they belong, that's where you'd get your backwashing...."

"They've sent for the police," one of the townsmen said in a placating tone.

"What're you trying to do?" Boyev turned on Osip. "Why put on the act?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"Wait a minute! What do you mean?"

"Who started this business of coming across, eh?"

"Well, who?"

"You!"

"Me?"

Osip started as if a spasm had seized him.

"Me-e?" he repeated, his voice breaking.

"That's true enough," Budyrin said in a level, distinct voice.

"Honest, it was you, Uncle Osip," the Mordvinian bore out the others, but quietly, apologetically. "You must've forgotten...."

"Of course you started it," the ex-soldier ejaculated sullenly and emphatically.

"Forgotten eh!" Boyev cried in fury. "Tell me another one! I know him, he's trying to shove the blame onto somebody else!"

Osip fell silent and narrowing his eyes surveyed the dripping, half-naked men.

Then emitting a strange whimper—I could not make out whether he was laughing or sobbing—twitching his shoulders and spreading out his arms, he muttered:

"That's right ... true enough, it was my idea ... now what do you make of that!"

"Aha that's better!" Soldier cried triumphantly.

Gazing at the river, which was now seething like a millet gruel coming to a boil, Osip puckered up his face and guiltily looked away.

"My mind must have gone blank like that, by God!" he continued. "How we ever made it I don't understand.... Makes me sick to think of it. Anyway, boys, I hope you won't hold it against me—after all, there was the holiday coming, wasn't there? You'll forgive me. I must have sort of gone off a bit or something.... True enough, I started it ... old fool that I am...."

"You see?" said Boyev. "And what'd you say if I got drowned?"

It seemed to me that Osip really was stricken by the uselessness and foolishness of what he had done as he sat there on the ground, looking as slippery as a new-born calf licked by its dam; he shook his head, passed his fingers through the sand around him and continued mumbling penitently in a strange voice, all the while avoiding everyone's eyes.

I looked at him and wondered what had happened to the captain of men who had taken his place at the head of his fellows and led them so considerately, ably and imperiously.

An unpleasant emptiness welled up in my soul. I dropped down beside Osip and, hoping to salvage something from the wreckage, spoke to him in a low voice.

"Don't, Uncle Osip...."

"Ever see anything like it?" he responded in the same tone, giving me a sidelong glance while his fingers were busy untangling his matted beard. Then he went on as loudly as before for everybody's benefit: "What a to-do, eh?"

... The dark stubble of the tree-tops on the crest of the hill was silhouetted against the extinguished sky, and the hill itself pressed against the shore like some huge beast. The blue shadows of evening appeared from behind the roofs of the houses that clung scab-like to the dusky hide of the hillside, and looked out from the

wide-open rusty-red, moist maw of a clayey gully creating the illusion that it was reaching out thirstily for the river.

The river grew black and the rustle and crunching of the ice became duller and more regular; every now and then an ice floe dug end on into the shore as the hog roots the earth, remained motionless for a moment, then rocked, broke loose and sailed on farther while the next floe crept into its place.

The level of the water rose rapidly, sweeping against the bank and washing away the mud, and the silt spread a dark stain in the murky blue water. Strange noises filled the air—a scrunching and champing as if some tremendous beast were devouring its meal and licking its chops with a giant tongue.

From the direction of the town the sweet and pensive melody of the pealing bells, now muted by distance, floated down.

Like two romping puppies the Dyatlovs dashed down the hillside carrying bottles in their hands while at right angles to them, along the river front, came a grey-coated police officer and two policemen in black.

"God Almighty!" Osip groaned, tenderly rubbing his knee.

As the police approached, the townspeople cleared a passage for them and an expectant silence fell. The police officer, a lean little chap with a small face and a waxed reddish moustache, strode up to us.

"So you were the devils . . ." he began sternly in a rather hoarse affected bass.

Osip threw himself back on the ground and began hastily to explain:

"It was me, Your Honor, who started the business. . . . Begging your pardon, Your Honor, it was because of the holidays. . . ."

"You old devil," the police officer yelled, but his shouting was lost in the avalanche of humble entreaties.

"We live here in town and on the other bank we've got nothing; didn't even have money to buy bread and, Your Honor, the day after tomorrow's Easter—got to take a bath and go to church like all good Christians, so I says, let's go, fellows, and take a chance; we weren't doing anything wrong. I've been punished for my fool idea though—leg's broken, see.

"That's all very well and good!" the police officer shouted sternly. "But what if you had drowned?"

Osip heaved a deep, tired sigh.

"What would have happened, Your Honor? Begging your pardon, probably nothing...."

The policeman swore, and everybody listened to him in attentive silence as if the man was uttering words of wisdom to be heard and remembered instead of mouthing obscene, brazen insults.

After taking down our names he left. We had drunk down the fiery vodka and feeling warmed up and in better spirits were getting ready to head for home when Osip, chuckling and throwing a look after the receding policeman, jumped lightly to his feet and fervently crossed himself.

"Thank God that's the end...."

"Why... looks like your leg's all right!" Boyev said in his nasal twang, astonished and disappointed. "D'you mean you didn't break it?"

"You wish I had, eh?"

"Oh, you old comedian! You miserable clown...."

"Come on, boys!" Osip commanded, pulling his wet cap on his head.

... I walked alongside him behind the others, and as we went, he spoke to me in a quiet, tender way as if sharing a secret known only to him.

"No matter what you do and how you try, you just can't live unless you're crafty and cunning—that's life for you, damn it anyway.... You would like to climb to the top of the hill but there's always some devil tripping you up...."

It was dark, and in the gloom, red and yellow lights burst forth as if signalling the message:

"This way!"

We walked up the hill toward the ringing of bells. At our feet rivulets rippled, drowning Osip's caressing voice in their babble.

"Got around the police neatly, didn't I? That's how you've got to do it, so that nobody knows what it's all about and everybody thinks he's the main spring. Yes... it's best to let everyone think he's the one who did it...."

I listened to him, but found it hard to understand what he was saying.

Nor did I want to understand him; as it is my heart was light and at ease. I did not know whether I liked Osip or not, but I was ready to follow him to the ends of the earth, even across the river once more, over ice that would be constantly slipping away from under my feet.

The bells pealed and sang, and the joyous thought came to my mind: How many more times shall I be able to welcome spring!

"The human soul's got wings," Osip sighed. "It soars in your dreams...." A winged soul? Wonderful!

HOW A SONG WAS COMPOSED

THIS IS HOW two women composed a song to the accompaniment of the mournful ringing of church bells, one summer's day. It was in a quiet street in Arzamas, just before sundown, on a seat outside the house in which I lived. The town was dozing in the sultry silence of a June day. Sitting at the window with a book, I was listening to my cook, plump, pock-marked Ustinya, talking quietly to the housemaid of my neighbour, the rural prefect.

"And what else do they write?" she asked in her masculine, but very flexible voice.

"Oh, nothing else," answered the housemaid in a low, pensive drawl. She was a dark, thin girl, with small, fixed, frightened eyes.

"And so—accept our greetings and send us money—is that it?

"That's it. . . ."

"As for how you're living—who cares? Ekh!. . ."

In the pond, beyond the back gardens of our street, the frogs were croaking, emitting queer glassy sounds. The ringing of the church bells came floating over with annoying persistence, disturbing the sultry silence. Somewhere in a backyard a saw was snorting, and it seemed as though my neighbour's old house had fallen asleep and was snoring, gasping for breath in the heat.

"Relations," said Ustinya in a sad tone mingled with anger. "But go only three versts away from them and you feel like a twig broken off a tree! It was the same with me the first year I lived in town. I was awfully homesick. I felt as if I was only half alive; as if half of me was here and half had remained in the village. And day and night I used to think and worry: How are they getting on? How are they managing?"

Her words seemed to be accompanied by the church bells, and she seemed to be deliberately speaking in the same key in which

they were ringing. The housemaid sat clasping her angular knees, and swaying her head in its white kerchief from side to side and biting her lips, she seemed to be listening intently to something far away. Ustinya's deep voice now sounded scornful and angry and now soft and sad.

"Sometimes the longing for my village was so fierce that I could neither see nor hear what was going on around me and yet I have nobody there. Father was burnt to death when the house caught fire. He was drunk at the time. My uncle died of cholera. I have two brothers, but one has remained in the army—he was made a corporal; the other is a bricklayer and lives in Boigorod. It seems as though they've all been swept away by a flood. . . ."

The lurid sun, sinking to the west, hung in the misty sky suspended from golden rays. The low voice of the woman, the tinkling of the bells and the glassy croaking of the frogs were the only sounds that disturbed the silence of the town at that particular moment. They floated low over the ground, like swallows before the coming rain; and above and around them there was stillness, all-absorbing, like death.

An absurd idea entered my head. It seemed to me that the town had been inserted into a large bottle that was lying on its side and was closed with a fiery cork, and that somebody was lazily and softly beating the heated glass on the outside.

Suddenly Ustinya said in a cheerful but businesslike way:

"Now, Mashutka, help me. . . ."

"Help you with what?"

"To make up a song."

Heaving a loud sigh, Ustinya began to sing in a hurried tone:

In the daytime when the sun shines bright
And at night in the light of the moon. . . .

Hesitantly picking up the tune, the housemaid continued the song in a low timid voice:

Lonely I feel and all forlorn. . . .

Ustinya confidently, but in a very moving tone, capped the verse with:

My heart by longing is torn.

Then she said merrily, and a little boastfully:

"There, that's the beginning! I'll teach you how to make up songs, my dear, as easy as spinning yarn.... Now, then, let's go on."

Remaining silent for a moment as if listening to the mournful croaking of the frogs and the lazy ringing of the church bells, she once again deftly picked up words and music:

Neither fierce winter's storms
Nor rippling streams in the spring....

The housemaid shifted close up to Ustinya, and resting her white kerchiefed head on Ustinya's plump shoulder, she closed her eyes and, now more boldly, continued the verse in her thin and tremulous voice:

A word of tiding from home
To console me doth bring....

"There you are!" said Ustinya triumphantly, slapping her knee. "When I was younger I could make up even better songs than this! The girls used to say: 'Go on, Ustyusha, start a song!' Ekh, didn't I let myself go! Well, how is it to go now?"

"I don't know," said the housemaid, opening her eyes and smiling.

I looked at them through the flowers on the window sill. The singers could not see me, but I could very well see Ustinya's rough, deeply-pitted cheek, her small ear, which her yellow kerchief failed to cover, her grey, animated eye, her straight nose like the beak of a jay, and her square, masculine chin. She was a sly, talkative wench, a confirmed tippler and fond of hearing the lives of the saints read. She was the biggest gossip in the street and, moreover, she seemed to be the repository of all the secrets of the town. Beside her, plump and well-fed, the lean, angular housemaid looked like a child. And the housemaid's mouth was like that of a child; she pouted her small full lips as if she had just

been scolded, was afraid she would be scolded again, and was ready to burst into tears.

Swallows were darting back and forth in the street, their curved wings almost touching the ground. It was evident that the gnats were flying low—a sure sign that it would rain at night. A crow was sitting on the fence opposite my window, motionless, as if carved out of wood, watching the flitting swallows with its black eyes. The church bells had stopped ringing, but the frogs were croaking more sonorously than before; the silence seemed denser, hotter.

The lark is singing in the sky,
The corn-flowers bloom in the corn,

sang Ustinya plaintively, looking up at the sky, her arms crossed over her breast. The housemaid followed her up boldly and tunefully,

Oh for a glimpse of my native fields,

and Ustinya, skilfully supporting the girl's high-pitched tremulous voice, added in a velvety tone the moving words:

And with my laddie in the woods to roam!...

They stopped singing and sat silently for a long time, pressing close against each other. At last Ustinya said in a low pensive voice:

"It's not a bad song we made up, is it? Quite good, I think...."

"Look!" said the housemaid softly, interrupting Ustinya.

They looked across the street to the right. There, bathed in sunshine, a tall priest in a purple cassock was striding down the street with an important air, tapping the pavement with his long staff in a measured beat. The silver crook of the staff and the golden cross on his broad breast glistened in the sun.

The crow glanced sideways at the priest with its black beady eye, lazily flapped its heavy wings and flew to a branch of an ash tree, from which it dropped like a grey clot into the garden.

The women rose to their feet and bowed low to the priest. He did not even notice them. They remained standing, following him with their eyes until he turned the corner.

"Yes, little girl," said Ustinya, adjusting the kerchief on her head. "If only I were younger, and had a prettier face...."

Somebody called angrily in a sleepy voice:

"Maria!... Mashka!..."

"Oh, they're calling me...."

The housemaid ran off like a frightened rabbit, and Ustinya, sitting down again, smoothed her gaudy cotton frock over her knee, lost in thought.

The frogs croaked. The stifling air was as still as the water in a forest lake. The day was passing away in a riot of colour. An angry rumble came across the fields from beyond the river Tesha—it was the distant thunder growling like a bear.

THE PHILANDERER

AT ABOUT 6 o'clock in the morning I felt a living weight thrust itself upon my bed, and somebody shook me and shouted right into my ear:

"Get up!"

This was Sashka the compositor, my chum. An amusing fellow, about nineteen years of age, with a mop of tousled red hair, greenish eyes like a lizard's, and a face smudged with lead dust.

"Come on, get up!" he shouted, pulling me out of bed. "Let's go on the spree today. I have some money, six rubles twenty kopecks, and it's Stepakha's birthday! Where do you keep your soap?"

He went to the wash basin in the corner and fiercely scrubbed his face. In the midst of his puffing and snorting he asked me:

"Tell me: 'star'—is that 'astra'—in German?"

"No, I think it's Greek."

"Greek? We have a new proof-reader at our place who writes poetry, and she signs herself 'Astra.' Her real name is Trushenikova, Avdotia Vassilievna. She's nice little lady—good-looking, only rather stout.... Where's your comb?..."

As he forced the comb through his red mop of hair, he wrinkled his nose and swore. Suddenly he broke off in the middle of a word and closely examined the reflection of his face in the murky windowpane.

Outside the sun was playing on the brick wall opposite. The wall was wet from the previous night's rain and the sun tinted it red. A jackdaw was sitting on the funnel of the rain pipe, preening itself.

"What an awful mug I've got!" said Sashka, and then he exclaimed: "Look at that jackdaw! How all dressed up she is! Give me a needle and cotton, will you; I'll sew a button on my coat."

He pirouetted round and round, as if he were dancing on hot bricks; so much so that the draught he caused blew some scraps of paper from my table.

Then, standing at the window and clumsily plying the needle, he asked:

"Was there ever a king named Lodir?"*

"You mean Lothar. Why do you ask?"

"That's funny! I thought his name was Lodir, and that all lazy people descended from him! Let's go to a tavern first and have some tea. After that we'll go to the nunnery church for late matin and have a look at the nuns—I'm fond of nuns!... And what does 'prospectives' mean?"

He was as full of questions as a rattle with peas. I began to tell him what "prospects" means, but he went on talking without waiting for me to finish.

"Last night that feuilleton writer, Red Domino, came to the printing office, drunk, of course, as usual, and kept pestering me with questions about my prospectives."

After sewing on the button, higher than he should have done, he nipped the cotton with his white teeth, licked his red puffy lips and mumbled plaintively:

"Lizochka is quite right. I ought to read books, otherwise I shall die a boor and never know anything. But when can I read? I never have any time!

"Don't waste so much time courting the girls...."

"What am I—a corpse? I'm not an old man yet! Wait! When I get married, I'll give it up!

Stretching himself, he mused:

"I'll marry Lizochka. That's a fashionable girl for you! She has a frock made of... what do you call it?... barege, I think. Well! She looks so lovely in it that my legs tremble when I see her wearing it. I feel I could gobble her up!"

In the tone of a grave mentor I said:

"Take care you are not gobbled up yourself!"

He smiled self-confidently and shook his head.

"The other day two students had an argument in our newspaper. One said that love was a dangerous business, but the other said no, it's quite safe! Aren't they clever? The girls like students. They are as fond of them as they are of military men."

We left the house. The cobble-stones, washed by the rain, glistened like the bald pates of government officials. The sky was

* Literally—lazybones. *Trans.*

almost shut out by banks of snow-white clouds, and every now and again the sun peeped through the spaces between these cloudy snow-drifts. A strong autumn wind was blowing people down the street like withered leaves. It buffeted us and rang in our ears. Sashka shrivelled up and thrust his hands deep down into the pockets of his greasy trousers. He wore a light summer jacket, a blue blouse, and brown top boots, down at heel.

At midnight on angel flew across the sky,

he declaimed in rhythm with our footsteps. "I love that piece! Who wrote it?"

"Lermontov."

"I always mix him up with Nekrassov."

And long she languished in the world,
Filled with strange desires.

And screwing up his greenish eyes he repeated in a low and pensive voice:

Filled with strange desires....

"Good Lord! How well I understand that! I understand it so well that I would fly myself.... Strange desires...."

A girl walked out of the gate of a gloomy house in holiday attire—a "claret-colour" skirt, a black blouse with jet trimmings, and a golden-yellow silk shawl.

Sashka pulled his crumpled cap from his head, and bowing respectfully, said to the girl:

"Many happy returns of the day, Miss!"

The girl's pretty round face first lit up with a tender smile, but she immediately drew her thin brows together in a stern frown and said in an angry, and half-frighened voice:

"But I don't know you!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" answered Sashka cheerfully. "It's always like that with me. They don't know me at first; but when they do they fall in love with me...."

"If you wish to be impudent..." said the young lady, glancing round. The street was deserted, except for a cart laden with cabbages at the very far end.

"I'm as gentle as a lamb!" said Sashka, walking beside the girl and glancing at her face. "I can see it's your birthday. . . ."

"Please leave me alone."

The girl stepped out faster, clicking her heels determinedly on the brick sidewalk. Sashka halted and mumbled:

"By all means. There! I've dropped behind. Isn't she proud! What a pity I haven't a costume in which to play the part! If I had another suit on, she would have taken an interest in me, don't you worry."

"How do you know that it's her birthday?"

"How do I know? She comes out in her best clothes and is going to church. I'm too poor. That's what's the matter. Ekh! If only I had lots of money! I'd buy myself a little estate in the country and live like a gentleman. . . . Look!

Four rough-bearded men were carrying a plain deal coffin out of a side street. In front of them, carrying the coffin lid on his head, walked a boy, and behind them walked a tall beggar, carrying a shepherd's staff. His face was stern, and looked as if it were hewn out of stone; and as he walked he kept his red-rimmed eyes fixed on the greyish nose of the corpse that was visible above the edge of the open coffin.

"The carpenter must have died," surmised Sashka, removing his cap. "Lord rest his soul and keep him far away from his relations and friends!"

A broad smile lit up his face, and his bright eyes flashed merrily.

"It's lucky to meet a corpse," he explained. "Come on!"

"We went to the 'Moskva' tavern, and entered a small room crowded with chairs and tables. The tables were covered with pink cloths. The windows were hung with faded-blue curtains. Flower pots were ranged on the window sills, and above the flower pots canaries in cages were suspended. The place was bright and warm and cosy.

We ordered some fried sausage, tea, half a bottle of vodka, and a dozen cigarettes of the "Persian" brand. Sashka sat down at a table near the window, spread himself out like a gentleman and launched into a discourse:

"I like this polite and genteel life," he said. "You are always complaining that this is bad and the other is bad, but why? Everything is as it should be. Your character is not human, it lacks

harmony. You are like the letter 'yer.'* The word can be understood without it, but they stick it on the end for form's sake, or perhaps because they think it looks better."

While he was criticizing me I looked at him and thought to myself:

"How much verve there is in that lad! A man who has so much in him cannot pass out of this life unobserved."

But he had grown tired of sermonizing by this time. He took up his knife and scraped it on his plate to tease the birds. At once the room rang with the shrill trilling of the canaries.

"That set them going!" said Sashka, extremely pleased with himself. Then, putting down the knife, he ran his fingers through his red hair and thought aloud:

"No! Lizochka won't marry me. That's out of the question. But who knows? Perhaps she'll learn to love me. I'm madly in love with her!"

"But what about Zina?"

"Oh, Zinka is so plain. Lizochka—she's smart, she is," Sashka explained.

He was an orphan, a foundling. At the age of seven he was already working for a furrier. Then he worked for a plumber. For two years he worked as a labourer at a flour mill that belonged to a monastery, and now, for over a year, he had been working as a printer's compositor. He liked the work on the newspaper very much. He learned to read and write in his spare time, hardly noticing it himself, and the mysteries of literature had a great fascination for him. He was particularly fond of reading poetry, and he even wrote verses himself. Sometimes he would bring me scraps of lead-smudged paper with formal lines scribbled on them in pencil. The subject of these verses was always the same, and they ran approximately as follows:

I loved thee at first sight when
On Black Lake my eyes met thine,
And all my thoughts have been since then
Of thee and of thy face divine.

* The hard sign formerly placed after consonants at the end of a word, now obsolete.—*Trans.*

When I told him that this was not poetry, he would ask in surprise: "Why not? Look! It ends with 'en' here and here, and with 'ine' here and here!"

"But then, remember how Lermontov's verses sound."

"Oh, well! He had lots of practice, whereas I have only just begun! Wait until I get used to it!"

His self-confidence was amusing, but there was nothing repellent about it. He was simply convinced that life was in love with him, as the laundress Stepakha was: that he could do whatever he pleased, and that success awaited him everywhere.

The church bells were ringing, calling for late matin. The canaries, listening to the sound, which made the windowpanes rattle, stopped singing.

Sashka mumbled:

"Shall we go to matin or not?"

And then he decided.

"Let's go!"

On the way he said in a tone of complaint blended with self-condemnation:

"Tell me, how do you explain it? I always feel bored in church, but I love to go! The nuns there are so young. I'm sorry for them!"

In the church he stood at the gates where the beggars and other supplicants were gathered. His greenish eyes opened wide with wonder as he gazed at the choir where a crowd of choristers were assembled, pale-faced and in pointed hoods, all standing stiff and straight as if they were carved out of black stone. They were singing harmoniously, and their silvery voices sounded amazingly pure. The gold on the icons glittered and the glass cases reflected the lights of the candles, which looked like golden flies.

The beggars sighed and muttered their humble prayers, raising their faded eyes to the dome. This was a week day, and there were few people in the church: only those had come who had nothing to do and did not know what to do with themselves.

In front of Sashka, telling her beads, stood a nun, rather a large woman, wearing a cowl. Sashka, who reached only up to her shoulder stood on tiptoe to peep into her round face and eyes, which were hidden by the cowl: and he stood like that, insolently staring at the nun with his lips pursed, as if for a kiss.

The nun slightly bent her head and gave him a side-long glance, like a well-fed cat looking at a mouse. He collapsed at once, pulled me by the sleeve and hurried out of the church.

"Did you see the look she gave me?" he said, closing his eyes with fright. Then he drew his cap out of his pocket, wiped his perspiring face with it and wrinkled up his nose.

"Gee! The way she looked at me ... as if I were the Devil! It made my heart sink!"

Then he laughed and said:

"She must have had some bad experiences with us fellows!"

Sashka was kind-hearted, but he had no pity for people. Probably, he gave more money to beggars, and gave it more willingly, than many a rich man, but he gave it because he hated poverty. The little daily tragedies of life touched him not at all. He used to talk about them and laugh.

"Have you heard? Mishka Sizov has been sent to prison!" he said to me one day with animation. "He walked and walked about, looking for work, and one day he stole an umbrella and was caught. He didn't know how to steal. They hauled him before the beak. I was walking along and suddenly I saw him being led like a sheep by a policeman. His face was pale and his lips were parted. I shouted out to him: 'Mishka!' but he didn't answer, as if he didn't know me."

We went into a shop and Sashka bought a pound of marmalade sweets.

"I ought to buy Stepakha some pastries," he explained, "but I don't like pastries.. This marmalade is better !"

In addition to the sweets he bought some cakes and nuts, and then we went to a wine shop and he bought two bottles of liqueur, one the colour of red lead and the other the colour of vitriol. Walking down the street with the packages under his arm, he composed the following story about the nun:

"A buxom woman, isn't she! She must have been a shopkeeper's wife. Probably a grocer. I suppose she was unfaithful to her husband! He must have been a puny fellow.... Aren't those women cunning! Take Stepakha, for example..."

By this time we had reached the gates of a house, painted brown, with green shutters. Sashka kicked the wicker gate open as

if he were at home, set his cap jauntily on the side of his head and strode into the yard, which was strewn with yellow birch, poplar and elder leaves. At the other end of the yard, built against the garden wall, stood a wash-house, banked with turf right up to the window sills. Its roof was covered with yellowish-green moss, and the treetops swayed over the roof, reluctantly shedding their leaves. With its two windows the wash-house seemed to be gazing at us mournfully and suspiciously, like a toad.

The door was opened for us by a big woman, about forty years of age, with a large pock-marked face, merry eyes and thick red lips, which were stretched in a pleasant smile.

"What welcome guests!" she cried in a singsong voice. And Sasha, placing his hands on her ample shoulders and bringing his face close to hers, said:

"Many happy returns of the day, Stepanida Yakimovna, and congratulations on receving the holy mysteries!"

"But I didn't go to communion!" protested Stepakha.

"It's all the same!" answered Sashka, kissing her three times on the lips, after which both wiped away the traces of the kisses, Stepakha with the palm of her hand and Sashka with his cap.

In the dark anteroom, encumbered with pokers, baskets and wash tubs, they found Stepakha's daughter, Pasha, busy with the samovar. Pasha was a young girl with large, bulging eyes that stared with stupid astonishment, typical of children who suffered from rickets. She had a wonderfully thick plait of hair of a soft golden colour.

"Many happy returns, Panya!"

"All right," answered the girl.

"You dummy!" exclaimed Stepakha. "You should say 'Thank you.'"

"Oh, all right!" retorted the girl angrily.

A third of the laundress' habitation was taken up by a large oven, and where the shelves for the bathers used to be there was now a wide bed. In the corner, under the icons, stood a table, laid out for tea, and at the wall stood a wide bench, on which it was convenient to place the wash tub. A shaggy dog looked through the open window like a beggar, resting his heavy paws with their bro-

ken claws upon the window sill. On the window sills there were flower pots with geraniums and fuchsias.

"She knows how to live," said Sashka, looking round the squalid room and winking to me, as much as to say: "I'm joking!"

The hostess carefully drew a pie from the oven and flipped its rosy crust with her fingernail. Pasha brought in the samovar, glistening like the sun, and cast an angry glance at Sashka. But he said, licking his lips:

"Hell! I must get married! I do love pie!"

"One doesn't marry for the sake of pie," observed Stepakha, gravely.

"Oh, I understand that!"

The buxom laundress laughed merrily at this, but her eyes were grave when she said:

"You'll marry one day and forget me."

"But how many have you forgotten?" retorted Sashka with a grin.

Stepakha also smiled. Dressed as she was, too gaudily for her age, she resembled not a laundress, but a matchmaker, or a fortune teller.

Her daughter, looking like a silent gnome out of a sad fairy tale, was unwanted here, and indeed seemed to be totally unwanted on earth. She ate very carefully, as if she were eating not pie, but fish that was full of bones. And every now and again she slowly turned her large eyes towards Sashka and gazed into his thin mobile face in a queer way, as if she were blind.

The dog whined pitifully at the window. The brassy strains of martial music, the steady tramp of hundreds of heavy marching feet, and the beat of a base drum keeping them in step, came floating in from the street.

Stepakha said to her daughter:

"Why don't you run out and look at the soldiers?"

"I don't want to."

"This is fine!" exclaimed Sashka, throwing the dog a piece of pie crust. "I don't think I need anything more!"

Stepakha looked at him with motherly eyes, and straightening her blouse over her high breast she said with a sigh:

"No, that's not true. There's a lot more things you need."

"What I just said was quite true," answered Sashka. "I don't

need anything more now, if only Pashka would stop boring through me with her eyes."

"A fat lot I care about you," the girl retorted softly and contemptuously. Her mother angrily raised her eyebrows, but pursed her lips and said nothing.

Sashka moved in his seat uneasily and looking sideways at the girl said ardently:

"I feel as though I have a hole in my soul. So help me God! I would like my soul to be full, and calm, but I cannot fill it! Do you understand me, Maximich? When I feel bad I want to feel good. And when I get a happy hour I begin to feel bored! Why is that?"

He was already "feeling bored." I could see that. His eyes were roaming restlessly round the room as if taking in its squalor; a critical and ironical spark flashed in them. Obviously, he felt out of place here, and had only just realized it.

He talked warmly about the wrongs that were done in the world, and about the blindness of men who had grown accustomed to these wrongs and failed to see them. His thoughts flitted about like frightened mice, and it was difficult to keep pace with their rapid changes.

"Everything is all wrong—that's what I see! You have a church in one place and next to it you have the devil knows what! Innokenti Vassilievich Zemskov writes poetry like this:

Thanks for those few flashes
Which lit up the gloom of my heart.
For those sweet moments of contact
With your body divine.

But it did not prevent him from cheating his sister out of her house by a lawsuit; and the other day he pulled his parlour maid Nastya by the hair."

"What did he do that for?" asked Stepakha, glancing at her rough hands, which were as red as the feet of a goose. Her face had suddenly become hard and she lowered her eyes.

"I don't know.... Nastya wanted to take him to court for it, but he gave her three rubles and she let it drop, the fool!"

Suddenly Sashka jumped up and said:

"It's time for us to go!"

"Where to?" the hostess asked.

"We have some business to do," said Sashka untruthfully. "I'll look in in the evening."

He offered Pasha his hand. but the girl looked at his fingers for a moment or so, not daring to touch them, and then she took Sashka's hand and shook it in a way that seemed as if she were pushing it away.

We went out. In the yard Sashka mumbled as he pulled his cap tightly over his head:

"The devil! That girl doesn't like me ... and I feel ashamed in her presence. I won't go there tonight."

Unpleasant thoughts appeared on his face, like a rash. He blushed.

"I must give Stepakha up," he said. "It's not a nice business! She's twice my age, and...."

But by the time we turned the corner he was already laughing and saying to himself cheerfully, without a trace of boastfulness:

"She loves me. She tends me like a flower. So help me God! It makes me feel ashamed. Sometimes I feel so good being with her ... better than with my own mother! It's simply wonderful. I tell you, brother, they are troublesome things, are women. But they're a good lot for all that. They deserve all our love.... But is it possible to love them all?"

"It would be good if you loved at least one well," I suggested.

"One, one," he mumbled pensively. "But try loving only one!..."

He gazed into the distance. beyond the blue strip of the river. at the yellowing meadows, at the black bushes stripped by the autumn wind and sparsely clothed with golden leaves. Sashka's face looked kind and thoughtful. It was evident that he was full of pleasant recollections, which played upon his soul as sunbeams played upon a river.

"Let's sit down," he suggested, halting at the edge of a gully near the nunnery wall.

The wind was driving the clouds across the sky. Shadows were flitting across the meadow. On the river a fisherman was tapping away, caulking his boat.

"Listen," said Sashka. "Let's go to Astrakhan."

"What for?"

"Oh, just like that. Or else, let's go to Moscow."

"But what about Liza?"

"Liza.... Y-e-ss...."

He looked straight into my eyes and asked me:

"Have I fallen in love with her yet, or not?"

"Ask a policeman," I answered.

He laughed freely and heartily, like a child. He glanced up at the sun and then at the shadows flitting across meadow, and jumping to his feet he said:

"Those confectionary girls will be coming out soon, come along!"

He strode rapidly down the street. There was a look of concern on his face, he had his hands in his pockets, and his cap was drawn low over his forehead. From the gates of a one-story, barrack-like building, girls came running, one after another, in kerchiefs and grey aprons. One of them was Zina, a dark, graceful girl with Mongolian features and almond eyes, wearing a red blouse fitting tightly round her bust.

"Come and have some coffee," said Sashka to her, clutching her by the arm. Then he went on to say hurriedly:

"Do you mean to tell me you intend to marry that mangy cur? Why, he'll be jealous of you...."

"Every husband ought to be jealous," answered Zina gravely. "Do you want me to marry you?"

"No, don't marry me either!"

"Drop that," the girl said, frowning. "Why aren't you at work?"

"I've taken a holiday."

"Ekh, you!... I don't want any coffee."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Sasha, pulling her into a pastry shop.

When they sat down at a small table by the window, he asked her:

"Do you believe me?"

"I believe every animal, the fox and the hedgehog. As for you—I'll wait a bit," the girl answered slowly.

"Well, without you I shall go to the dogs!"

At that moment Sashka really believed that he was passing through a tragedy—his lips trembled, his eyes were moist. He was sincerely moved.

"Well, I'm a lost man, drowned in my own tears. But it serves me right, since I can't catch fortune by the hem of her cloak. But it won't be easy for you either! I shall give you no rest. Let him have a business and own horses, but you'll not be able to eat a thing, thinking of me. Mark my words. . . ."

"It's time I stopped playing with dolls," the girl said softly but angrily.

"Oh, so I am a doll to you, eh?"

"I wasn't speaking of you."

"There, look at them, Maximich! They are a race of snakes. They have no feeling. She stings me in the heart, and I suffer. But she says: Oh, you are a doll!"

Sashka was indignant. His hands trembled, and his eyes grew dark with anger.

"How can one live with creatures like that?" he demanded.

"A fine actor," I thought to myself, watching him almost with admiration.

His acting obviously captivated the girl, touched her. Wiping her lips with a corner of her kerchief, she asked in a kindly voice:

"Will you be free on Sunday?"

"Free from what? From you?"

"Don't play the fool. . . . Come over here. . . ."

They went over to a corner, and Sashka, with flashing eyes, talked long and ardently to the girl in an undertone. Finally, she exclaimed with sad vexation:

"Good Lord! What kind of husband will you make?"

"I?" shouted Sashka. "This kind!"

And without being in the least embarrassed by the presence of the fat pastry cook, he tightly hugged the girl and kissed her on the lips.

"What are you doing, are you mad?" the girl exclaimed in confusion, tearing herself out of his arms.

She fled out of the door like a bird, and Sashka, wearily sitting down at the table shook his head and said disapprovingly:

"What a temper! She's a wild animal, not a girl!"

"What do you want of her?"

"I don't want her to marry that bald droshky driver. It's a scandal. I won't allow it. I can't bear it!"

Finishing his coffee, now quite cold, he seemed to have forgotten the tragedy he had just passed through and began to reflect lyrically:

"Do you know? On holidays, or even on week days, when a lot of girls are out together strolling, or going home from work, or from high school, my very heart trembles. Good Lord! I think to myself. What a lot of them there are! Each one must love somebody; and if they don't they certainly will love someone tomorrow, or within a month, it makes no difference. Now this is what I understand. This is life! Is there anything better in life than love? Just think—what is night? Everybody is embracing and kissing—oh, brother! that's something, d'you know.... It's something you can't even find a name for! It is really a heaven-sent joy."

Jumping up he said:

"Come along, let's go for a walk!"

The sky was overcast with grey clouds, the rain was coming down in a fine drizzle, like dust. It was cold, raw and miserable. But Sashka, oblivious to everything, strolled along in his light summer jacket and chattered without ceasing about everything in the shop windows that caught his greedy eye—about neckties, revolvers, toys, and ladies' frocks, about machines, confectionary and church vestments. He caught sight of the bold type of a theatrical poster.

"Uriel Acosta! I have seen that! Have you? Those Jews talk well don't they? Do you remember? Only it's all lies. There's one kind of people on the stage and another kind in the street, or in the market place. I love jolly people—Jews and Tatars. Look how heartily the Tatars laugh.... It's a good thing they don't show you real life on the stage, but something remote—boyars and foreigners. As for real life—thank you very much. We have quite enough of our own! But if they do show you real life, let it be all true, and without pity! Children ought to play on the stage, because when they play, it's real!"

"But you don't like what is real?"

"Why not? I do if it's interesting."

The sun peeped out again, reluctantly lighting up the rain-drenched town. We roamed through the streets until vespers, when the church bells called for prayers. Sashka pulled me to a waste lot, to the fence of an orchard that belonged to a stern government official named Renkin, the father of beautiful Liza.

"Wait for me here, will you?" he begged of me, leaping onto the fence like a cat. He sat down on a post and whistled softly. Then, raising his cap with a pleased and polite gesture, he began to talk to a girl, who was invesible to me, wriggling so restlessly that he was in danger of falling off the fence.

"Good evening, Elizaveta Yakovlevna!"

I did not hear what the answer was on the other side of the fence, but through a chink between two boards I saw a lilac skirt, and the thin wrist of a white hand holding a large pair of gardener's clippers.

"No." Sashka went on to say sadly, but untruthfully. "I haven't managed to read it yet. You know how hard I work. And I work at night. In the daytime I have to sleep—and my chums give me no rest. As I set the type, letter by letter, I think only of you.... Yes, of course! Only I don't like full lines of type; verse is much easier to read.... May I come down? Why not? Nekrassov? Yes ... very, only he doesn't write much about love.... Why are you angry? Wait a minute—is there anything offensive about that? You asked me what I liked, and I said that most of all I liked love—everybody likes it.... Elizaveta Yakovlevna ... wait...."

He stopped talking, hung over the fence like an empty sack, and then, sitting up straight, he sat there for several seconds like a mournful raven, tapping his knee with the peak of his cap. His red hair was beautifully lit up by the setting sun and tenderly ruffled by the wind.

"She's gone!" he said angrily, jumping to the ground. "She's offended because I didn't read some book—a book, the devil take it! She gave me something that was more like a flat iron than a book! It was about an inch and a half thick.... Let's go!"

"Where to?"

"What does it matter."

He walked on slowly, barely dragging his feet along. His face looked tired, and he glanced with vexation at the windows that were lit up by the slanting rays of the sun.

"After all, she must love somebody," he said plaintively. "Why doesn't she love me? But no! She wants me to read books! Thinks I'm a fool! Her eyes are brighter than the light of day—and she wants me to read books! It's ridiculous. Of course, I'm no match for her ... but good Lord, you don't always fall in love with your equal!"

After remaining silent for a moment, he softly muttered:

And long she languished in the world,
Filled with strange desires,

and remained an old maid, the fool!"

I laughed. He looked at me in surprise and asked:

"What, am I talking nonsense? Ekh, brother Maximich! My heart is swelling and swelling without end, and I feel as if I am all heart!"

We reached the edge of the town, but the other side this time. Before us spread a field, and in the distance loomed the Young Ladies Institute, a tall white building surrounded by trees, standing behind a brick wall, and with brick columns running along the porch.

"I'll read books for her, it won't kill me," mused Sashka. Prospectives... like hell! I'll tell you what, brother. I'll go and see Stepakha.... I'll put my head in her lap and go to sleep. Then I'll wake up, we'll have a drink, and then go to sleep again. I'll stay the night with her. We haven't spent a bad day, the two of us, have we?"

He squeezed my hand tightly and looked tenderly into my eyes.

"I like to walk with you," he said. "You are by my side, and yet you seem not to be there. You don't hinder me in the least. Now that's what I call being a real chum!"

Having paid me this doubtful compliment, Sashka turned on his heel and rapidly walked back to town. His hands were thrust into his pockets, his cap was balanced precariously on the back of his head, and he went along whistling. He looked so thin and

sharp, like a nail with a golden head. I was sorry he was going back to Stepakha, but I understood that he had to give himself to somebody, he had to spend the richness of his soul on someone!

The red rays of the sun struck his back and seemed to be pushing him along.

The ground was coldish, the field deserted, the town seemed to murmur softly. Sashka stooped down, picked up a stone, and swinging his arm threw it far away.

Then he shouted to me: "So long!"

THE BOSS

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL EPISODE

A GUSTY wind swept the courtyard in an eddy of drab dry snow, wisps of straw and strips of bast, amid which stood the plump, round figure of a man in a heel-length gingham Tatar shirt, with bare feet shod in deep rubber galoshes. With hands clasped over an expansive belly, furiously twiddling a pair of stubby thumbs, he pierced me with unmatched beady eyes—the right one was green, the left one grey—and said in a high-pitched voice.

"Run along—there's no work for you! Whoever heard of work in the winter time?"

His pursy beardless face was puffed in an expression of disdain: a pale bit of moustache twitched on his upper lip; the lower lip sagged querulously, baring a close row of small teeth. The gusts of a boisterous November wind ruffled the thin hairs of a ponderous-browed head and whisked up his garment above the knee revealing fat, smooth, bottle-like legs covered with a downy yellowish growth, and incidentally betraying that their owner was innocent of trousers. There was something curiously arresting in the sheer ugliness of the man, and something intangibly insulting in the twinkle of his green eye. Not being in any particular hurry, I thought I would have a chat with him, and asked:

"Are you the janitor?"

"Get along, that ain't none o' your business. . . ."

"You'll get a cold, my dear fellow going about without trousers. . . ."

The red patches that served as eyebrows went up, the incongruous eyes shifted queerly, and the man's body lurched forwards as though he were about to fall.

"Anything more to say?"

"You'll catch a cold and die."

"Well?"

"That's all."

"And quite enough!" he growled, ceasing the thumb-twiddling. He unclasped his hands, fondly patted his fleshy sides, and bearing down on me, asked:

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, nothing. Can I see the boss, Vassili Semyonov?"

Fetching a sigh and scrutinizing me closely with his green eye the man said:

"That's me. . . ."

My hopes of getting a job were ruined. The wind at once seemed colder, the man more repulsive.

"Well?!" he exclaimed with a leer. "Janitor, eh?"

Now that he stood very close to me I could see that he was woefully drunk. The red knobs above his eyes were covered with a barely perceptible yellow down and he altogether oddly resembled a monstrous chicken.

"Clear out!" he said cheerfully, enveloping me in a pungent exhalation of alcoholic fumes and waving a stubby arm, which, with its clenched fist, resembled a champagne bottle with the cork. I turned my back on him and sauntered towards the gate.

"Hi! D'yer want three rubles a month?"

Was I, a strong lad of seventeen with a schooling to work for that fat drunkard for ten kopecks a day! Yet winter was no joke—there was no alternative. Sorely against my will I said:

"All right."

"Got a passport?"

I thrust a hand into my bosom, but my employer waved his arm in a gesture of disgust. . . .

"Never mind that! Give it to the clerk. You go in there. . . . Ask for Sashka. . . ."

I passed through an open door hanging on a single hinge into a decrepit lean-to that clung weakly to the yellow peeled wall of a two-storied building, and had threaded my way through sacks of flour to a narrow corner whence a sourish, warm, appetizing vapour assailed my nostrils, when I suddenly heard alarming noises issuing from the yard—a loud thumping and snorting. Pressing my face to a crack in the passage wall I stood struck with amazement. My em-

ployer, with elbows pressed against his sides, was capering about the courtyard in a sort of hop-skip-and-jump like a horse being lunged by an invisible trainer, disclosing glimpses of bare calves and fat round knees, his belly and flabby cheeks quivering, his fish-like mouth pursed up, puffing and whooping:

"Whew, whew. . . ."

The yard was narrow, crowded with a chaotic jumble of dilapidated, awry out-houses with huge padlocks, like dogs' heads, hanging on the doors; dozens of gnarls stared blind-eyed from a shrivelled, rain-washed tree. One corner of the yard was littered roof-high with empty sugar barrels, their round jaws bristling with straw. The yard seemed to be used as a garbage dump for the debris of things that had had their day.

And amid the whirl of straw and bast and dancing ringlets of wood shavings, frisking with them, as it were, was the ponderous, loose-jointed fat figure of this queer man, bouncing heavily with a noise of smacking galoshes over the cobble-stone yard, wheezing:

"Whew, whew, whew. . . ."

From somewhere behind the corner some pigs answered him with an angry squealing and grunting; somewhere a horse sighed and stamped, and from an open little ventilation window of a room on the second floor languishingly floated a girlish voice, singing:

Why so sad, beloved boy,
My carefree vagabond?

The wind, peering into the mouths of the barrels, rustled amid the straw; a splinter of wood beat a hurried whirr; the doves huddled together for warmth on the eaves of a barn, cooing plaintively. . . .

Life here was a curious medley, and in the centre of it all, perspiring and panting, whirled this grotesque personage whose likes I had never seen before.

"Looks like I've landed in a pretty stew!" I thought with some misgiving.

In a basement furnished with little windows fenced off from the outside by a close wire netting, beneath a vaulted ceiling hung a mingled cloud of steam and tobacco smoke. The place was gloom-rid-

den, the windowpanes broken, smeared with daubs of dough inside and spattered with mud outside. The corners were festooned with hanging tufts of rag-like cobwebs covered with meal, and even the black square of an icon was obliterated by films of grey dust.

A golden fire blazed in the huge low-vaulted oven, before which, scraping a busy long-handled shovel over the hearthstone, stood the squirming figure of Pashka the Gypsy, the baker, soul and head of the workshop—a little black-haired man with a parted little beard and dazzlingly white teeth. Clad in a loose, ungirdled red-bunting smock, his bare chest revealing a becoming pattern of hairy ringlets, lean and active, he resembled a tavern dancer, and it was painful to see those heavy, ragged boots, looking like cast-iron, on his shapely legs. His cheerful ringing cries roused the echoes of that dismal cellar.

"Roast and boil!" he shouted with a string of oaths, wiping the sweat from a handsome brow in raven locks.

At a long table by the wall under the windows sit eighteen workmen, swaying their bodies in a weary regular rhythm, making little pretzels in the form of the letter "B," sixteen to the pound; two men at one end of the table cut the grey resilient dough into long strips, pinch it with accustomed fingers into equal pieces and toss them down the table within reach of the workmen's hands—these hands are so nimble that their movements are almost elusive to the eye. Moulding the piece of dough into pretzel shape each man slaps it with his palm—the workshop is filled with the incessant sound of soft slapping. At the other end of the table I lay the moulded pretzels on trays, which when filled, are carried by boys to the boiler who throws them into a caldron of boiling water, whence, after a minute or so, he bails them out with a copper ladle into a long, tinned copper trough, lays out the slippery hot pieces of dough again on trays which the baker dries on the hearth, then sets them out on his shovel and deftly flings them into the oven, where they are baked to a crisp and brown readiness.

Any tardiness on my part in laying out the pretzels tossed to my end of the table means spoiling them—they will stick together and the work will be ruined. The men at the table begin swearing and throw scraps of dough in my face.

They all regard me with dislike and suspicion, as though crediting me with evil intentions.

Eighteen noses sway dreamily and dejectedly over the table; the men's faces seem oddly alike, all of them wear an expression of sullen weariness. The iron lever of the mixer thumps heavily as my shift mate kneads the dough. It is very hard work, kneading a 250-lb mass of dough to a stiff and rubber-like consistency, in which there must not be a single pellet of dry unmixed flour. And it must be done quickly, at most in half an hour.

The wood crackles in the oven, the water simmers in the boiler, hands scrape and smack on the table—all these sounds mingle in an incessant, monotonous hum, unenlivened by rare angry exclamations. Only from amid the boy threaders on the floor, comes the fresh high-pitched voice of eleven-year-old Yashka Artyukhov, a snub-nosed, lisping little person who, with a face alternately registering horror and amusement, is relating to a breathless audience exciting and incredible tales about a priest's wife who, in a fit of jealousy, poured kerosene over her daughter, a would-be bride, and set her alight, about the apprehension and punishment of horse-stealers, about hobgoblins, witches and mermaids. For that ringing ever-flowing voice of his the boy was nicknamed "Tinkle."

I already know that Vassili Semyonov was himself but recently—six years ago—a worker in the bakehouse, who lived with his master's wife, an old woman whom he taught to do away with her sot of a husband by slow poisoning, and had taken the business into his own hands, and now he beat her and kept her in such a state of terror that she would fain live like a mouse, under the floor, so long as she could keep out of his sight. The story was told me matter-of-factly, as something of common occurrence—I could not trace even a feeling of envy for the lucky man.

"Why does he go about without trousers?"

Kuzin, a one-eyed old man with a gloomy, savage face soberly explained:

"He's walking off the booze—only the day before yesterday he came to the end of a hard drinking bout."

"Isn't he a half-wit?"

Several pairs of eyes looked at me with a derisive scowl, and the Gypsy shouted hopefully:

"You wait, he'll show you where his wits are!"

Everybody—from sixty-year-old Kuzin to Yashka who strings

the pretzels on a bast thread for two rubles from October till Easter—speaks of the master with a feeling closely akin to boasting, as if to say: That's the kind of man Vassili Semyonov is, find another like him if you can! He's a libertine, he has three mistresses, two of whom he gives the devil of a time, and the third of whom beats him. He is greedy, feeds us badly, we only get cabbage soup and corned beef on holidays and tripe the rest of the time, with bean and millet porridge on hemp-oil on Wednesdays and Fridays. As for work, he demands seven sacks daily, which is forty nine poods in the dough, and the handling of each sack takes two and a half hours.

"It's strange, though, the way you speak of him," I said.

Flashing the whites of his shrewd eyes, the baker asked:

"What's strange about it?"

"As if you were boasting. . . ."

"There is something to boast about! You don't seem to grasp it. Now, he was a common workman, a nobody, and today the police inspector bows to him! The man can't read or write, he knows nothing but figures—yet he keeps a forty-man business all in his head!"

Kuzin confirmed with a pious sigh:

"The Lord has given him plenty of sense."

And Pashka cried excitedly:

"A pretzel bakery, a bread bakery, a bun bakery, a cracknel bakery—see if you can manage all that without bookkeeping! Pretzels alone he sells as much as five thousand poods over the winter to the Mordvinians and Tatars living in the country, then there are seven costermongers in town each of whom's got to sell not less than two poods of pretzels, and prime cracknels, every day—what d'you say to that?"

The baker's enthusiasm was beyond me, it irritated me—I had already had sufficient grounds for thinking and speaking of the bosses otherwise.

Old Kuzin, concealing a thievish eye under a grizzled eyebrow, said tauntingly:

"He's no ordinary man, my dear fellow!"

"Looks like it, if, as you say, he poisoned the old boss. . . ."

The baker puckered his black brows into a frown, and demurred:

"As to that, there aren't any witnesses. Sometimes, out of spite or envy a man's said to have murdered or poisoned or robbed some

one—people don't like it when one of our brotherhood has luck come his way. . . ."

"What kind of a brother's he to you?"

The Gypsy did not reply, and Kuzin, glancing into a corner, growled at the boys:

"You might clean the dirt off that holy image, you little devils! Tatar heathens you. . . ."

The rest were silent. They might not have existed.

When it was my turn again to lay the pretzels out on trays I stood at the table telling the boys everything I knew, and what I thought they ought to know. To drown the muttering noises of the workshop I had to speak loudly, and when my audience was attentive I waxed enthusiastic and raised my voice. During one of these moments of "uplift" my boss caught me red-handed and meted out to me punishment and a nickname.

He appeared noiselessly behind my back within the stone arch that divided our workshop from the bread bakery; the floor of the bakery was raised three steps above the level of our workshop floor, and the boss stood framed within the arch, hands on belly, twiddling his thumbs, clad in his invariable long shirt drawn by the tape round a beefy neck, looking for all the world like an unwieldy sack of flour.

He stood surveying everybody from his elevation out of mismatched eyes, the green pupil, which was of a regular round form, gleaming and contracting like a cat's, and the other, a grey oval eye, staring fixedly and dully like the glazed eye of a corpse.

I went on speaking until I noticed the unusual hush that had descended on the workshop, though the work went on swifter than before, and a mocking voice behind me said:

"What's the blatter about, Blatterer?"

I turned round, flustered and silenced, and he walked past me, his green eye travelling sharply over my figure, and asked the baker:

"How does he work?"

Pasha answered approvingly:

"He's all right! Strong. . . ."

The boss waddled himself leisurely across the workshop, and mounting the steps of the passage door, told the Gypsy in a soft lazy voice:

"Put him on dough mixing for a week running. . . ."

With which he disappeared behind the door, letting a white cloud of frost into the workshop.

"Well I never!" ejaculated Vanok Ulanov, a puny, lame lad with an insolent face, and amazingly shameless of speech and gesture.

Somebody whistled derisively. The baker cast an angry glance around and rapped out with an oath:

"Get your hands moving!"

From the floor in the corner where the boys were sitting came Yashka's angry, reproving voice:

"You're a fine lot, too—thothe thitting at the end of the table! Why the devil couldn't you nudge a fellow when you thaw the both coming?"

"Y-yes," took up the hoarse voice of his brother Artem, a lad of sixteen, dishevelled like a cockerel after a fight. "It's no joke mixing the dough for a week running—it'll knock a fellow up awful!"

The end of the table was occupied by old Kuzin and ex-soldier Milov, a good-natured fellow infected with syphilis. Kuzin dropped his eyes and said nothing. The old soldier murmured guiltily:

"I didn't think of it. . . ."

The baker, grinning from ear to ear, said:

"Now your name's Blatterer!"

Two or three men laughed halfheartedly, then followed an awkward, distressing silence. The men avoided my eyes.

"Yashka's always the first one to sense a truth," came the sudden deep-voiced comment of Osip Shatunov, a lop-sided man with a Kalmuck face and slits of eyes. "He won't live long in this world, that Yashka."

"Go to hell!" retorted the boy in a merry, ringing voice.

"He ought to have his tongue cut off," suggested Kuzin. Artem threw him an angry:

"You ought to have your own tongue pulled out, root and all, you sneak!"

"Dry up!" came an authoritative voice from the oven.

Artem got up and stepped leisurely to the passage door, followed by his little brother's admonition:

"Where the devil are you going in bare feet? Put on your boots —you'll catch your death o'cold!"

Apparently everybody was accustomed to these remarks—they passed in silence. Artem looked tenderly at his brother with laughing eyes, and, with a wink at him, put on his ragged boots.

I felt sad, and a sense of my loneliness and estrangement among these people weighed heavily on my heart. A snowstorm was beating against the dirty windows—it was cold outside! I had seen men like these, and I understood them a little. I knew that almost every one of them was living through a painful and inevitable crisis of the soul, a soul born and nourished in the quiet of the country, and whose soft and pliant essence the town was malleating after its own fashion by hundreds of little hammers, widening some and narrowing others.

The cruel, relentless handiwork of the town was particularly noticeable when these inarticulate people began to sing their village songs, putting into the words and music all the pained bewilderment and dumb anguish of their souls.

Poor unha-a-ppy ma-aid,

suddenly Ulanov started to sing in a high, almost feminine voice, and somebody else, involuntarily as it were, would take up:

Walked in the field at night. . . .

The slowly sung word "field" rouses two or three others. Bending their heads lower, hiding their faces, they give themselves up to memories:

In the field the moon shines brightly,
In the field blows a gentle breeze. . . .

Before they have sung the last line Vanok carries on the song in sobbing tones:

Poor unha-a-ppy ma-a.d. . . .

The song grows louder, stronger:

She spake to the wind:
O, kind wind, gentle friend,
Draw my heart, my soul from me!

And as they sing a gentle breeze from the wide fields seems to have been wafted into the workshop, and one's mind is filled with

kindly thoughts, thoughts that ennoble and soften the heart. And suddenly, as though ashamed of the sadness of the tender words, someone mutters:

"Aha, that's got the jade. . . ."

Crimson with exertion Ulanov climbs to a still higher and sadder pitch:

Poor unha-a-ppy ma-aid. . . .

Soul-stirred voices sing with infinite melancholy:

She tearfully begged the wind:
Take Thou, O Take my heart
Into the forest deep and dark!

"And I bet you she—" a lewd, filthy innuendo breaks into the song. The scents of the field are chased away by the fetid smell of a dark basement and dirty yard.

"E-ekh, damn it all!" someone sighs.

Vanok and the best voices strive harder, as though trying to quench the putrid blue flames and reeky words, while the men grow ever more ashamed of the sad story of love—they know that love in the city is bought at the price of ten kopecks, they buy it, together with the disease and canker that go with it—and their attitude to it is a thing firmly established.

Poor unhappy maid!
Ah, nobody loves me. . . .

"Don't be such a damned prude—ten men'll love you then. . . ."

Bury thou my heart
Beneath the roots and autumn leaves. . . .

"All they know, the hussies, is to get married and sit on us men's necks. . . ."

"That's a fact. . . ."

Ulanov sings nice songs, with eyes tightly closed, and at such moments his dissolute, oldish-looking face becomes covered with engaging little wrinkles and glows with a shy smile.

But ever more often the cynical ejaculations befoul the song as the mud of the street bespatters a holiday dress, and Vanok must

admit himself vanquished. Now he opens his bleary eyes, while an insolent smile twists his dissipated face and something evil plays upon his thin lips. He is anxious to uphold his reputation as a good song leader—it is the only reputation that he, lazy and unpopular as he is with his comrades, had to keep up in the workshop.

Tossing an angular head in thin, reddish hairs, he screeches:

On Prolomny street what-ho
Lies a student drunk as Chloe....

With a whoop and a whistle and a fierce cynicism, singing the ribald words with a sort of malicious glee, the whole workshop roars in unison:

Lies and smiles with wanton wiles....

It is like a herd of hogs who have broken into a lovely garden, trampling the flowers. Ulanov is odious and sinister. Wild with excitement, he is all aflame, his grey face covered with hectic patches, his eyes almost popping out of their orbits, his body obscenely squirming in shameless gestures, and his strident voice, grown suddenly strong, cuts the heart with a ferocious yearning:

Come the wenches, come the ladies,

he chants with waving arms, while the rest catch up in a raving howl:

Straight ... Heigh-ho!
Straight!
Straight....

The mud boils furiously, a thick, greasy, viscid mud wherein, moaning, almost sobbing, human souls are being cooked. The madness of it is unbearable, the sight gives rise to a frantic impulse to dash one's head against the wall. Instead of which you close your eyes and begin to sing the ribald song yourself, perhaps louder than the others—you are overcome by a feeling of devastating pity for your fellow-men, and, besides, one does not always enjoy a feeling of his own superiority!

Sometimes the boss puts in a noiseless appearance, or the red curly-headed clerk, Sashka, comes running in,

"Having a gay time, boys?" Semyonov enquires in a poisonously sweet little voice, while Sashka simply yells:

"Not so much noise, you bastards!"

And the flame instantly dies out, and a deeper, heavier darkness settles on the soul from the alacrity with which these people obey the imperious command.

One day I asked:

"Brothers, why do you spoil good songs?"

Ulanov glanced at me in astonishment:

"Why, do we sing badly?"

And Osip Shatunov said in his deep voice that always sounded sort of apathetic:

"You can never do any bad to a song to spoil it. It's like the soul. We'll all die, but the song will remain.... Forever!"

When he spoke Osip lowered his eyes like a nun making a collection for the monastery, and when he was silent his broad Kalmuck cheekbones worked almost incessantly, as though this heavy man were constantly chewing something....

I made a sort of reading stand from splinters of wood, and when, having mixed the dough, I took up my position at the table to lay out the pretzels, I put the stand in front of me with a book opened out on it and read aloud. My hands being constantly engaged with my work, the business of turning over the pages was performed by Milov--he did it reverently, each time with an unnatural exertion and a copious wetting of the finger. It was his business too to warn me by a kick under the table of the boss' approach.

The ex-soldier, however, was a wool-gathering sort of fellow, and one day, while I was reading Tolstoy's "A Tale of Three Brothers" I heard the horsy snort of Semyonov over my shoulder; his plump little hand shot out and seized the book, and, before I could gather my wits, he was walking to the oven swinging the book in his hand and saying:

"I like that, eh? Smart...."

I overtook him and grabbed him by the arm.

"You can't burn the book!"

"Who said so?"

"You can't do that!"

A deep hush descended on the workshop. I could see the frowning face of the baker, his white grinning teeth, and waited for him to shout:

"Go for him!"

Green circles spun before my eyes and my legs trembled. The men worked away with might and main, as though in a hurry to be done with one business and start another.

"I can't?" the boss repeated calmly without looking at me, his head bent to one side as though he were listening to something.

"Let's have it, here."

"All right.... Take it!"

I took the rumpled book, released the boss' arm and went back to my place, while he, with head bent, saying nothing as usual, went out into the yard. There was a long silence in the workshop, then the baker, with a rough gesture, wiped the sweat from his face and stamping his foot said:

"Whew, what a turn I had, damn you fellows! I was sure he was *going to pitch into you....*"

"So was I." put in Milov joyfully.

"There might have been a fight!" exclaimed the Gypsy regretfully.

"Well, Blatterer, better look out now! He's got it in for you now, crikey!"

Kuzin shook his grey head and grumbled:

"You don't fit in here, my dear chap. We don't want any rows. You'll try the boss' temper and he'll have it out on all of us—he will!"

Yashka Artyukhov swore at the soldier in an undertone:

"Didn't you thee him coming, you duffer?"

"Looks like I didn't."

"Weren't you told to keep a look out?"

"Yes, I missed this time...."

The majority maintained an apathetic silence, just listening to the angry growling. I could not make out how these people regarded me, I felt ill at ease, and decided that it were better for me to leave. As if guessing my thoughts the Gypsy spoke up angrily:

"Look here, Blatterer, you'd better give notice—it's going to be hell for you just the same! He'll set Yegor onto you—that'll be the end of it."

Yashka just then got up from the floor where he had been squatting cross-legged on a piece of matting, tailorwise, and, thrusting out his belly, swaying on bandied, rickety legs, and glaring horribly with milk-blue eyes, shouted, with raised fist:

"What, leave for good? Punch him in the jaw! And if he fights I'll take your part!"

There was a moment of silence and then a cloudburst of laughter, that refreshing, vigorous laughter which, like a summer downpour washes the dirt and dust and excrescence from a man's soul and leaves it bright and pure, throws men together in a solid mass, a single human body, cemented by a bond of common understanding.

All the men had dropped their work, rocking and holding their sides with shrieking, howling laughter, while tears streamed down their faces. Yashka, too, laughed in an embarrassed fashion and patted his shirt.

"Why not? I'll show him! I'll grab a three pound weight, or elth a chump of wood...."

Shatunov was the first to stop laughing. He wiped his face with the palm of his hand and said, without looking at anyone:

"Yasha's said it again, the infant's right! Scaring a fellow for nothing. He's doing you good—and you tell him to clear out...."

"There's no harm in warning him!" said Pashka, coming to a rest. "We're not dogs, are we?"

And all eagerly fell to discussing how to safeguard me from Yegor.

"It's all the same to him whether he kills a man or cripples him —makes no difference, none at all!"

Yashka outvied everybody, breathlessly constructing absurd plans of defense and attack, while old Kuzin pinned his eye in a corner and growled:

"How many more times have I got to tell you boys to give the holy image a clean up...."

The Gypsy, scraping his shovel on the hearth, argued with himself, as it were:

"One's got to be prepared for trouble.... There's plenty of rough play down here...."

Somebody walked past the window through the yard with a heavy tread, and the all-knowing Yashka commented animatedly:

"That's Yegor going to shut the gates—going to have a look at the pigs...."

Someone muttered.

"Pity they didn't finish him off in the hospital...."

It became quiet and dreary. After a minute the baker suggested to me:

"D'you want to see Semyonov's parade?"

I stood in the passage, looking out into the yard through a crack in the wall: in the middle of the yard, my boss was sitting bare-legged on a box, holding a couple of dozen buns in the hem of his long shirt. Four huge Yorkshire boars nuzzled around his knees, grunting loudly, while he was thrusting buns into the red jaws, patting the swines' fat pink sides and mumbling in a benevolent, low, unfamiliar voice:

"A-ah, the beasties want to eat, the beasties want a bun? There, there, there...."

His fat face was wreathed in a soft, dreamy smile, the grey eye had come to life with a look of kind indulgence, and there was altogether something oddly new about him. Behind him stood a broad-shouldered fellow with a pock-marked face, a big moustache, a clean-shaven blue chin and a silver ring in his left ear. With cap tilted back on his head, he looked with round, button-like, lack-lustre eyes at the pigs jostling his master, while his hands, thrust into the pockets of his coat stirred inside and twitched the skirts of that garment.

"Time to sell 'em," he said hoarsely. Not a muscle of his blunt face had moved.

"Plenty of time," snapped the boss in a loud voice. "When'll I get others like them?..."

One of the boars prodded him in the side with its snout. Semyonov swayed on the box and broke into a glad cackle, shaking his lubberly bulk and crinkling his face in such a way that his unmatched eyes vanished in the thick creases of his skin.

"Rogie-pogie hermits!" he shrieked through his laughter. "They live in the dark—they do—just look at 'em—choo, choo! Just look at 'em—eh! My li'lle recluses, saintly souls...."

The pigs were disgustingly alike, and one and the same beast seemed to be dashing around the yard in quadruplicate, with a

mocking and offensive similitude. Small-headed, on short legs, their naked bellies almost touching the ground, they butted into the man with an angry flutter of the grey lashes of their useless little eyes—and I looked at them as though in a horrible dream.

Squealing, grunting and crunching, the Yorkshires thrust their greedy blunt muzzles into the master's knees, rubbed against his legs and sides, while he too squealed, pushing them off with one hand and teasing them with the other in which he held a bun, now bringing it close to their jaws, now drawing it back, shaking all over with soft laughter, himself almost a perfect imitation of the beasts, except that he was still more dreadful, loathsome and—curious.

Lazily raising his head, Yegor gazed long at the sky which was as wintry-dull and cold as his eyes; the furbished earring swayed gently over his shoulder.

"The nurse in the hospital," he said in an unnaturally loud voice, "told me on the secret that there won't be any doomsday."

Semyonov, engaged in an attempt to seize the ear of one of the porkers, queried:

"Won't there?"

"No."

"She's probably a damned liar. . . ."

"Maybe she is."

The boss went on fondling the spoilt, clean, smooth pigs, but his hand was beginning to move sluggishly—he was apparently tired.

"She has a fine bust and pop eyes," said Yegor with a reminiscent sigh.

"Who, the nurse?"

"Sure! Doom, she says, day, there won't be, but the sun's going to eclipse altogether in August. . . ."

Semyonov queried again incredulously:

"Altogether? You don't say so?"

"Altogether. But she says it's not for long—a shadow will just pass over."

"Where's the shadow come from?"

"I don't know. From God, maybe. . . ."

Getting to his feet the boss said sternly and emphatically:

"She's a fool! No shadow can't stand up against the sun, it'll pierce any shadow. That's one thing! Secondly, God they say—is

bright—how comes the shadow from him? And then, there's nothing but emptiness in the sky—d'you ever see a shadow come from nothing? She's a crazy fool. . . ."

"Of course, like every woman. . . ."

"That's just it. . . . Well, drive the youngsters into the pigsty."

"I'll call one o' the boys."

"All right. But see they don't hit the beasts, and if they do, you can let 'em have it from me. . . ."

"I know. . . ."

The boss walked through the yard with the Yorkshires waddling after him like sucklings after a sow. . . .

The next day, early in the morning, the boss flung open the door leading from the passage into the workshop, stood on the threshold and said with venomous sweetness:

"Mister Blatterer, will you go and carry the flour into the passage from the yard. . . ."

White clouds of cold air from the open door swirled around Nikita, the boiling man who, turning his head to the boss, requested:

"Will you shut the door, Vassili Semyonich, it's blowing pretty hard."

"Wha-at? Blowing?" squealed Semyonov, and poking him in the back of the head with a tight little fist, he vanished, leaving the door open. Nikita was about thirty years of age, but he looked like an adolescent—a timid little man with a yellow face covered with small tufts of colourless hair, with big, always wide eyes in which there was a look of frozen anguish and terror. For six years, from five in the morning till eight in the evening, had he been standing over the caldron, dipping his hands incessantly in the boiling water, one side of him roasted by the fire, while behind was the yard door dousing him with cold draughts several hundred times during the day. His fingers were twisted by rheumatism, his lungs inflamed, and his legs drawn in knotted blue veins.

Throwing an empty sack over my head I went out into the yard, and as I drew level with Nikita he muttered to me through clenched teeth:

"It's all your fault, damn you. . . ."

Tears, like turbid sweat, streamed from his big eyes.

I went out crestfallen, thinking:

"I'll have to clear out."

The boss, in a lady's fox coat, was standing by a pile of sacks with flour—there were about a hundred and fifty of them, and even a third of that lot would not go into the passage. I told him so, and he answered with a sneer:

"If they won't I'll make you haul 'em back again.... That's all right, you're a strong fellow...."

I snatched the sack off my head and told Semyonov that I would not allow him to badger me and asked him to pay me off.

"Come on, get on with the job!" he retorted sneeringly. "What'll you do with yourself in the winter? You'll die of hunger...."

"Pay me off!"

His grey eye became bloodshot, the green one shifted evilly, and he thrust a clenched fist into the air, asking in a sobbing voice:

"D'you want a punch in the jaw?"

I flared up. Striking aside his outstretched arm I seized him by the ear and began pulling it silently, while he pushed his left hand in my chest and cried out in an amazed low voice:

"Hold on! What'you doing? To the boss? Let go, damn you...."

Then, alternately weighing his struck right hand in his left, and rubbing his red ear he looked into my face with ludicrously staring eyes and began to mutter:

"To the boss? You? Who are you, eh? Why, I ... I—I'll call for the police! I'll...."

And suddenly, pursing his lips with a pained expression he gave a long dreary whistle and turned away, blinking his right eye.

My wrath burned out like so much straw—he made such a droll sight, slowly waddling off into the corner, while his fat buttocks quivered in an injured sort of way beneath the short fur coat.

It grew cold, and, not wishing to go into the workshop, I decided to warm myself by carrying the sacks into the passage. When I ran in with the first sack I saw Shatunov; he was squatting on his haunches before a crack in the wall, looking like an owl. His stiff hair was tied up with a ribbon of bast, the ends of which dangled over his forehead and stirred together with his eyebrows.

"I saw the way you handled him," he said quietly, his lantern jaws working heavily.

"Well, so what?"

His little Mongolian eyes widened in an inscrutable look that was rather disconcerting.

"Look here!" he said, standing up and drawing close. "I won't tell anyone about it, and don't you either. . . ."

"I didn't intend to."

"Quite right! He's the boss, after all! Isn't that so?"

"Well?"

"We've got to obey somebody, otherwise we'll all come to blows!"

He spoke gravely and very quietly, almost in a whisper.

"There must be respect, you know. . . ."

I did not understand what he meant, and got angry:

"You just go to hell. . . ."

Shatunov seized my hand, speaking in a disarming mysterious whisper:

"You needn't be afraid of Yegor! D'you know any charm against night scares? Yegor is haunted by night terrors, he's afraid of death. He has a great sin on his soul. . . . One night I passed the stable and there he was, standing on his knees and howling: 'Holy Mother of God, keep me from sudden death'—d'you understand?"

"I don't!"

"Come over him that way!"

"What way?"

"By fear. . . . Don't rely on strength, he's five times as strong as you are."

Sensing that this man wished me well I thanked him and held out my hand. He responded after a slight hesitation, and when I pressed his horny palm, he smacked his lips regretfully and, lowering his eyes, mumbled something inaudible.

"What d'you say?"

"Never mind now," he said with a deprecatory gesture and went into the workshop, while I began to haul in the sacks, my thoughts dwelling on what had happened.

I had read about the Russian people, about its spirit of fellowship and sociality, the warm and generous susceptibility of its soul to good, but I knew the people better at first hand, having been thrown on my own resources since the age of ten, cut off from the influence of family and school.

Most of my personal impressions seemed to fit in well with what I had read. Yes, people are attracted to what is good, they appreciate it, hanker after it, and are always waiting for it to come from somewhere to make this rugged, dismal life a brighter, warmer thing.

But I find myself thinking ever more often that while loving what is good, like children do a fairy tale wondering at its beauty and rareness, looking forward to it as a holiday, most people have no faith in its power, and it is a rare person who is solicitous of guarding and protecting its growth. They are all sort of unploughed souls, that are thickly and abundantly overrun with weeds, and if a grain of wheat be brought in by a wind of chance, the young shoot withers and fades.

Shatunov roused my interest—there was something unusual about the man. . . .

For about a week the boss did not show up in the workshop, neither did he discharge me. Indeed, I did not insist on it—I had nowhere to go, and life here was growing more interesting every day.

Shatunov obviously shunned me, and my efforts to have a "heart-to-heart" chat with him were a failure—my questions elicited at best an unintelligible reply, spoken with downcast eyes and working jaws:

"Of course, if one knew the right word! Still, every man's soul's his own. . . ."

There was something thickly dark about him, something of the recluse. He habitually spoke little, did not use profane language, but neither did he pray on going to bed or on getting up, and only when he sat down to dinner or supper would he silently make the sign of the cross over his deep chest. During a moment of leisure he would imperceptibly withdraw into a corner, choosing the darkest, where he would either mend his clothes or take off his shirt and kill parasites in the dark. And always he hummed to himself in a deep bass, almost in a lower octave, queer, unfamiliar songs.

Ah, why does this day seem sad and dreary. . . .

One would ask him facetiously:

"Only today? Did you feel all right yesterday?"

Without answering or looking up he would hum on:

I might have a drink of home-brew, but I don't want to....

"You haven't any, anyway—home-brew, I mean."

Without batting an eyebrow, as though he were deaf, he went on drearily:

I'd go to see my darling, but my legs don't want to go,
Oh, my legs don't want to go, and my heart it is not draun....

Pashka the Gypsy was not fond of dismal songs.

"Hey, wolf!" he shouted angrily, baring his teeth. "Howling again?"

The funereal words came creeping one by one out of the dark corner:

My heart is sad, ah, ever so sad.
Weary and dreary, it gives me no sleep....

"Vanok!" commanded the baker. "Put the lid on him, he'll smoke the place out! Let's have 'Goatie!'"

The men broke into a ribald dance song, Shatunov emitting deep-mouthed sounds with an air of indifference and a peculiar knack of fitness to the blatant obscenity of the song, which at times became drowned in his voice, vanishing like a gushing rivulet in the dark stagnant water of a muddy pond.

The baker and Artem were obviously kindly disposed towards me—it is a new attitude that does not lend itself to description, but I sense it nevertheless. As for Yashka Tinkle, he dragged the very first night after my clash with the boss a sack filled with straw into the corner where I slept and announced:

"Well, I'm going to thleep next to you now!"

"All right."

"I thay, let's be friends!"

"Let's."

He promptly rolled himself over to my side and whispered confidentially:

"Do mithe eat cockroaches?"

"No, what makes you ask?"

"I thought as much!"

And in the same hushed voice, his thick tongue moving rapidly and his winsome eyes shining, he confided:

"D'you know, I thaw a mouthe having a talk with a cockroach—honour bright. I did! I woke up one night, and in the moonlight thaw a mouthe not far from me busy at one of the pretzels, nibbling and nibbling, an' I crawled up—ever tho quietly. Just then a cockroach came up, and then two more, and the mouthe dropped the pretzel and thtarted moving his grey whithkers, and they also began wagging their whithkers—like our dumb Nikander—talking to each other they were.... I wonder what they were talking about? Mutht be interething, eh? Are you thleeping?"

"No! Go on, please...."

"He looked ath if he was athking the cockroaches: 'Where d'you come from?' An' they thaid 'We're from the country....' They crowd in from the villages, you know, during the famine, or when there's been a fire.... They run away from the hut before a fire, they know when there's going to be a fire. Ol' man brownie tells 'em: 'Run off, you fellows, and they hop it! Have you ever theen a brownie?"

"Not yet...."

"I have...."

At which point he suddenly gave a snore, as though gasping for breath—and Tinkle was heard no more till morning!

The boss now made it his rule to visit the workshop almost every day, seeming deliberately to choose a time when I was relating something or reading to the men. Coming in noiselessly he would sit down on a box in a corner by the window on my left, and if I stopped on seeing him, he would say in a tone of grim mockery:

"Go on jabbering, professor, go on, spin the yarn, don't be afraid!"

And he would sit for a long time, silently blowing out his cheeks, which would set his little ears stirring beneath his sparse hair—they were almost indistinguishable, set close against his skull. Sometimes he would ask in a croaking voice:

"What, what?"

And one day, when I was describing the structure of the universe, he cried shrilly:

"Hold on! And where's God come in?"

"He's here. . . ."

"Liar! Where?"

"D'you know your Bible?"

"Don't you try to fool me—where is he?"

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

"The waters!" he cried triumphantly. "And you're trying to prove there was fire! Wait, I'll ask the priest what it says in the writings. . . ."

He got up and went out, adding morosely:

"You seem to know a lot, Blatterer—d'you think it's good for you?. . ."

Shaking his head Pashka said anxiously:

"He'll lay a trap for you!"

Two days after this Sashka, the clerk, came running into the workshop and shouted to me sternly:

"The boss wants you!"

Tinkle raised a snub-nosed freckled face and gravely suggested:

"Take a three-pounder with you!"

I went out amid an accompaniment of subdued laughter.

In a crowded room in the semi-basement two other pretzelmakers, Donov and Kuvshinov, besides my own boss were sitting at a table before a samovar. I stopped in the doorway. My boss commanded in a maliciously soft voice:

"Now, professor Blatterer, will you be so kind as to tell us about the stars and the sun, and how it all happened."

His face was flushed, his grey eye narrowed and his green one alight with a mischievous glint of emerald. Next to him shone two other smiling visages, one a lobster-red framed in a carroty stubble, the other a dingy, mildewed-looking map. The samovar snorted lazily, enveloping the odd heads in wisps of vapour. On a wide bed set up against the wall, looking like a grey old bat, sat the mistress, her arms propped amid the rumpled bedclothes, her underlip sagging, while she swayed to and fro and hiccoughed loudly. The pink little flame of an icon-lamp flickered lonesomely in the corner, as though shivering from cold; on the wall between the windows hung an ole-

ograph of a woman naked to the waist, holding in her lap a cat as disgustingly fat as herself. The room was filled with a stuffy smell of vodka, pickled mushrooms and smoked fish, and the legs of passers-by flitted across the window like huge shears silently snipping at something.

I moved forward, and my boss, picking up a fork from the table, got up, and tapping the edge of the table with it, said to me:

"No, you stand where you are.... Let's have the story first, then I'll stand you a treat...."

I decided that I would stand him a treat, too, afterwards and began to talk.

Life on earth was none too happy, and that is why I was so fond of the sky. Often on a summer night I would go into the fields and lie down on the ground face upwards, and it seemed to me that every star sent a golden ray down to me, into my heart; linked by their multitudes to the cosmos I floated among the stars together with the earth, as amidst the strings of a huge harp, and the quiet murmur of the earth's nocturnal life sang to me a song of the infinite joy of living. These wholesome hours of spiritual communion with the universe miraculously cleansed the heart of the day's vexatious impressions.

And here, in this squalid little room, facing the three bosses and a drunken hag gazing at me bleakly with a senseless stare, I let myself be carried away, forgetting the offensive presence of everything around me. I perceived that the two ugly faces were grinning insultingly, and my boss had bunched his lips and was whistling softly, while his green eye travelled swiftly over my face with a peculiar, fixed scrutiny: I heard Donov say in a husky, tired voice:

"Hell, he can talk the hind leg off a donkey!"

And Kuvshinov exclaimed angrily:

"If you ask me, the fellow's nuts!"

But this did not deter me: I wanted to make them listen to my narration, and it seemed to me that they were coming under the spell of my words....

Suddenly my boss, without stirring, uttered slowly in a high nasal voice:

"All right, that'll do Blatterer! Thanks old chap! That was fine. And now that you have put all the stars in their places, go and feed the pigs, my little piggies..."

The reminiscence now seems amusing, but at the time I felt anything but amused, and I don't remember how I mastered the fury that overcame me.

I remember that Shatunov and Artem seized me when I ran into the workshop, led me out into the passage and brought me round with a drink of water. Yashka Tinkle said in a tone of conviction:

"Well? Aha, you didn't lithen to me?"

And the Gypsy, scowling and muttering angrily, patted me on the back:

"I'd have nothing to do with him.... When he's got his monkey up he doesn't care a hang, even if it was the bishop himself...."

Feeding the pigs was regarded as a humiliating and harsh punishment. The Yorkshires were housed in a dark and crowded pigsty, and when their buckets of feed were brought in they would rush a man off his feet, jostle him with their blunt muzzles, and he was a lucky fellow whom their rough amiability did not trip over into the mire.

Immediately on coming into the pigsty one had to lean his back against the wall, kick the swine off, swiftly pour the slops into the trough and make off, because the enraged beasts had a habit of biting when kicked. It was much worse when Yegor opened the door of the workshop and announced in a sepulchral voice:

"Heigh, you Katsapi,* come and get the pigs in!"

That meant that the refractory beasts let loose in the yard did not want to go back to the pigsty. Five or so of the men would then run out into the yard, swearing and sighing and a merry chase would begin, to the master's immense enjoyment. At first the men themselves enjoyed the mad scramble, which was something of a diversion, but they soon became breathless with fatigue and fury; the obstinate pigs rolled back and forth across the yard like barrels, throwing the men off their feet, while the boss stood looking on, fired by the excitement of the chase, hopping and stamping his feet, whistling and screeching:

"Good boys! Don't give in! Scratch the scabs off 'em!"

When a man was sent sprawling the boss yelled louder and merrier than ever, slapping his fleshy, woman-like thighs and choking with laughter.

* An abusive epithet applied to Russians by Ukrainians in the old days.—*Trans.*

Indeed, it must have looked a droll sight, those carcasses of pink fat tearing around the yard hotly pursued by a yelling hand-waving bunch of skinny humans besprinkled with flour, clad in dirty rags, with tattered boots on their bare feet, who ran and fell and were dragged about the yard clutching the hind foot of a boar.

One day a boar escaped into the street, and six of us boys chased him about the town for two hours, until a passing Tatar hit the beast across the front legs with a stick, after which we carried the pig home on a mat to the great amusement of the neighbourhood. The Tatars shook their heads and spat in disgust, while the Russians quickly formed an escort. A dark, brisk little student, taking off his cap, enquired sympathetically and loudly of Artem, motioning to the whimpering animal:

"Ma or sister?"

"The boss!" retorted a tired and irate Artem.

We hated the pigs; living better than we did, they were to all of us, except the boss, a source of painful humiliation and dirty cares over their health and well-being.

When the workshop learned that I was to tend the pigs for a whole week, some man pitied me with that annoying Russian compassion which clings stickily to the heart like gum and saps its strength: most of them maintained an indifferent silence, while Kuzin said in a didactic snuffling tone:

"Never mind! The boss' orders—got to do your best.... Whose bread are we eating?"

Artem shouted:

"You old devil! One-eyed sneak...."

"Well, what else?" asked the old man.

"Toady! Tell him, go on, tell the boss...."

Kuzin interrupted him, declaring calmly:

"So I will! My dear fellow, I'll tell him everything! I live by the truth...."

The Gypsy rapped out an oath and then, unusually for him, dropped into a sullen silence.

In the night, at a painful hour, while I was lying in my corner listening in stony horror to the drowsy snoring of the toil-worn men and arranging and rearranging in my mind such mute and unintelli-

gible words as Life, Men, Truth, the Soul, the baker crept up to me softly and lay down beside me.

"Aren't you sleeping?"

"No."

"Taking it hard, brother. . . ."

He rolled himself a cigarette and lit up. The red little flame illumined the silk threads of his beard and the tip of his nose. Blowing off the burned ash, the Gypsy whispered:

"Look here—poison the pigs! It's a simple thing—all you've got to do's give 'em some salt in hot water—the beasts'll get a swelling in the throat and peg out. . . ."

"What's the sense?"

"First—it'll make it easier for us all, and be a blow for the boss! And I'd advise you to go away! I'll ask Sashka to steal your passport from the boss—so help me God! What d'you say?"

"No, I won't."

"Its your lookout! Just the same, you won't stick it long—he'll break you. . . ." Embracing his knees, he began rocking himself dreamily, continuing slowly, in a barely audible voice:

"I mean what's good for you, from all my heart! Really, go away. . . . It's become worse since you're here, you seem to get his back up, and he goes for everybody. Mind, the men are annoyed with you—they might come rough."

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Are you annoyed too?"

He kept his eyes fixed on the pale glow of his cigarette in silence before he uttered, grudgingly:

"If you ask me—peas are not planted in a swamp."

"But isn't what I say true?"

"It's true all right, but what's the use? A mouse can't gnaw through a mountain. It makes no earthly difference whether you speak or you don't speak. You're much too trustful, brother. Be careful, it's dangerous to trust people!"

"You too?"

"Well—yes, me too. What am I? Can I be depended on? I'm one thing today, another thing tomorrow. . . . All the rest of 'em too. . . ."

It was cold, and the heady smell of stale dough assailed the nos-

trils. The men lay around like grey hummocks, sniffing and heaving; one man was talking in his sleep:

"Natasha ... Nata ... Ah...."

Someone was moaning and sobbing bitterly—he must have been dreaming that he was being beaten. Three black windows gazed blankly from the dirty wall, like deep mouths of tunnels into the night. Water was dripping from the window sills: from the bakery came the soft sound of slapping and thin squeaks: the baker's assistant, deaf and dumb Nikander, was kneading the dough.

The Gypsy whispered, musingly and gently:

"You ought to go to the country, become a teacher—that's the thing for you! A good life, believe me! And all straight, a sure thing, and worthy of the soul! If I was educated it's a teacher I'd be, right away! I'm awfully fond of kiddies. And women too. They're my misfortune, women are! As soon as I catch sight of a passable gal—that's the end of me: I've got myself in tow as if she had me by a lead. If it wasn't for my character, and if I took a fancy to go in for farming, I might perhaps make up my mind and marry a good woman.... We'd hatch a brood of youngsters, she and I, a dozen at least, dammit! And here—there's one good-looking woman, another just as good, and all of 'em easy—and so you jog along... God knows why! It's like gathering mushrooms, you're that greedy, you've already got a full basket, but no, you must bend down to pick another one...."

He stretched himself and spread his arms wide, as though about to embrace somebody, then abruptly assumed a sober, business-like tone:

"Well, what about the pigs?"

"Nothing doing."

"More's the pity! What's it cost you?"

"No."

The Gypsy crept stealthily back to his corner by the stove.

Silence reigned. I thought I saw Kuzin's jesuitical eye gleaming dully from underneath the table where he slept.

Fantasy darted fitfully over the dirty floor amid the sleeping bodies like a terrified bat, beating itself against the damp dark walls, and grimy vault of the ceiling, and dying impotent.

"Hey," someone cried in his sleep, "give it here ... give me the

The pigs were poisoned.

Two days later, when I went into the pigsty in the morning they did not make a dash for me as they usually did, but lay huddled in a dark corner and met me with an unfamiliar hoarse grunting. I examined them by the light of the lantern and it struck me that the animals' eyes had grown bigger overnight, and bulged from beneath the pale eyelashes, regarding me piteously, with a look of sheer terror and something akin to reproach. Their laboured breathing shook the fetid darkness, and a sough like a human moan, floated on the air.

"Finished!" I said to myself. I felt a painful throbbing at the heart.

I went into the workshop and called the Gypsy out into the passage. He came out chuckling, stroking his moustache and beard.

"Did you have the pigs poisoned?"

He stood shuffling his feet uncomfortably and asked me curiously:

"Are they dead? Let's go and have a look."

In the yard he asked mockingly:

"Going to tell the boss?"

I said nothing; twining his beard round his finger, he spoke in an apologetic voice:

"That's Yashka, the little devil. He heard us talking, and yesterday he says: 'I'm gonna do it, Uncle Pashka, I'll put salt in for them!' 'Don't you dare,' I said. . . ."

Halting before the door of the pigsty and peering with narrowed eyes into the darkness whence the wheezy breathing of the animals could be heard coming in gurgles and sputters, he scratched his chin, wrinkled his face wryly, and said crossly:

"What a rotten business, hell! I'm jolly good at lying, as a matter of fact I like it, but there are times when I simply can't! Just can't. . . ."

Walking back, shrinking with the cold, grunting, he looked into my eyes and drawled:

"Hell, there's going to be the devil to pay! The boss'll fly off the handle! He'll tear Yashka's head off for him. . . ."

"What's Yashka got to do with it?"

"That's the way things are," declared the Gypsy with a wink. "The little ones always answer for the big ones in the *artel*."

Saying which he instantly frowned, threw me a keen look, and ran swiftly into the passage, muttering:

"Go on, complain. . . ."

I went to the boss. He had just got up, and his fat face was creased and grey, his dark hair plastered down over the knobs of his irregular skull; he sat at the table with legs wide apart, his long pink shirt drawn at the knees on which lay snugly ensconced a dun cat.

The mistress was laying the table for tea, moving about with a soft rustle like a bundle of rags being dragged across the floor by an invisible hand.

"What is it?" he asked with the shadow of a smile.

"The pigs have fallen ill."

He dashed the cat down to my feet and with fists clenched bore down on me like a bull, his right eye flashing, and his left growing red and filling with tears.

"What, what?" he rumbled, gasping for breath.

"Better call the vet-doctor quickly. . . ."

Coming close up to me he comically slapped his hands over his ears, suddenly seemed to have swollen, went blue, and emitted a wild, plaintive howl:

"The devils, I know what it's all about. . . ."

The mistress crept up, and I heard her voice for the first time, a quavering, wheezy voice:

"Send for the police, Vassya, quick, send for the police. . . ."

Her wasted, rag-like cheeks quivered, her big mouth fell open in dismay, revealing black uneven teeth. The boss pushed her roughly aside, snatched some clothes hanging on the wall and rushed to the door, holding them in a bundle under his arm.

But outside in the yard, having peered into the pigsty and listened to the stertorous breathing of the animals, he said calmly:

"Call three of the men out."

And when Shatunov, Artem and the soldier came out of the workshop, he shouted, without glancing at us:

"Bring 'em out!"

We carried out the four dirty carcasses and laid them in the yard. There was a faint glimmer in the sky; the lantern, placed on the ground, shed a light on the slowly falling snowflakes and the heavy heads of the pigs—an eye of one of the pigs had rolled out like that of a hooked fish.

Throwing a fox coat over his shoulders, the boss stood silently and motionlessly over the dying animals, his head lowered.

"Go back to your work! Send Yegor here!" he said in a hollow voice.

"That's got him all right!" whispered Artem as we jostled in the narrow passage littered with sacks of flour. "Struck him so hard he isn't even angry. . . ."

"You wait," blurted Shatunov. "wet wood doesn't burn up at once. . . ."

I remained behind in the passage, looking out into the yard through a crevice. The light of the lantern struggled in the morning gloom, barely illumining the four grey sacks which inflated and contracted with a whistle and a rattle; the boss, bareheaded was bending over them, his hair falling over his face; he stood for a long time in that pose without stirring, covered with the fur coat looking like a bell. . . . Then I heard a sniffling noise and a soft human whisper:

"What is it, dearies? It hurts? Poor things. . . . Choo, choo. . . ."

The beasts seemed to breathe louder.

He raised his head, looked round, and I saw distinctly that his face was in tears. Now he had wiped them off with both hands, with the gesture of an injured child, moved away, pulled a handful of straw out of a barrel, went back, squatted down, and began wiping the boar's dirty snout, then instantly threw the straw away, got up, and began to walk slowly round the pigs.

He went round them once and again, quickening his step, then suddenly broke into a run, dashing round in circles, leaping and stabbing the air with his clenched fists. The skirts of his coat flapped round his legs, he stumbled, nearly fell, came to a stop shaking his head and whimpering. At length—this also happened suddenly, as though his legs had given way—he sat down on his haunches, and, like a Tatar at prayer, began wiping his face in the palms of his hands.

"Choo, choo, my little pets . . . choo-o!"

Yegor swam lazily out of the gloom, from behind a corner, with a pipe in his teeth; the glowing bowl now and again lit up his dark face that seemed as though it had been hastily hewn out of a battered gnarled board; the earring glinted in the thick lobe of his red ear.

"Yegorie," the boss called softly.

"Aye?"

"They've poisoned the beasties. . . ."

"He?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"Pashka and Artyukhov. Kuzin told me about it. . . ."

"Give 'em a thrashing?"

Pulling himself to his feet the boss said wearily:

"No, wait."

"What a bunch of scum," growled Yegor.

"Ye-e-s. No, but what's the beasts' fault, eh?"

Yegor spat, onto his boot as it happened, then lifted his foot and wiped the boot with the hem of his coat.

The grey chilly sky hung like a pall over the little yard. A bleak wintry day broke grudgingly.

Yegor went up to the dying beasts.

"Must slaughter them."

"What for?" said the boss with a toss of the head. "Let 'em live as long as they got to. . . ."

"I'll kill 'em, and we can sell 'em to the sausage man. They're no good as carrion!"

"The sausage man won't take 'em," said Semyonov, squatting down again and stroking the swollen neck of one of the boars.

"What d'you mean, he won't take 'em? I'll say you got fed up with them and had 'em slaughtered. I'll say they were healthy. . . ."

The boss was silent.

"Well, what we going to do?" persisted Yegor.

"What?"

The boss got up and walked slowly round the pigs once more, humming in an undertone:

"Rogie-pogies my li'lle recluses. . . ."

He stopped, looked round, and blurted:

"Kill 'em!"

We were expecting a storm, dismissals; we thought the boss would throw in an extra sack of work as a punishment; the Gypsy apparently felt bad, but tried to show a bold front, and shouted with affected nonchalance:

"Roast and boil!"

The workshop maintained a sullen silence; the men scowled at me, and Kuzin muttered:

"He'll serve it out on all—guilty and innocent alike. . . ."

The atmosphere grew thicker and gloomier; quarrels started here and there, and when we sat down to dinner Milov, the soldier, grinning to his very ears, burst into a silly laugh and fetched Kuzin a crack over the forehead with his spoon.

The old man groaned, clasped his head, stared in amazement with his single evil eye and whined:

"Brothers, what for?"

A general clamour broke loose, intermingled with curses, and three men, with waving arms, bore down threateningly on the soldier who, with his back to the wall, convulsed with laughter, explained:

"That's for being a sly fellow! Yegor told me . . . the boss knows all about who poisoned the pigs. . . ."

The Gypsy, pale and oddly tense, bounded from the oven and seized Kuzin by the scruff of the neck:

"Again? Weren't you beaten enough, you rotten scab, for your damned tongue?"

"You'll say it isn't true p'raps?" wailed Kuzin in a quavering old voice, shielding his shrivelled little face. "Didn't you start it? Didn't I hear how you tried to set the Blatterer on to it? . . ."

The Gypsy grunted and swung back his arm, but Artem hung on to his shoulder:

"Don't hit him, Pashka, stop it. . . ."

There began a scuffle, Pashka struggled in the grip of Shatunov and Artem, kicking and snarling and ferociously rolling the whites of his frenzied eyes:

"Let me get at him, I'll finish him off. . . ."

And the truthful little old man, with the neck-band of his dirty shirt in the Gypsy's possession, fumed and sputtered:

"If there ain't nothing, I won't say nothing, but if there are bad goings on it's my business to tell about it! Yes, even if you tear my heart out, you scoundrels!"

Saying which he suddenly threw himself on Yashka, hit him on the head, knocked him down, kicked him and began dancing on his body with an amazingly youthful agility:

"It was you, you, you bastard, who put the salt in, you. . . ."

Artem leapt at the old man and butted his head into his chest. The latter dropped to the floor with a groan, and lay moaning.

Infuriated Yashka, cursing horribly and sobbing, flew at him like a tiger, tearing at his shirt, pounding him with his fists, while I tried to pull him off. Around us arose a heavy stamping and shuffling of feet, sending clouds of dust into the air; teeth were bared in savage snarls, the Gypsy screamed hysterically. A free fight had begun, and behind me I could already hear the thud of blows and grinding jaws. A curly-headed, squint-eyed and crusty fellow by the name of Leschov tugged at my shoulder and challenged me:

"Come on, man to man, let's fight it out! Come on, I tell you!"

Vitiated, stagnant blood, poisoned by rotten food and rotten air, charged with the venom of enduring wrongs, had rushed to men's heads—faces became livid, ears flamed, blood-shot eyes glared in unseeing fury, and clenched jaws made all faces look doggish and angular.

Artem came running up and shouted into Leschov's savage face:

"The boss!"

Pandemonium was swept away as before a cleansing wind—every man darted lightly back to his place, quiet was instantly restored, and only the wheezy breathing of exertion and rage could be heard, and the hands that seized the spoons shook.

Two bread bakers were standing within the arch of the bakery—the dandy bun-baker Yakov Vishnevsky and the bread-baker Bashkin, a corpulent, asthmatic man with a brick-red face and owlish eyes.

"Won't there be a fight?" the latter asked in a disappointed dismal voice. Vishnevsky, twisting a thin moustache with a deft little hand all covered with scars from burns, bleated goatishly:

"Hi, you lubbers, meal-worms. . . ."

All the unexpended fury was vented on their heads—the whole workshop fell to cursing them vehemently; these bakers were very unpopular; their work was easier than ours, their wages higher. They returned curse for curse, and another fight seemed to be imminent, when suddenly Yashka, tear-stained and tousled, got up from the table and walked off unsteadily, then clutched his chest and fell headlong to the floor.

I carried him into the bread bakery where it was cleaner and more airy, and laid him on an old flour bin. He lay with a face of yellow

ivory, and as motionless as if he were dead. The tumult died down, there was a premonition of ill, everybody was cowed, and began to swear at Kuzin in undertones:

"You done that to him, you one-eyed devil!"

"Deserve to be in jail, you scoundrel...."

The old man remonstrated angrily:

"Nothing o' the sort! He's had a fit or something...."

Artem and I brought the boy to. He slowly raised the long lashes of his quick, merry eyes and enquired listlessly:

"Have we arrived?..."

"Arrived where, dammit!" exclaimed his brother in a tone of distress. "Always poking your nose in everywhere. I've a jolly good mind to give you a hiding.... What made you fall down?"

"Where from?" answered the other with a surprised twitch of the eyebrows. "Did I fall? Mutht have forgotten.... I thaw a dream—we were in a boat—you and I, catching crabs ... we had grub with uth ... a bottle of vodka too...."

He shut his eyes, feeling tired, then after a pause babbled in a faint little voice:

"Now I remember—knocked my heart out o' plathe.... Kuzin done that! I hate the fellow. I can't breathe prop'ly ... the old ass! I know him ... beat his wife to death! Mething around with his daughter-in-law. We're from the thame village, you thee, so I know all about it...."

"You better shut up!" said Artem angrily. "Better go to sleep."

"Our village was Yegildeyevo. It hurtth me to talk, otherwithe I'd..."

He spoke as though he were dropping off to sleep, all the time licking his parched, darkened lips.

Somebody dashed through the bakery jubilantly shrieking:

"We're in for a good time, boys! The boss is on the booze!"

The whole workshop was agog with boisterous laughter and shrill whistling; everybody looked at each other kindly, with pleased, sunny eyes: the master's vengeance on account of the pigs hung fire, and during his bout of drunkenness less work could be done.

Vanok Ulanov, who cunningly made himself scarce in moments when passions ran high, skipped out into the middle of the workshop and yelled:

"Up with the tune!"

The Gypsy, closing his eyes and thrusting out his Adam's apple, began singing in a shrill tenor:

Here comes a goatie down the street....

Twenty men thumped the table and caught up:

Gay and young and all in a heat!
His beardie waggles....

ran on the Gypsy, stamping his foot, and the chorus rounded off the indelicate doggerel with a:

...and wiggles and wabbles!

On a small patch of grimy floor a soft little figure squirmed like a scalded worm in shameless convulsions, raising clouds of dust.

"Keep it up!" the men shouted, and the sudden burst of merriment was no less hideous and painful than the recent paroxysm of fury.

Tinkle turned worse in the night: he ran a high fever and breathed unnaturally, drawing gulps of the sour, acrid air into his lungs and letting it out in a thin jet through pursed lips as though he wanted to whistle and did not have the strength to do so. He asked often for a drink, but, having taken a sip, shook his head negatively, and with a sweet smile of his dimmed eyes, whispered:

"My mithtake, don't want any...."

I rubbed him down with vodka and vinegar, and he fell asleep with the shadow of a smile on his face, daubed in meal; his curly hair stuck to his temples, while he himself seemed to have melted, and his chest barely rose beneath a dirty shirt, worn almost to rags, and smeared with dried clots of dough.

The men growled at me:

"Stop playing the doctor there! Loafing's a game we can all play at...."

I felt sick at heart, and ever more an unwelcome intruder in the midst of these men. Only Artem and Pashka apparently understood my feelings—the Gypsy shouted breezily to me:

"Hi, keep your chin up! Knead the dough little maid, the boys are waiting with the marmalade!"

Artem fussed around me, trying hard to crack merry jokes, but he could not put it over today, and sighed sadly, asking me twice:

"D'you think Yashka's been hurt badly?"

Shatunov, louder than usual, started his favourite song:

To stand at the crossroads and peer down the lanes,
To see where fate has passed with all the joys and pains....

In the night I lay down on the floor beside Tinkle, and as I busied myself spreading the sacks he woke up and asked fearfully:

"Whothe that crawling? Is that you Blatt'ler?"

He made a vain attempt to sit up, but fell back, and his head dropped heavily on the black rags of its pillow.

Everybody was asleep, there was a rustle of heavy breathing, and wet coughing shook the stuffy, acrid air. A blue starry night looked coldly through the begrimed windowpanes: the stars were distressingly small and far away. A little tin oil lamp burned on the wall in a corner of the bakery, illumining the shelves with bread bowls—the bowls looked like hairless scalps. On a bin of dough, curled up into a ball, slept the deaf and dumb Nikander, and the yellow bare leg of the baker, covered with sores, projected from beneath the table on which the loaves were weighed and rolled.

Yashka called softly:

"Blatt'ler...."

"Ai?"

"I'm mitherable...."

"Well, let's talk, tell me something...."

"I don't know what to talk about.... About the brownie?"

"Let it be the brownie...."

He said nothing for a while, then climbed off the bin, lay down, rested his hot head on my chest and began in a low, dreamy voice:

"It was before they took my father to jail; it was thummer then, and I was quite a little 'un. I was thleeping outthide, on a cart of hay—it was fine! Thuddenly I wakes up, and there he was thkipping

down the doorthteps. A wee little thing he was, no bigger'n a fist and hairy all over, like a mitten, all grey he was and green. He didn't have no eyes either. Did I yell! Mum thtarted whacking me—I shouldn't ha' yelled, he muthn't be theared, otherwise he'll get angry and leave the houthe for ever—that's very bad! People who haven't got a brownie in the houthe God brings no luck. D'you know who the brownie is?"

"No. Who is he?"

"He reports to God through the angels—the angels dethend from heaven, and they're not thupposed to understand the language that people thpeak, otherwithe they'll be defiled, and people muthn't lithen to the angels' talk. . . ."

"Why not?"

"Becauthe. Not thupposed to. I think it's a shame—look how it keeps people away from God!"

He grew animated, sat up, and his speech came faster, almost as when he was well.

"Everyone would tell God straight what he wanted, but no—there's the brownie! Maybe thometimes he's wild with people—p'raps they didn't pleathe him—and he'll go and tell the angels a bunch of fibs—d'you understand? Now, they athk him: 'How's this muzhik?' And he, being in a temper, thays: 'That muzhik's a bad man'—and then I bet you that fellow's gonna have a houseful o' trouble! People cry and cry: 'Lord have mercy on us!' And people have no idea what he's been told about them, he doesn't want to lithen to them—he's altho angry. . . ."

The boy's face was clouded and grave; he screwed up his eyes and gazed at the ceiling, which was as grey as a wintry sky, its wet stains resembling clouds.

"What did your father die from?"

"He boathted about his thtrength. That was when he was in jail. . . . Thaid he could lift five real people, told 'em to put their arms round each other, and thtarted to lift 'em, and his heart went bust. Bled to death."

Tinkle heaved a deep sigh and lay down again beside me; he rubbed his hot cheek against my hand, and went on:

"Gee, he was awful thtrong, he was! Crothed himself two dozen times with a two-pood weight without taking a rest. But he didn't

have no work, and very little land, ever tho little ... couldn't thay how much. There was nothing to eat, nothing at all—just go and beg. I was a little 'un but I altho used to go among the Tatars—they're all Tatars where we live, but good Tatars, the kind that always thays 'here you are.' They're all like that. Well, what was father to do? Tho he began thtealing horses ... he was thorry for us...."

His thin voice had grown husky and sounded ever more tired and broken; the boy coughed like an old man and sighed:

"When he thtole a horse, everything was alright—we had enough to eat, and all cheered up.... Mum uthed to cry her eyes out ... but at these times she would have a drink and begin to thing thongs.... She was a little woman, good at everything... uthed to cry to Dad: 'Oh, my darling, my poor loht soul!...' The muzhiks uthed to beat him with thticks—he didn't mind! Artem was to have gone into the army ... we thought he'd become a man there ... but he's unfit...."

The boy fell silent with a loud snore that startled me. I bent over him and listened to the beating of his heart. It beat feebly and rapidly, but the fever seemed to have dropped somewhat.

A sickly ray of moonlight fell through the window onto the dirty floor. Outside it was still and clear, and I went out into the yard to look at the clean sky and breathe the frosty air.

When I returned to the bakery, refreshed and chilled, I had a fright: something grey, an almost shapeless, living bundle stirred in a dark corner by the oven, wheezing softly.

"Who's that?" I asked with a start.

The familiar voice of the boss replied hoarsely:

"Don't shout."

He was dressed as usual in the Tatar shirt, which made him look like an old woman. He was standing in a furtive sort of way behind a corner of the oven, a bottle of vodka in one hand and a tumbler in the other. His hands were apparently shaking—there was a tinkle of glass and the gurgle of liquor being poured out.

"Come here!" he called, and when I came up, thrust the glass out, spilling some of the contents. "Have a drink!"

"I don't want any."

"Why not?"

"It isn't the time."

"If a man drinks, any time's good enough. Drink!"

"I don't drink."

He shook his head heavily.

"I was told you drink."

"A wineglass or so, when I feel tired...."

Peering into the glass with his right eye, he heaved a loud sigh and splashed the vodka into the cavity beneath the oven, then stepped over and sat down on the floor with his legs dangling in the cavity.

"Sit down. I want to have a chat with you."

I could not see the round pancake of his face in the dark, but his voice struck me as oddly unfamiliar. I sat down beside him, greatly interested; with head lowered, he drummed his fingers on the glass, which tinkled faintly.

"Well, tell me something...."

"Yashka must be taken to the hospital...."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"He's ill. Kuzin beat him up badly."

"Kuzin's a dirty scoundrel. He informs on the men. D'you think I'm partial to him for it? Pay him for it, eh? I wouldn't throw a handful of dirt in his ugly mug, leave alone give him a copper...."

He spoke lazily but audibly, and though his words reeked of vodka, he did not seem to be drunk.

"I know everything! Why didn't you want to make away with the pigs? Be frank! I've given you offence, I understand that. And you've given me offence. Well?"

I told him.

"So!" he said after a pause. "Then I'm worse than a pig, eh? I too should be poisoned, eh?"

He sounded as though he were smiling, and I repeated:

"Then I'll take Yashka to the hospital?"

"You can take him to the slaughterhouse for all I care. What's it to do with me?"

"At your expense."

"Certainly not," he let fall indifferently. "That's not been done before. They'll all be wanting to lie in the hospital!... I say, why did you tweak my ear, that time?"

"I got angry."

"I understand, that's not what I meant! Well, you could have given me a clout over the ear, or say a punch in the jaw—but why pull my ear, as if I was a kid? . . ."

"I don't like to hit people. . . ."

He maintained a long silence, and seemed to have dropped into a sniffling doze, then said firmly and distinctly:

"You're a funny fellow! You're not a bit like the rest of 'em—even your noddle's twisted on a different way. . . ."

He said it inoffensively but with obvious annoyance.

"Now tell me, am I really a bad person?"

"What did you think?"

"I? You're a liar—I'm a good man! I'm a clever man, my dear chap. Now, you're educated, you've got the gift o' the gab, can talk about one thing and another, about the stars, the Frenchies and the nobility—I admit that it's all very well and entertaining! I took notice of you right away—remember, that time when you first saw me and said I'd catch a cold and die. . . . I'm always quick to size up a man's worth!"

He tapped his forehead with a stubby finger, sighed, and explained:

"There's a hell of a memory here, my dear chap. . . . Why, I even remember how many hairs my grandpa had in his beard! Let me have a bet with you! Eh?"

"What about?"

"That I'm smarter than you. You just think: I'm an illiterate man, I don't know the ABC, only figures, and yet I'm carrying a big business, forty-three workmen, a shop, three branches. You, an educated man, are working for me. If I want to I could take on a real student and kick you out. I can kick everybody out if I want to, sell the whole show and squander the money on drink. Isn't that right?"

"I don't see that you need brains for that. . . ."

"Bosh! What d'you call brains? If I haven't got 'em—nobody's got 'em! D'you think brains is a matter of words? No sir, it's a matter of business, that's the only place you'll find 'em. . . ."

He broke into a quiet but triumphant laugh, shaking his big, loose bulk, and continued on a note of condescension, in a thickening bibulous voice:

"You couldn't feed one person—and I'm feeding forty! I could feed a hundred if I wanted! Talk of brains!"

His voice became stern and didactic, and his tongue more sluggish as he went on:

"What'you kicking against me for? It's all nonsense! What's the good of it, anyhow—it don't do you no good either. You try hard so that I pay you your due...."

"You've done so already."

"Have I?"

He pondered it a moment or two and acquiesced with a prod in my shoulder:

"So I have! All you need now is for me to give you a chance—but I may not give you a chance.... Although I see everything, I know everything! This Garaska of mine's a thief. But he too's a smart fellow, and if he doesn't come a cropper and get himself in jail, he'll be a boss! He'll skin people alive! They're all thieves here, worse'n cattle—just carrion! And you're trying to be nice with 'em.... I just can't understand it, it's so silly of you."

I was overcome by sleepiness: my bones and muscles ached with the day's labour, and my head was dizzy with weariness. The tedious, sticky voice of the boss seemed to glue one's thoughts:

"You say risky things about the bosses—it's all just foolishness, because of your youth. Another man in my place would call in a policeman straightway, shove a ruble in his fist, and have you hauled off to the police station.

He slapped my knee with a heavy, soft hand:

"A clever man should aim at becoming a boss, not fly wide! People are as thick as hops, bosses are very few—that's the trouble ... it's all lopsided and wrong! If you keep an eye open you'll see more—then your heart'll be hardened and you'll understand that it's the people themselves who are bad—those who are not employed. All the extra people should be put to work, so they don't knock around doing nothing. It's a shame to leave even a tree to rot without any use. Burn it—it'll give warmth—the same with a man. D'you follow me?"

Yashka moaned, and I got up to look at him. He was lying chest upwards, with puckered brows and open mouth, his arms stretched down the length of his body—there was something straight and soldierly about the boy.

Nikander sprang down from the bin, made for the oven, ran into the boss and stood dumbfounded for a minute, then opened his mouth wide, blinked his fishy eyes guiltily and mooed, while he traced an intricate pattern in the air with swift-moving fingers.

"Moo-oo," the boss mocked him, got up and walked out, adding: "Stony chump. . . ."

When he had disappeared behind the door the deaf and dumb man winked at me, and, clasping his throat between two fingers, articulated:

"Kokh, kokh. . . ."

Next morning Yashka and I went to the hospital—we had no money for a cab, and the boy walked with difficulty, coughing weakly and talking, while he manfully tried to overcome his pain:

"Thimply can't breathe, gaspers knocked flat. . . . The devils. . . ."

In the street, amid the dazzling silvery sunlight and the muffled figures of warmly-clad pedestrians, he looked smaller and skinnier in his dark rags than he really was. His sky-blue eyes, accustomed to the gloom of the workshop, watered copiously.

"If I die, Artem'll go to the dogs, he'll take to drink, the fool! And he doethn't take any care of himself. You pull him up. Blatt'ler, now and again . . . thay I thaid tho. . . ."

His parched, dark little lips twisted painfully and his childish chin quivered—I held him under the arm, and I was afraid that he would begin to cry and I would assault the passers-by, smash the windows and make an ugly scene.

Tinkle stopped, drew his breath, and uttered with an impressiveness of age:

"Just tell him that I ordered him to obey you. . . ."

On coming back to the workshop I learned of another mishap: in the morning, when Nikander was carrying pretzels to one of the branch shops, he was run over by fire-brigade horses and was now in hospital too.

"Now," said Shatunov confidently, looking at me with his narrow little eyes, "you can expect a third stroke of ill luck—they always go in threes: from Christ, St. Nicholas and St. George. Then Our Lady'll tell 'em: 'That'll do, children!' and they'll come to their senses. . . ."

Nikander was not spoken of, he was a stranger, not of our workshop, but a good deal was said about the speed, strength and endurance of fire-brigade horses.

Garaska came in during dinner—an agile, handsome animal, a lad with the insolent eyes of a libertine and thief, smooth-spoken with all whom he feared; he announced with solemnity that I had been promoted to assistant baker in Nikander's place, at a salary of six rubles per month.

"Congratulations!" shouted Pashka gaily, then instantly knitted his brows and asked:

"Whose order is that?"

"The boss'."

"But he's drunk?"

"Not a bit!" retorted Garaska with a chuckle. "He did hold a wake yesterday for the souls of the departed, but today he's all himself and a bit more, and has gone away to buy flour...."

"The pig business is not over, then," said the Gypsy slowly and angrily.

The men looked at me sullenly, with envy and ugly sneers. Harsh, invidious words floated over the workshop:

"Making a hit...."

"A strange bird's always a strange bird...."

Shatunov slowly chewed his own special words:

"There's a place for nettles and a place for poppies...."

And Kuzin wrapped his thoughts in the words he always used when he thought ill:

"How many times have I got to tell you little devils to give the holy image a cleanup!"

Only Artem cried in a loud voice:

"Off they go—yelping and snarling!"

On the very first night of my work in the bread bakery when, having kneaded one lot of dough and set the paste for another, I sat down under the lamp with a book, the boss came in, drowsily blinking his eyes and smacking his lips.

"Reading? That's good. Better than sleeping—no danger of the dough standing too long...."

He spoke quietly, then, throwing a cautious glance under the table where the baker lay snoring, sat down next to me on a sack of flour,

took the book out of my hands, closed it, and laid it on his fat knee with his palm on top of it.

"What's the book about?"

"About the Russian people."

"What people?"

"The Russian I said."

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye and said in a didactic manner:

"We Kazan folks are also Russians—except the Tatars—the Simbirsk people too are Russians. Whom does it write about?"

"It writes about everybody...."

He opened the book, held it at arm's length, shaking his head and scanning the pages with his green eye, then flatly announced:

"Can see that you don't understand the book."

"How d'you see that?"

"It's plain. Where are the pictures? There ain't any. You should read those with pictures in 'em—much more fun, I bet! What's it say about the people?"

"It writes about their beliefs, their customs, the songs they sing...."

The boss closed the book, slipped it under him, and gave a long yawn. He made no sign of the cross over his mouth* which was wide like that of a toad.

"That's all common knowledge," he said. "The people believe in God, they have good songs and bad songs, and their customs are rotten! You ask me about that—I'll show you customs better'n any book. You needn't learn that from books—just step out into the street, go to the market, to the pub, or the village during a holiday—that's where you'll see customs. Or you might drop in on the magistrate ... the circuit court too...."

"You're talking of the wrong thing."

He eyed me sullenly and said:

"I know what I'm talking about! As for those books—they're just fables, fairy tales ... simply moonshine! D'you mean to tell me you can describe the people in a single book?"

* It was a superstitious practice to make a sign of the cross over the mouth during a yawn to shut out evil spirits.—*Trans.*

"There's more than one book."

"So what of it? The people are thousands and millions. You can't write a book about every one of 'em."

His voice sounded disgruntled, the yellow down over his eyes stiffened with anger. The conversation struck me like an unpleasant dream, and was boring.

"You're a funny fellow, a regular muddle-head," he said, sighing and wheezing. "Don't you see it's all twaddle and humbug! Who are the books about? About people. But what people will tell the truth about themselves? Will you tell it, eh? Nor will I! If you were to flay me alive, I wouldn't! Maybe I'll say nothing even before God. He'll ask me: Well, Vassili, tell me about your sins! And I'll say: You ought to know that yourself my Lord, it's your soul, not mine!"

He nudged me with his elbow, chuckling and winking, and went on in a lower tone:

"I might say that! Who's soul is it? It's His! He took it from me—and let's hear no more about it!"

He emitted an angry grunt and went over his face with his palms, as though washing himself, continuing unflaggingly.

"Say, didn't he give me a soul? Sure he did! And didn't he take it afterwards? Sure he did! Then the bill's clean, we're quits!"

I was beginning to feel queer. The lamp hung behind and above us, and our shadows lay on the floor at our feet. Sometimes the boss tossed his head up, and the yellow light shone on his face, showing a nose lengthened by the shadows and dark patches under the eyes, making the fat contours of his face look nightmarish. There was a window in the wall on our right, almost level with our heads, and through the dusty panes I could see nothing but the blue sky and a cluster of yellow stars, as small as peas. The baker, a dull lazy fellow, snored, the cockroaches made rustling noises, and the mice scratched.

"But don't you believe in God?" I asked the boss. He glanced at me askance with his dead eye and said nothing for quite a time.

"You can't ask me about that. You daren't ask me about anything at all, except your business. I can ask you about anything I want to, and you've got to answer me. What are you after?"

"That's my business."

He pondered, breathing noisily through his nose.

"What sort of a reply's that? Cheeky devil. . . ."

He drew the book from under him, slapped it on his knee and threw it on the floor.

"Story! Who can know my story? As for yours—you haven't got one yet . . . and there won't be any!"

He laughed outright, a complacent laugh—that queer, sobbing sound, so faint and thin, evoked a dismal feeling of compassion for my boss, while he, swaying his big body, went on speaking in a sneering, vindictive tone:

"I know all about it! I've seen your likes. I've got a mistress, a shopwoman in one of my branches—she's got a nephew, a student of the cattle sciences—learning how to cure horses and cows—now he's a drunkard. I did that for him! Galkin, his name is. Sometimes he comes in to get ten kopecks for vodka—he's a bum now. He also tried to find out what's what! Used to shout, 'There must be truth somewhere among the people—there's a craving after that truth in my soul—consequently truth exists outside the soul as well!' And I'd keep on getting him drunk. Become a hopeless drunkard, the wretch. He'd stare at me with his peepers—they were sort o' soft, like a woman's, but I wouldn't call 'em deceitful. He wasn't all there. Used to shout: 'Vassili Semyonov, you're a frost, you're a terrible man in life. . . .'"

It was time for me to heat the oven; I got up and told the boss so; he, too, got up, opened the bin, slapped the dough and said:

"So it is. . . ."

He left unhurriedly without glancing at me.

I felt relieved that his oily, boastful voice was stemmed and the flow of insolent speech had trickled out of the bakery.

There was a padding of bare feet on the floor of the pretzel bakery and Artem stumbled against me out of the dark, his head dishevelled and his nice, cheerless eyes dilated like those of a sleepwalker.

"The way he's trying to get round you!"

"Why aren't you asleep?"

"I don't know. Sort o' pain in the heart. . . . Gee, the way he'. . ."

"It's difficult with him."

"Rather! A lump of lead. . . . And a cur in the bargain!"

The lad leaned his shoulder against the edge of the oven and suddenly said in a changed tone, casually as it were:

"They've scotched my poor brother.... D'you think he'll come out o' the hospital or be carried out?"

"What an idea? Please God...."

He pushed off from the oven and walked back to the pretzel bakery with a swaying gait, saying drearily and softly as he went:

"We'll get nothing from God...."

The nightly talks with the boss dragged on in an interminable nightmare: he dropped into the bakery almost every night soon after cockcrow, when the devils had tumbled into hell, and I, having lit the fire, sat down by it with a book in my hand.

Round and lazy, he trundled out of his room and sat down with a grunt on the floor, at the edge of the oven cavity, his bare legs dangling in it as in a grave; stretching his short paws in front of him, he examined them against the fire with a narrowed green eye, admiring the thick blood visible through the yellow skin, and started a two hours' queer and depressing conversation.

He usually began by boasting of his brains, by the power of which an illiterate muzhik had built and was running a large business with stupid and thievish people under his control—on this he dilated at great length, but with a sort of listlessness, in intermittent pauses, and frequent whistle-like sighs. It sometimes seemed as though he was weary of enumerating his business successes, that it cost him a great effort to speak of them.

I had long become tired of wondering at his truly rare abilities—his ability to make a good purchase of a consignment of water-damaged and malted flour, to sell a hundred poods or so of spoilt pretzels to a Mordvinian tradesman—these commercial exploits had palled with their fraudulent monotony and disgraceful simplicity, which so cruelly exposed the measure of human greed and stupidity.

The wood blazed hotly in the oven, before which sat I and the boss; the fat folds of his belly drooped on his knees, the pink glow of the fire flitted across his dull face; his grey eye, like the metal plate on a horse's harness, rigid and rheumy, resembled the eyes of a decrepit beggar, while the green one, gleaming like a cat's, was very much alive with an odd, watchful kind of life. His peculiar voice—now womanishly high and gentle, now hoarse and angrily wheezing, dropped words of calm insolence:

"You're too trustful, and you say a lot you shouldn't be saying! People are swindlers, they've got to be managed silently: just look at a man strictly, and don't say a word—keep your mouth shut! There's no need for him to understand you—he's got to be afraid of you, let him guess what you mean. . . ."

"I don't intend to manage people."

"Liar! You can't get on without it."

He explained: some people have to do the work, others the managing, and the authorities have to take care that the former explicitly obey the latter.

"Kick out all those who are not wanted! Out with all the odds and ends!"

"Where are they to go?"

"That's none o' my business. That's why we have the authorities for loafers and thieves—for all the dross. A fellow who's worthy of his salt doesn't need any authorities, he's his own authority. The governor general can't be expected to know what flour's suitable for me, and what is not. His business is to know whether a man's useful or harmful."

Sometimes I seemed to catch a note of emotional stress in his voice. Perhaps it was a yearning for something else—a quest for something he knew not? And I listened tensely to his speech, eager to understand him, waiting for other ideas, other words.

From under the oven came a smell of mice, burnt bast and dry dust. The grimy walls breathed a damp warmth on us, the dirty, trampled floor had rotted away, and the patches of moonlight on it illumined the dark cracks. The windowpanes were thickly fly-specked, but the flies seemed to have besmirched the very sky. The place was stuffy, crowded and unwashably filthy.

Was it befitting for a man to live a life like this?

The boss slowly threaded word by word, reminding one of a blind beggar groping with trembling fingers for the small coins in his alms box.

"Science—all right! In that case let 'em teach me how to make flour out of dust or clay! There, mind you, stands a whopping building—'varsity they call it—the pupils are young blades who knock about the pubs getting themselves drunk and kicking up rows in the streets, singing smutty songs about St. Varlaam, visiting the whores

down Peski way, and generally, live like blessed clerks.... And suddenly, after that, they're doctors, judges, teachers, lawyers! D'you expect me to believe 'em? Why, they're probably rott'ner than I am! I don't believe anybody...."

And smacking his lips lickerishly he described in disgusting detail how the students behaved with the girls.

He spoke a good deal about women, with a smooth cynicism and lack of excitement, with an oddly probing abstraction, his voice trailing off to a whisper. He never described women's faces, but only their breasts, thighs, legs; it was very unpleasant to listen to these stories.

"You talk all the time about conscience, straightforwardness. I'm more straightforward than you are! You're rude enough, but you're not straightforward, not by a long chalk—I know a thing or two! The other day you told the newsman in the pub that my buns were all rotten and the dough spills onto the floor, that there are a lot of cockroaches, the workmen have syphilis and it's dirty everywhere...."

"I told you, too, about it...."

"H'm, so you did! But you didn't say anything about wanting to give the information to the newspapers. Well, they wrote about it in the paper; the police came, the sanitary man too—I gave 'em a twenty-fiver between the bunch of 'em, and there you are"—he made a circular motion with his hand above his head—"d'you see? Everything as it was. All the cockroaches still kicking. There's the newspaper for you, and science and conscience. Don't you see, you fathead, that the tables could be turned on you? All the police in this neighbourhood are walking about in my galoshes, all the chiefs live on my tips—you haven't a Chinaman's chance! And you try to pit yourself against it, like a cockroach against a dog. Ugh, it makes me sick to talk with you...."

Indeed, he did look as if he were sick: his face sagged, he closed his eyes wearily and yawned with a little whine, his gaping red jaws revealing a thin tongue like a dog's.

Before meeting him I had seen a good deal of human grossness, cruelty and folly, and not a little of goodness and real humanity as well. I had read some splendid books, and I knew that people had long and everywhere been dreaming of a different manner of

life, that in some places they had attempted, and were indomitably striving to bring about the realization of those dreams—my soul had long since cut its milk teeth of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, and, until I had met the boss, I believed those teeth to have been pretty strong.

Now, after each of these conversations, I realized ever more clearly and sadly how frail and incoherent were my thoughts and dreams, how thoroughly the boss was tearing them into shreds, showing me the dark voids among them, filling my heart with sad misgivings. I knew, I sensed that he was wrong in his calm negation of everything that I believed in, and I never for a moment doubted the truth of my opinions, but it was difficult for me to shield that truth from the dirt which he flung at it; it was no longer a question of refuting him, but of defending my inner world, which was being invaded by a mortifying sense of my own impotence before my employer's cynicism.

His mind, rough and heavy like an axe, had hacked up the whole of life, split it into regular pieces and laid them out before me in a dense little stack.

And his words about God and the soul had fired my youthful curiosity. I always tried to lead the conversation on to these topics, and the boss, seeming not to notice my efforts, tried to prove to me how little I knew the secrets and tricks of life.

"You've got to live carefully! Life demands everything from a man, something, say, like a mistress, but is it much you want from her? Just one thing—pleasure! And you've got to live artfully: wheedle it where you can, snatch it where you can't, or go straight up and land a whack—bang! and it's yours!"

If, irritated by his talk, I asked direct questions, he would answer:

"That doesn't concern you. Whether I believe in God or not—I'll answer for that, not you. . . ."

And when I began to speak on my favourite subjects he would shake his head as if trying to find a comfortable position for it, bend his little ear to my voice and listen patiently and silently, invariably with an expression of utter unconcern on his flat snub-nosed face, which reminded one of a copper lid with a knob in the middle.

A bitter sense of injury crept into my heart—not on account of myself, I had already grown tired of being resentful, and took the knocks of life pretty calmly, warding them off with scorn—but on account of the truth that lived and grew within my soul.

It is painful humiliation, exquisite anguish, when a man is unable worthily to defend what he loves and what he lives for; there is no sharper agony for a man than the dumbness of his heart....

The fact that the boss chatted with me at nights gave me an especial importance in the eyes of the pretzel men: I was no longer regarded by some as a troublesome and dangerous man, by others as a queer fish and a crank; the majority, ineffectually concealing a feeling of malice and envy towards my good fortune, now obviously considered me a cunning fellow who had been playing a deep game to gain his ends.

Stroking a grey, dusty little beard, his shifty eye pinned somewhere into a corner, Kuzin said to me respectfully:

"Now, brother, you'll soon rise to a position of clerk, I shouldn't be surprised...."

Someone quietly added:

"To bully us..."

Other hard words were dropped behind me:

"With a tongue in one's head one can find the way not only to Kiev it seems...."

"Bribe him...."

And many now sought my eyes submissively, with an offensive readiness to oblige.

Artem, Pashka and one or two others who had begun to display a friendly feeling towards me, introduced into their relations an undertone of exaggerated attentiveness to whatever I said. One day I lost my patience and told the Gypsy angrily that I thought it quite unnecessary and very bad!

"You keep it to yourself, take my word!" he answered, grasping my meaning, and roguishly flashing the bluish whites of his eyes. "If the boss, who's smarter than all of us here, discusses things with you—then I guess you've got a mouthful of the right nails!..."

Shatunov on the other hand, always taciturn and reserved, drew still closer to me with growing confidence. When we met face to face

his morose, inscrutable eyes would light up warmly, and his thick lips spread slowly in a broad smile that transfigured his rugged, stony face.

"Well, d'you find it easier now?"

"Not easier, but cleaner. . . ."

"If cleaner, that means easier!" he said didactically. Then, shifting his gaze into a corner, he would ask, casually as it were:

"What's the meaning of *bakhtirman-purana?*"

"I don't know."

Apparently he did not believe me, for he would turn away with an embarrassed grunt, swaying on crooked, lazy legs, then shortly he would ask again:

"And what is *savarsan-samo*—d'you know?"

He had a big stock of such words, and when he enunciated them in his deep sepulchral voice they sounded odd, with a sort of ancient, legendary tang about them.

"Where d'you get those words from?" I asked him wonderingly, my curiosity aroused. He countered with a cautious question:

"What d'you want to know that for?"

Then again, as though trying to catch me unawares, he would suddenly pop a question:

"What's the meaning of *harna*?"

Sometimes of an evening, after work, or on the eve of a holiday, after a bath, the Gypsy and Artem dropped in on me, and close on their heels Osip Shatunov would edge himself in. We sat around the oven cavity in a dark corner—I had swept and washed it clean and made it cosy. On the walls to the right and behind us stood shelves with bread bowls, from which the dough was rising—they resembled bald heads hiding themselves and peeping at us from the walls. We drank thick brick tea from a large tin kettle. Pashka suggested:

"Well, tell us something—or maybe you'll read some poetry!"

I had Pushkin, Shcherbina and Surikov in my box on the top of the stove—shabby little volumes purchased from a second-hand bookseller, and I read with zest, in a singsong voice:

How lofty is, oh Man, thy calling, grand and glorious,
'Tis God's own radiance from Heaven earthward poured!
Thy soul holds all the world in unison harmonious,
And all has found in it response and true accord. . . .

Pashka, blinking dully, peered sideways into the book and muttered in surprise:

"Fancy that! Exactly like the Bible! Why, you could sing that out in church, so help me God. . . ."

Poetry almost invariably excited his feelings and attuned him to a penitential mood; sometimes he would repeat the lines of a verse that had deeply moved him, waving his arms, clutching his curly hair and swearing ferociously.

"That's it!"

A life of want is my destined lot.
All hopes must be forgot.

"Crikey, that's it! Good God—sometimes, brothers, you're that sorry for your soul—going to the dogs, it is! It wrings your heart with a bitter pain—hell! What's one to do—become a robber? You can't kill a sparrow with a little stone—and you keep telling us: Be friendly with each other, boys! Be friendly! Christ!"

Artem listened to the verse with a gulping sound and licked his lips, as though he were swallowing something hot and tasty.

He was always struck with wonder at the descriptions of nature:

The trees in golden plumes bedecked.
Stand drooping by the pond.

"Stop!" he gave a low exclamation, amazed and thrilled, his face aglow, as he gripped my shoulder. "I've seen that! That's near Arsk, at one of the manors, so help me God!"

"Well, so what of it?" Pashka asked in annoyance.

"But don't you understand? I've seen it, and it's written down. . . ."

"Don't interrupt! Damn nuisance!"

Once Artem was struck by Surikov's poem "In the Country," and for three days or so, berated by a wearied audience, he went about singing it to the tune of an old soldier's song: "'Twas at the Battle of Poltava":

I plod along—I know not whither,
It matters not wherever I roam!
Who cares to whether land or river,
My journey's end doth bring me home. . . .

Shatunov was not stirred by poetry, to which he listened with utter indifference, but he would cling tenaciously to a single word and insist on having its meaning explained:

"Wait a minute, wait a minute—what's that—urn?"

His strange pursuit of words baffled me, and I was curious to know what he was after.

Once, after having been besieged with questions and entreaties, Osip gave way, saying with a condescending smile:

"That's got you, eh?"

Then, looking round him with an air of mystery, he explained in a whisper:

"There's a secret verse—he who knows it can do anything—it's a lucky verse! But so far nobody's supposed to know all of it—all the words have been dealt out to different people, scattered all over the earth, till the time comes. Well—you see—all these words have got to be collected and joined together to make that verse. . . ."

His voice sank still lower and he leaned over to me.

"It reads all ways, that verse, from the beginning or the end, just the same. I've got some o' the words already, a wandering man told 'em to me before he died, in the hospital. Well, brother, homeless people go roaming about the world picking up these secret words wherever they can! When they've picked 'em all up everybody'll know about it. . . ."

"How's that?"

He eyed me mistrustfully from head to foot and said in a tone of annoyance:

"How, how! You know it yourself. . . ."

"My word of honour—I don't know anything!"

"All right," he growled, turning away, "don't pretend. . . ."

And one morning Artem came running in excited and happy, and tumbling over his words declared:

"Blatterer! I've made a song up myself, really I have!"

"No?"

"As sure as I stand! I must have dreamt about it, 'cause I woke up and there it was, going round and round in my head, like a blessed wheel! Look here. . . ."

Drawing himself up to his full height he declaimed in a low singsong voice:

There the sun goes down over the river—
Soon the sun will sink in the woods,
There the shepherd drives the herd,
And . . . the village. . . .

"How's it go?"

He looked helplessly at the ceiling, his face gone pale, biting his lip and blinking in speechless dismay. Then his narrow shoulders drooped and he waved his arm with a gesture of embarrassment:

"Forgot it—dash it! Clean out o' my head. . . ."

And the poor fellow broke into tears—they streamed copiously from his big eyes, while his gaunt pinched little face crumpled up and his hand fumbled piteously with his chest over the heart, as he said in a guilty voice:

"Fancy that. . . . Tut, tut—what a fine bit it was . . . it gripped the heart. . . . Ah, well . . . you think I'm kidding?"

He turned away into a corner with drooping head, and lingered there, shrugging his shoulders, his back bent, then went back quietly to his work. All day he was absent-minded and gloomy, and in the evening he drank himself disgustingly drunk, was spoiling for a fight and shouted:

"Where's Yashka, eh? What's happened to my li'lle brother? God damn you. . . ."

The men wanted to beat him up but the Gypsy took his part, and we, tying up the drunken Artem in sacks, put him to sleep.

The song that had come to him in his dream he never more remembered. . . .

The master's room was separated from the bakery by a thin papered partition, and often, when I forgot myself and raised my voice, the boss would bang his fist on the partition, startling both us and the cockroaches. My comrades went quietly to sleep, the scuttling cockroaches rustled amid the scraps of wallpaper, and I was left alone.

There were times, however, when the boss would suddenly and noiselessly swim out of the door like a dark cloud. drop into our midst unexpectedly and say in a grating voice:

"Sitting up half the night, drat it, and in the morning you'll be snoring till God knows what time."

That was meant for Pashka and the others. To me he growled:

"It's you, hymn singer, started this night business—you again! Mind they don't get brainy from those books o' yours, and pitch into you first when they start smashing ribs. . . ."

This was said in an impersonal tone, more for the sake of appearances than from a desire to break up the company; he lowered himself on the floor beside us with an indulgent:

"Well, go on reading! And I'll do some listening, maybe I'll get wise. . . . Here, Pashka, pour me out some tea!"

The Gypsy said jocularly:

"We'll treat you to tea Vassili Semyonich, and you treat us to vodka!"

The boss silently showed him a soft blunt fico.

At other times he would join us, announcing in a quaint, plaintive voice:

"I can't fall asleep, boys. . . . The mice are scratching, damn 'em, the snow's crunching outside—darned students gadding about—the girls are in and out of the shop—coming in for a warm, the whores! Buys a bun for three kopecks and dawdles about in the warmth for half an hour. . . ."

We were in for a spell of boss philosophy.

"Everybody's the same: get without giving! You too—all you're out for's an easy job—that's all you know, to knock off as soon as you can and loaf around. . . ."

Pashka, as head of the workshop, was stung to the quick, and started a useless argument:

"You're still not satisfied Vassili Semyonich! We work like devils as it is! I daresay when you were working here yourself. . . ."

The boss did not like such reminders; he listened for a time in silence to what the baker was saying, his lips pursed, his green eye appraising him sternly, then he opened his toad-like mouth and delivered in a piping voice:

"What's been has been, and what's here is here! And here I'm the boss, and can say anything I like—the law says you've got to obey me—savvy? Go on reading, Blatterer!"

One day I read "The Robber Brothers"—it pleased everyone, and even the boss said with a thoughtful shake of the head:

"It could have happened ... why not? It could. Anything can happen to a man ... anything!"

The Gypsy scowled, twisted a cigarette between his fingers and blew at it fiercely, while Artem, with a vague sort of smile, was trying to remember the verses:

There were two of us, my brother and I ...
And life for us, children, was no joy....

As for Shatunov, he stared into the cavity beneath the oven and, without raising his head, blurted out:

"I know a better verse...."

"Well, let's hear it," suggested the boss, ironically contemplating his long-armed ungainly body. Osip was so disconcerted that his neck even flooded with colour and his ears began to stir.

"Afraid I've forgotten it...."

"Come off it!" snapped the Gypsy. "Nobody pulled you by the tongue!"

Artem egged Osip on:

"Better? Come on, get it off your chest, bag...."

Shatunov helplessly and guiltily looked at me, then at the boss, and drew a deep breath.

"All right... listen!"

Still staring into the oven cavity, which, with its litter of broken bread bowls, firewood and broom wisps resembled a black wearily-opened mouth with unmasticated food in it, he began in a muffled voice:

O, high above the Volga river, there among the bushes,
A robber brave lay dying, his last hour had he met.
The robber pressed a hand to his wounded chest—
Fell on his knees, and prayed to God.
Lord God! Receive my wicked soul from me.
My wicked, damned and captive soul!
I was to have been a monk in my youth—
But became a robber instead!

He recited in a singsong and hid his face, bending his back ever lower, and grasping the toes of his bare foot, which, for some inexplicable reason, he kept jerking up into the air. He seemed to be performing black magic, uttering some kind of incantation:

I lived for adventure, not for bluster—
I lived to test the soul,
Squandered my strength, kept asking of my soul:
What has God put in thee, soul,
What goodness dost possess,
The gift of the Blessed Virgin?
What seed has been sown in thee soul
By the prince of darkness, the fiend?

"You're a silly ass, Osip," the boss said suddenly in a shrill snappish voice with a shake of the shoulders, "and your poetry's silly, nothing like that out of a book—you're a liar! Fathead!"

"Wait a minute, Vassili Semyonich," broke in the Gypsy roughly, "let him finish!"

But the boss went on excitedly:

"It's sheer meanness! Thy soul, my soul.... Makes a holy mess, then gets scared and howls: Lord God, Lord God! What's God to do with it? He could sin all right, but he's afraid to face the music...."

He deliberately—as I thought—yawned, and added huskily:

"Soul, soul and it isn't worth a fig!"

A snow storm clawed the windowpanes with shaggy paws—the boss glanced at the window with a wry face, then said listlessly:

"If you ask me, the fellow who jabbers about his soul hasn't a scrap of brains! He's told: now, this is the way you've got to do things! An' he says: my soul don't allow me—conscience, or whatever it is.... It boils down to the same thing, call it soul or conscience—so long as he can fight shy of things. One fellow believes everything's taboo—he goes and becomes a monk, another sees nothing's taboo—he becomes a robber! They're two men, not one! And they shouldn't be confused. What's got to be done will be done... if a thing's to be done conscience'll hide under the oven and the soul will go visiting a neighbour."

He pulled himself lumberingly to his feet and, without a glance at anybody, went into his room.

"You'd better go to sleep.... Sitting around, moralizing. H'm, soul! Praying to God's a simple thing, being a robber's no great shakes either, no—do some work, you dirty scum! Aha?"

When he disappeared, slamming the door after him, the Gypsy nudged Shatunov and said:

"Well, go on with it!"

Osip raised his head, passed his eyes over everybody, and said quietly:

"He's a liar."

"Who, the boss?"

"Yes. He's got a soul all right, and it's not a peaceful one. I know!"

"That's not our business.... You go on with what you have to say!"

Osip started, crawled out from under the oven, and, with a toss of his huge head, sauntered away.

"It's slipped my mind...."

"Don't tell fibs!"

"Really. I'm going to sleep."

"Oh, you.... Try to remember it!"

"No, time to go to sleep...."

A blur in the dark, Osip said quietly:

"It's a rotten life, ours is, brothers...."

"You don't say?" muttered Artem. "And we didn't know it—thanks for telling us!"

The Gypsy neatly rolled himself a cigarette and, watching Osip's retreating figure, whispered:

"That fellow's a bit weak in the sky loft...."

A February blizzard moaned and howled, lashing itself against the windows, roaring eerily in the chimney; the gloom of the bakery, barely illumined by a little oil lamp, stirred gently, and currents of cold air trickled in from somewhere, clinging about the legs; I was kneading the dough while the boss sat on a bag of flour near the bin, saying:

"While you're young, think of everything there is; so long as you haven't tied yourself to any particular business—you turn over all

the likely jobs in your mind—you might hit on something that'll suit you.... Just think it over—there's no hurry...."

He sat with his knees wide apart—on one of them he held a decanter with kvass, on the other a glass half-filled with the rusty liquid. I stole annoyed glances at his shapeless face bent over the earth-black floor, and thought:

"You might treat me to some kvass...."

He raised his head, listened to the moaning outside, and asked in a lowered voice:

"Are you an orphan?"

"You've asked me that before...."

"Lor', what a rough voice you have," he remarked with a sigh and a toss of the head. "Both the voice and the words themselves...."

Having finished work, I was cleaning my hands, peeling off the dried clots of dough; he drank the kvass with a smacking of the lips, refilled the glass and held it out to me:

"Have a drink!"

"Thanks."

"Yes. There—drink. I can soon tell a fellow who knows how to work, I'm always ready to be considerate to such a man. Pashka, for instance: he's a humbug, a thief, yet I respect him—he's fond of his job, there isn't a better baker in all the town! A fellow who likes to work deserves every consideration in life, and respect when he dies. Absolutely!"

Closing the bin, I went to light the fire. The boss got up with a grunt and waddled noiselessly after me like a grey ball, saying:

"You can forgive a man a lot of things when he's doing a good job.... What's bad in him will die with him, but the good will remain...."

Lowering his legs under the oven he slumped heavily to the floor, placed the decanter beside him, and bent down to peer into the fire:

"Not enough wood, look!"

"Plenty—it's dry, half of it's birch...."

"Humph? Ugh...."

He broke into a thin little laugh and slapped me on the shoulder:

"You're a bright lad, don't think I don't see it! That's a lot! You've got to take care of everything—wood, and flour and all...."

"What about the man?"

"We'll get to the man, don't you worry. You listen to me, I won't teach you nothing bad."

Stroking his chest, which was as bulging and fat as his belly, he said:

"I'm a good man inside—with a heart. You're too young and foolish to understand that yet, still it's time you knew—a man, my dear chap—that's not a soldier's button, he shines in different ways.... What'yer pulling faces?"

"Well—I've got to go to sleep, and you don't let me—it's interesting to listen to you...."

"Well, if it's interesting—don't sleep! You'll have enough sleep when you'll be a boss..."

He sighed, and added:

"No, you won't be a boss; you'll never run a business.... Much too wordy you are ... you'll fritter yourself away in words, you'll be wasted on the wind for nothing... no benefit to anybody...."

He suddenly rapped out a foul oath with a sharp intake of breath. His face quivered like a dish of oaten jelly from a sudden jolt, and a spasm of rage ran through his body; his face and neck reddened and his eyeball bulged fiercely. Vassili Semyonov, the boss, howled softly and queerly, as though trying to imitate the moaning blizzard outside, where all the earth seemed to be wailing piteously.

"Dash it, if I only had good men, reliable men! I'd show 'em what business is—I'd make the whole district, the whole Volga sit up.... But there aren't any people! They're all drunk through poverty or just weakness.... As for the authorities, those darned officials...."

He shook the fists of his stubby arms at me, unclinched the fingers, clawing at the air as though he had clutched someone by the hair and was pulling and tearing it, talking all the time with a hungry hiss and foaming mouth:

"You've got to look out what a man has a leaning for while he's young, still young—not drive men slapdash into any old job! That's why it works out that a man's a merchant today and a beggar tomorrow; today he's a baker, and in a week's time you'll find him sawing firewood for somebody.... Opened schools and driving every Tom, Dick and Harry into 'em—go and learn! Clipping everybody like sheep with one and the same shears.... A man's got to be given a chance to find his own bent, his own!"

He gripped my arm, pulled me to him, and went on in an angry hissing voice:

"That's what you ought to be thinking and talking about—that everyone's made to live not the way he wants to, not according to his means, but the way the authorities order you.... Who's got the right to give orders? He who's doing things—I'm entitled to give orders, I can see where a man's place is!"

Pushing me away he waved his hand with a gesture of despair:

"No good'll come of it with the officials meddling in people's affairs—no real business! Best to chuck the whole show and run away into the woods. Run away!"

His round body swaying to and fro he said in a quiet drawl:

"Not a man to be had, all yes men without any guts! Go! He goes. Stop! He stops. Just like recruits. And act like recruits even when they're up to mischief. And it all leads to no end.... And God, I bet you, looks down from the heavens at all this fuss and bother and thinks to himself: Oh, I'm fed up with you fools... you're of no earthly use..."

"You don't consider yourself of no earthly use, do you?"

Still swaying his body he did not answer at once.

"Myself, myself you say.... Not every spark'll start a fire, may be just a flash in the pan. Myself, you say.... I'm just forty odd and'll soon die from drunkenness—and drunkenness comes from life's worries, and the worries ... now, is this the kind of show for me? I'm fit to handle a business of ten thousand men! I could make things hum so that the governors in this country would be flabbergasted!"

He boastfully flashed a green eye, while the grey one looked drearily into the fire; then he spread his hands in a sweeping gesture:

"What's this to me? A mousetrap. Give me half a dozen smart men, honest men—well, if not honest men, say clever thieves!—and I'll show you what's what.... Talk of work! A huge business—stagger everybody—and doing something useful...."

He lay down, tired, stretched himself on the dirty floor, sniffling, with his legs dangling in the oven cavity red from the glow of the merry fire.

"Women, too," he suddenly growled.

"What about women?"

Glancing for a minute or so at the ceiling, the boss sat up, saying dismally:

"If only a woman'd understand how a man can't get on without her—what a big thing she is in a business ... they can't understand it! A fellow's all alone.... A wolf's life! Winter and dark night. The forest and snow. Devours a sheep—fills his belly—but, Christ, he's miserable! Sits and howls...."

He shuddered, looked hastily into the oven, sternly at me, then instantly assumed the sharp tone of the master, growling:

"Rake the coals what'you looking at? Standing flapping your ears...."

He clambered from under the oven, stood a long time looking out of the window, scratching his side. A wailing whiteness eddied outside the panes. The yellow flame of the oil lamp, almost hidden by the smoky glass, fizzed and crackled on the wall.

"My God, my God," muttered the boss, as he went off to the pretzel bakery with a heavy shuffling of his felt slippers, and was swallowed up in the dark cavity of the arch; when he had gone I began to set the loaves in the oven, then dozed off.

"Mind you don't oversleep," a familiar voice sounded above my head.

The boss was standing with his hands behind his back, and his face was wet, his shirt damp.

"A heavy snow—heaps of it, the whole yard's snowed up...."

He stretched his lips wide and for several seconds stood silently grimacing at me, then said slowly:

"One fine day a snow like that'll come down a whole week, a month, the whole winter and summer ... and smother everything on earth.... No amount of shovelling'll help you then.... Yes. Not a bad idea! Straightway put an end to all the fools...."

Wabbling from side to side like a two-pood weight in agitation, he rolled his grey bulk to the wall, lurched through it, vanished....

Every morning, at daybreak, I had to haul a basket of fresh buns to one of the shop branches, and I was acquainted with all three of the boss' concubines.

One of them was a young seamstress, a curly-haired, plump little woman in a close-fitting modest grey gown: she looked at the world

indolently through a pair of blank, washed-out eyes, and her pale face bore a look of widowed sorrow. Even behind his back she spoke of the master in a timid, subdued voice, calling him by his Christian name and patronymic, and received and checked my deliveries with a droll flurried air, as though they were stolen goods. . . .

"Oh, the darling little buns, little cakies," she said in a treacly voice. . . .

The other was a tall, neat woman of about thirty, with a well-nourished devout-looking face, keen eyes humbly lowered and a voice humbly placid. When receiving the goods she tried to cheat me in the count, and I was confident that sooner or later this woman would inevitably clothe her slim and, to all appearances, cold body in the striped dress of a convict, and a grey prison overall and tie up her hair with a white kerchief.

Both of them roused in me an unconquerable antipathy, and I always contrived to deliver my goods to the third woman; her branch was in a more out-of-the-way spot, and the pleasure of visiting this strange lady was gladly ceded to me by the other boys.

Her name was Sofia Plakhina; she was fat and rosy-cheeked and altogether a sort of fragmentary creation—as though she had been hastily modelled out of odds and ends.

She wore a shock of wavy hair, raven black like that of a Jewess, and always uncombed; between plump red cheeks was an alien aquiline nose, and her eyes were uncommon; dark hazel pupils floated oddly in crystal-clear whites, and had a childishly merry gleam in them. Her mouth was also childish—small and pouting, and her amorphous fat chin rested on the full-blown hideously raised bosom of an obese woman. Slovenly, always frowzy and grimy, in buttonless blouse, with bare feet shod in slippers, she looked like a woman of thirty, whereas she was only "oiteen" as she said in broken Russian. She had been brought from Baronsk as an orphan, and the boss had found her in a brothel, whither she had found her way, as she expressed it:

"Like this! Mummie from who I was borned, died, and Daddy married German woman, and he died as well, and German woman married German man—so I have another Mummie and Daddy, and both not mine! And they both of them drunk, and I already thirteen, and German man he begin pester me, because I was always fat. They punched me very much on head and on back. Then he lived with me

and a baby happened, then they all get scarums and run away from house, everything go smash and house they sell for debts, and I come with lady here on ship to make abortion, then I got well and they gave me to a House. Awful rotten.... It was only nice on ship...."

She told me that when we had become friends, and the manner in which this friendship was contracted was very strange.

I did not like her incongruous face, her imperfect speech, her indolent movements and noisy insufferable chatter. The second time I had delivered my goods she declared with a laugh:

"Yesterday I drove out boss and scratched his mug—did you notice?"

I had—three scars on one cheek, two on the other, but I did not feel like talking to her and said nothing.

"Are you deaf?" she enquired. "Or dumb?"

I made no reply. She then blew into my face and said:

"Silly!"

That was all that time. The next day, while I was crouching before my basket, putting away dried and mildewed breadstuffs that had not been sold, she threw herself on my back, put her soft short arms tightly round my neck and cried:

"Carry me!"

I was annoyed and told her to leave me alone, but she hung on still more heavily, urging me on:

"Come on, carry me...."

"Leave off, otherwise I'll throw you over my head...."

"No," she argued, "you can't do that—I'm lady! You must do so as lady wishes—come on!"

Her greasy hair exuded a suffocating odour of pomade and she was all permeated with a sort of reeking oily smell, like an old printing machine.

I flung her over my head so that she hit the wall with her feet. She started to cry softly and piteously like a child and moaned.

I felt both sorry for her and ashamed of myself. Sitting on the floor with her back to me, she rocked herself, straightening her tossed skirts over her smooth legs, and there was something touchingly helpless in her nudity, especially in the way she wiggled the toes of her small bare feet, from which the slippers had flown off.

"I warned you," I muttered in confusion as I helped her to her feet. She winced and moaned:

"Oh, oh... cheeky boy...."

And suddenly, stamping her feet on the floor. she broke into a good-natured laugh and cried:

"Go to bulls, to wolves—go away!"

I hurried into the street, much flustered and cursing myself roundly. The grey remnants of the night melted above the roof tops, misty morning was creeping into the town, but the yellow lights of the street lamps had not been extinguished and stood guard over the silence.

"Look here," the girl opened the street door and shouted after me, "you needn't be afraid. I won't tell boss nothing!"

Two days later I had occasion to make another delivery—she greeted me with a sunny smile, then suddenly became thoughtful and asked:

"Can you read?"

And taking a handsome wallet from a drawer of the cash desk she drew out a piece of paper:

"Read it!"

I read two opening lines of verse written in a clear hand:

My Dad's a notorious embezzler of public funds,
He stole no less than fifty thousand....

"Oh, what a beast!" she cried, snatching the paper out of my hand, then began speaking hurriedly and indignantly:

"Rotten little fool wrote me that, also cheeky boy, but student. I'm very fond of students. they're like military officers. and he's courting me. He talks of his father like that! His father's important man, grey beard, with a medal on his chest. goes about with dog. Oh, I don't like when old man goes about with dog—hasn't he anybody else? And his son scolds him—calls thief! Even wrote it down—there!"

"What do you care about them?"

"Oh!" she said, and her eyes flew open in distress. "You musn't scold your father! And himself goes to drink tea with loose woman...."

"With whom is that?"

"Why, with me!" she exclaimed in surprise and annoyance. "How dull you are!"

A peculiar kind of verbal, so to say, familiarity sprang up between us; we spoke about everything, but I doubt whether we understood anything about each other. At times she would confide to me, with an air of utter gravity and in great detail, such girlish affairs that I would involuntarily drop my eyes, thinking:

"Does she take me for a woman, I wonder?"

That was not so; since we had become friends she no longer came out to me untidy—her blouse was buttoned up, the holes under the armpits mended, and she even put on stockings; she would come out to me with a kind smile and announce:

"And I've got the samovar ready!"

We drank tea behind the cupboards, where she had a narrow cot, two chairs, a table and an old, absurdly tubby chest of drawers, the bottom one of which wouldn't close. Sofia was constantly knocking her shins against the corner of the drawer, when she would always slap the top of the chest, nursing the bruised part against the other leg, wincing and scolding:

"Pot-bellied fool! Exactly like Semyonov—fat, spiteful and silly!"

"D'you think the boss is silly?"

She raised her shoulders in surprise, and her big ears rose too, stirring.

"Of course!"

"Why?"

"Because he is."

"No, but why?"

Unable to reply, she grew angry:

"Why, why! Because he's a fool ... all-round fool!"

But one day she explained to me, almost with indignation:

"D'you think he lives with me? It happened only twice, back in that House, but here there's nothing. I used to even sit on his knees, and he tickled me and then say—get off! He lives with those two, and I don't really know what he wants me for? This shop doesn't bring no income, I'm no good at selling and I don't like it. What's the idea? I ask him and he squeaks—that ain't your business! Such foolishness all round...."

She shook her head with eyes closed, and her face looked blank, like that of a corpse.

"D'you know those two?"

"Sure. When he drinks he brings one of 'em to me and shouts like a madman: punch her in bloomin' mug! I don't touch young one—pity her—she always trembles; but that other one, the lady, I hit her once, I was also drunk, and hit her. I don't like her. And then I felt bad and scratched his mug for him...."

She became lost in thought, her body all tense, then said quietly:

"I'm not sorry for him—the swine—but somehow.... He's rich.... Better if he'd be beggar or sick man. I tell him: how can you live like that, you fool? You must live good, somehow.... Now, why not marry nice woman, have children...."

"But he is married...."

Sofia said simply with a shrug:

"Didn't he poison somebody ... he could poison his wife ... useless old woman! He's just a madman.... And doesn't want anything...."

I tried to show her that it wasn't right to poison people, but she calmly remarked:

"But it's done...."

A balsamine stood blossoming on her window sill, and one day she asked boastfully:

"Nice sunflower?"

"Not bad. It's a flower but not a sunflower."

She demurred with a shake of the head:

"No, it doesn't suit: a flower's just what's on cotton print, but a sunflower's from God, from the sun, they're all sunflowers, but different colours. I know how to say pink, blue, lilac...."

... I found it ever more difficult with these apparently simple, but really queer and frightfully muddled people. Reality became a dreadful dream, a nightmare, and the things spoken of in books glowed ever more brightly and beautifully and receded farther and farther away like winter stars.

One day the boss, looking straight into my face with his green eye, which on this occasion was dull, like oxidized copper, asked me sullenly:

"I hear you're having tea down at the branch shop?"

"I am."

"I hope so! Better look out. . . ."

He sat down beside me, jostling me heavily as he did so, and, with a feeling akin to rapture, began talking, blinking his eyes like a stroked cat and smacking his lips with relish over the words:

"A peach of a girl, what? Let me tell you . . . she's not a devil of God's creation! What she only tells me . . . no priest would ever speak to me like that! Ye-e-s. I bully her—just to put her to the test: 'Why, you fool, I'll give you a good hiding and kick you out!' But she doesn't care a hang. . . . Likes to speak the truth, the hussy, she does. . . ."

"What d'you want the truth for?"

"It's pretty miserable without the truth," he said with astonishing simplicity.

Then, heaving a sigh, he pierced me with a keen, hostile look, and went on peevishly, as though I had offended him in some way:

"You think life's a cheerful thing maybe? . . ."

"Not likely! Especially round about you. . . ."

"Round about you!" he mocked, then fell silent for a long time, looking blue: his jowls hung down like an old house dog's on a hot day, his ears drooped and his lower lip sagged limply like a bit of rag. The fire was reflected on his teeth with a reddish glow.

"It's fools who find life cheerful, but a clever man . . . a clever man drinks vodka, he kicks up a dust . . . he's got a quarrel to pick with life. . . . Take me—sometimes I lie of a night—lie all night and, hang it, not even a louse will bite me! When I used to be a workman the lice were fond of me . . . it's a sign of money, always! Soon as I began to live clean they dropped off. . . . Everything's dropping off. Only the cheap things are left—women . . . the most plaguing, the most difficult. . . ."

"Are you looking for the truth there?"

He exclaimed angrily:

"D'you think they're less up to snuff than you are? Them? Just look at Kuzin—he fears God and likes to report the truth . . . thinks I'll buy it from him. I like to knock off rotten stuff myself at a good price—take that!"

He pointed a fico at the fire.

"Yegor's an axe. As stupid as an owl. You also go about croaking—caw, caw, and all the time waiting for an opportunity to climb on a fellow's neck. You want everyone to live the way you tell 'em to, and I don't want to! God himself left me in the lurch—go on, Mister Semyonov, lead your own life, I'm not interfering . . . go to the devil, for ought I care!"

His sallow-pink face, licked by the flames, was shiny and perspiring, his eyes came to rest with the fixity of sleep, and his tongue moved sluggishly.

"But Sovka tells me straight—you're living bad! Bad? Well, yes—you're not a wolf, or a swine. . . . How's a man to live then, you fool? I don't know, she says, figure it out yourself! You're clever enough, don't make out that you don't know. . . . That's the truth for ye. That's not the way to live, I don't know what's the way—that's the truth! And you, you. . . ."

He rapped out a blasphemous oath, and continued with greater animation:

"I call her Sova.* In the daytime she's altogether a blind fool . . . though at night she's a fool too . . . at least at night she's . . . got audacity. . . ."

He chuckled softly, and the sound struck me as containing the same note of tenderness with which he had talked to his pigs:

"Rogie-pogies, my li'lle recluses."

"I'm keeping three of 'em," he ran on "one for the joys of the flesh—Nadya curlyhead. An out-and-out wanton! Looks as if she's afraid of everything, but really she's afraid of nothing—she knows neither fear, nor conscience—just greed. A regular leech. She'd baffle a saint. The other one, Kurochkina, is for the mind. You couldn't call her anything else—her name's Glasha, Glafira, but you've got to call her Kurochkina . . . there's that about her! I like to tease her: pray as much as you like, I say, and light as many icon lamps as you may, the devils are waiting for you all the same! She's scared of the devils, scared stiff! Passes off counterfeit coins on the quiet—slipped me a blind piece the other day, three rubles, and before that five rubles. Where these come from? Says they were palmed off on her. Liar—she's simply working in some gang, probably a tenderer on a commission

* The word *sova* in Russian means owl.—*Trans.*

basis. She's a shrewd piece. It's dull with her, unless you get her worked up ... she's pretty hot then. makes my flesh creep sometimes.... She's capable of strangling a person. Suffocate him with a pillow. Yes, just a pillow! And when it's done she'll pray: Almighty God, forgive me, have mercy! That's a fact!"

There was something violently irritating in his ugly figure generously illumined by the fire whose licking flames grew hotter and brisker. He twisted away from the heat, perspired, and exhaled fetid, greasy odours, like a garbage hole in hot weather. One was strongly tempted to berate him in good set terms, hit him, anger the man to make him speak differently, but on the other hand he compelled a rapt interest to these acrid, pungent speeches—they oozed filthily, yet breathed a sort of ache and yearning....

"They all lie—fools through stupidity, the clever ones through cunning, but Sovka speaks the truth ... she speaks it ... not for her own good ... and not for the soul's sake ... soul, bosh! Simply speaks because she wants to. I heard say the students crave for the truth, so I knocked about the pubs where they carouse ... nothing of the kind, it's all fibs ... they're just drunkards—yes, drunkards...."

He muttered, no longer taking any notice of me, as if oblivious of my presence at his side:

"For some men the truth's like ... like as if he fell in love with some highborn lady ... saw her only once, and fell in love for a lifetime ... and can't reach her ... as if it happened in a dream...."

One could not tell whether the boss was drunk or sober—perhaps ill? His tongue and lips stirred sluggishly, as if struggling to straighten out the cruel words his mind was shaping. He was rather odious just then, and through a nodding drowsiness I stared into the fire, no longer listening to his purring voice.

The wood was wet and protested loudly, hissing and spitting froth, emitting heavy blue smoke. The scarlet flames tremulously wrapped themselves round the blocks, spluttered angrily, licked the bricks of the low arch with snaky tongues, writhed and pressed towards the oven mouth, while the smoke—a thick, heavy smoke—smothered them.

"Blatterer!"

"Yes?"

"D'you know what surprised me in you?"

"You told me."

"Yes. . . ."

He fell silent again, then, in the whining voice of a beggar, cried:

"What did it mean to you whether I caught a cold and died or not! You said that . . . without thinking, just for a joke!"

"Hadn't you better go to sleep?. . ."

He sniggered, shaking his head, and uttered in the same querulous voice:

"I mean him well, and he drives me away. . . ."

This was the first time I had heard my boss express a sentiment of goodliness, and I wanted to test the sincerity of his mood. I hazarded:

"You might wish little Yasha well."

The boss heavily raised his shoulders and was silent.

Two days or so before this conversation took place Tinkle had dropped into the bakery, with his hair smoothly cropped, clean and tidy, all transparent looking like his eyes, which had grown still more limpid in the hospital. His spotted little face had become thinner, his nose tilted still higher, and the child wore a dreamy smile and trod the workshop with a peculiar gait, as though he were about to jump off the earth. He was afraid to soil his shirt and was apparently embarrassed on account of his clean hands which he kept out of sight in the pockets of his stiff trousers, which were also new.

"Who's toffed you up like that?" the pretzel makers enquired.

"Mith Julia," he answered in a faint little voice, stopping in his tracks, then drawing his left hand out of his pocket and waving it in the air, he related:

"The doctor lady, a colonel's daughter; the Turks cut off her father's legs, right up to the knees—I've theen him too—clean bald he is, and keeps on thaying—that's nothing. . . ."

"Gee brothers, it's fine there in the hospital! Talk about clean!"

"What you got in your right hand?"

"Nothing!" he retorted, his eyes rounding in dismay.

"Liar! Let's have a look!"

He was thrown into confusion, his whole body contorted as he thrust his hand deeper into his pocket. This roused the boys' curiosity and they decided to search his pockets: they grabbed him and after a little tussle pulled out of his pocket a brand-new twenty kopeck piece and an enamelled little icon of the Mother and the Infant. The coin was promptly returned to Yasha, and the icon passed from hand

to hand. At first the boy, with a tense smile on his face, kept stretching out his little hand for it, then scowled, and his animation burned out. When Milov the soldier handed him back the icon Yashka carelessly thrust it into his pocket and disappeared. After supper he came to me looking distressed and rumpled, besmeared with dough and sprinkled with flour, yet with nothing of his vivacious old self.

"Well, show me the present!"

His blue eyes looked away:

"I haven't got it. . . ."

"Where is it?"

"Lotht it. . . ."

"You don't say?"

Yashka drew a deep breath.

"How's that?"

"Threw it away," he answered in a low voice.

Seeing the look of incredulity on my face he made a sign of the cross and said:

"Tho help me God! I wouldn't tell you a lie. I chucked it in the fire—thtarted to boil like pitch, then burnt up!"

The boy suddenly sobbed and hid his face in my side, stammering through his tears:

"The dirty thwine . . . always grabbing everything. . . . The tholdier picked it with his finger . . . thcratched a bit off the edge . . . damned rotter. Mith Julia, when she gave it to me, she kissed it firth . . . and me as well . . . there, she thays, this is for you! It'll be . . . good . . . for you. . . ."

Sobs racked his thin body and I was unable to soothe him for quite a time; I did not want the pretzel makers to see these tears and grasp their painful meaning. . . .

"What's that about Yashka," the boss asked suddenly.

"He's very weak and no workman for the pretzel bakery. You could fix him up as a shopboy."

The boss became thoughtful, gnawed at his lips, and said impassively:

"If he's weak, he's no good for the shop. It's cold there—he'll catch a cold, and Garaska'll handle him rough. Better send him to Sovka's branch . . . she's a slut, the place is full o' dirt and dust, let him make himself handy there. . . . It isn't hard work. . . ."

Glancing into the oven at the golden heap of embers, he started to clamber out of the cavity.

"Rake up, it's time!"

I thrust the long poker into the oven, while the boss dropped lazy, drearily-uttered words over my head:

"You're a dolt! Why, fortune's right at your elbow and you ... ugh, dammit!... Funny chap!"

The March sun peered cautiously, fastidiously, into the dingy streets, steeped in the dense shadows of the old, dilapidated houses; imprisoned from morn till night in the gloomy cellar in the centre of the town, we felt the approach of spring by the dampness which grew more abundant every day.

A sunbeam looked in at the end window of the workshop for twenty minutes or so after midday, and the glass, iridescent with age, became beautiful and gay. Through the open little ventilation window one could hear the sledge runners screeching on the uncovered cobbles of the roadway, and all the street noises sounded unmuffled and sharper.

The pretzel bakery resounded with incessant songs, but they lacked their winter unison: chorus singing fell flat, every one who could sang to himself, often changing the tune, as though unable to find a song that spring day to harmonize with the soul.

Forsaken by you, dear heart

sang the Gypsy by the oven, and Vanok led on with an effort:

Life lies in ruins at my feet....

He broke off abruptly, saying in the same high voice in which he had been singing:

"Ten days more and they'll begin ploughing down at our place."

Shatunov had just finished kneading the dough and, shirtless, shining with sweat, was tying his hair with a ribbon of bast, drowsily gazing at the window.

His sombrous voice rumbled softly:

God's little pilgrims walking by the way,
Silent little pilgrims have nothing to say....

Artem sat in a corner mending torn sacks, humming in a girlish voice with intermittent coughing some of Surikov's verse which he had learned by heart:

Thou liest in a w-wooden coffin,
Our dear, our dearest f-friend....
Wrapped in a sh-shroud to the very chin....
Yellow, gaunt and spent....

"Pshaw!" said Kuzin spitting in his direction. "Dug up words for a song, silly ass.... Now, you little devils, didn't I tell you hundreds of times...."

"Ah, Christ Almighty!" the Gypsy shouted excitedly, breaking off the song. "It's going to be wonderful soon on earth!"

He yelled out, keeping time with his agile feet:

Here comes the drunken lady,
Laughing from afar,
That's the sweet little baby
My heart is pining for!

Ulanov carried it on:

Demure little Anne
Has mastered all the clan—
When April comes
She makes things hum!...

In this discordant singing and snatchy conversation one could feel the mighty voice of spring, the vibrant hopes of renewal. The complex music flowed on endlessly, as though these men were learning a new choral song—the exciting torrent of miscellaneous sounds poured into the bakery where I was working, all so different and yet similar in their intoxicating charm.

And with my thoughts, too, dwelling on spring, visualizing it as a woman who stints nothing in loving everything on earth, I shouted to Pashka:

Demure little Anne
Has mastered all the clan!...

Shatunov turned his broad face away from the iridescent window and, drowning the Gypsy's reply, rumbled:

And the road is hard and painful,
'Tis not a path for the sinner. . . .

Through a crevice in the thin partition, from the master's room, came the nagging mendicant voice of the old mistress:

"Vassili dear, Vassili darling. . . ."

The boss had been drinking hard for over a week, and the attack was showing no signs of having spent itself. He had drunk himself to a state when he could no longer speak, and merely growled; his eyes were bulging and dimmed, and apparently sightless, for he walked upright and stiff like a blind man. He was all swollen and livid like a body dragged out of a river; his ears had grown larger and stood out flap-wise, his lip sagged, and his bared teeth looked superfluous on a hideous enough face. He sometimes came out of his room, propelling himself slowly on his short legs, with unnecessarily heavy tread, and bore straight down on anyone who happened to be in his path, repelling him with the terrifying glance of his unseeing eyes. Behind him, carrying a decanter of vodka and a glass in his immense paws, lurched an equally drunk Yegor, his pitted face covered with red and yellow spots, his dull eyes half-closed and his mouth agape like a man who has burnt himself and was gasping for breath.

Without stirring his lips he maundered:

"Make way . . . boss is comin'. . . ."

The rear was brought up by the grey mistress who came with head lowered and whose watering eyes seemed as though they would any minute ooze out onto the tray she carried in her hands and sprinkle the salted fish, the pickled mushrooms and other snacks littered about on blue plates.

A deathly stillness descended on the workshop, which seemed to be filled with stifling night. A trail of pungent, irritating odours trickled behind this trinity of quietly demented people; they excited fear and envy, and when they disappeared through the door, a depressing silence reigned for two or three minutes in the workshop.

Then followed low, cautious remarks:

"He'll drink himself to death. . . ."

"He? Never in your life!"

"D'you see how many snacks there were, boys!"

"Smelt good...."

"Going to the dogs, Vassili Semyonich is...."

"Be interesting to count how much he can lap up!"

"You wouldn't tackle it in a month."

"How do you know?" said Milov the soldier with a modesty not devoid of confidence in his own powers. "You just try it—stand me a month's drinks!"

"You'd go off the hooks...."

"At least—I'd have a good time while it lasted...."

I went out into the passage several times to take a look at the boss. Yegor had placed a rotted old bin upside down in the middle of the mushy yard under the sun, where it looked like a coffin; the boss, bareheaded, sat down in the middle of the bin, placing the tray with snacks on his right hand, and the decanter on his left. The mistress seated herself furtively on the edge of the bin. Yegor stood behind his master's back, supporting him under the armpits and bracing his spine with a knee, while the latter bent his whole body backwards and stared long at the pale frost-killed sky.

"Yego'... are you breathing?"

"I am...."

"Isn't every breath praizh to the Lord? Isn't it I shay?"

"It is...."

"Fill up the glash...."

The mistress, fluttering like a terrified hen, thrust a glass of vodka into her husband's hand; he pressed the glass to his mouth and leisurely sucked at it, while she hurriedly made tiny signs of the cross and pursed her lips as though for a kiss—it was piteous and comical.

Then she began to snuffle softly:

"Yegor darling ... oh, it'll kill him...."

"Don't worry yourself, Mum ... nothin' happens without the will o' God," said Yegor, in a voice that sounded delirious.

While the spring sun shone brightly outside and sparkled in the puddles amid the stones.

One day the boss, after surveying the sky and the house tops, lurched forward and very nearly toppled over on his face, then enquired:

"Whose day is it?"

"God's," answered Yegor under great stress, barely managing to catch the boss before he fell. Semyonov put his leg out and asked again:

"Whose leg is that?"

"Yours."

"Liar! Whose am I?"

"Semyonov's. . . ."

"Liar!"

"God's."

"Aha-a!"

The boss raised his foot and brought it down in a puddle, spattering his face and chest with mud.

"Yegorie," snuffled the old woman; Yegor shook his finger and said:

"I can't go against the boss, Mum. . . ."

And the boss, blinking his eyes, not troubling to wipe the dirt off his face, enquired:

"Yegor! Won't a hair fall?"

"It can't . . . unless God wills it. . . ."

"Gimme. . . ."

Yegor bent his huge shaggy head within reach of the boss, who clutched the Cossack's curly mane, pulled several hairs out, examined them in the light and held his hand out to Yegor:

"Hide 'em . . . so they don't fall. . . ."

Carefully collecting the plucked threads of hair off the master's fat fingers, Yegor rolled them into a ball between the palms of his hands and stowed them away in the pocket of a loud waistcoat. His face wore its usual wooden expression and his eyes were dead; only his groping movements, which were nevertheless unsteady, revealed that he was much the worse for drink.

"Take care of 'em," mumbled the boss with a wave of the hand. "Have to answer for everything . . . for every hair. . . ."

They had apparently gone through all this before—there was something mechanical in all their gestures. The mistress looked indifferent and only her black parched lips stirred incessantly.

"Sing!" the boss suddenly squealed.

Yegor tilted his cap back, pulled a horrible face and, seating himself at his master's side, started to sing in a hoarse maudlin bass:

Here come the Don boys. . . .

The boss held out a cupped hand, as though begging for alms.

Ho, Cossacks young and brave....

The boss lifted his head and howled, and his sightless, ghastly face, streaming with tears, looked as though it were going to melt.

During one of these performances Osip, who was standing in the passage by my side, asked softly:

"See that?"

"Well?"

He looked at me and smiled, a piteous, tremulous smile—he had begun to look very haggard lately, and his Mongolian eyes seemed to have grown larger.

"What is it?"

Osip leaned over and whispered in my ear:

"Rich, eh? Happiness? There's happiness for you! Remember that...."

While the boss was on his drinking bout Sashka the clerk too dashed about the workshop as though he were drunk. His eyes gleamed shiftily, his arms hung limply, as though broken, and his red curls quivered on a clammy brow. Everybody in the workshop spoke openly of Sashka's thievery and greeted him with approving smiles.

Kuzin sang the clerk's praises in honeyed words:

"Aye, he's a reg'lar eagle is 'Lexander Petrov, and it's high he's going to fly, mark my word...."

Everybody did his bit of stealing, did it with an airy unconcern, and the proceeds were promptly spent on drink—all three bakeries were in their cups. The errand boys sent to the public houses for vodka crammed pretzels under their shirts and bartered them somewhere for lollipops.

"You'll soon ruin Semyonov that way," I told the Gypsy; he shook his handsome head:

"My dear chap, every ruble he turns over brings him thirty-six kopecks...."

He spoke as if he had exact knowledge of the master's business transactions.

I laughed. Pasha regarded me with a wry look of disapproval:

"You're always sorry for everything... how can you be like that?"

"It's not a question of being sorry—but I can't make head or tail of this here muddle...."

"You can't be expected to understand a muddle," interjected Shatunov; the whole workshop was listening attentively to our conversation.

"You praise the boss for being a smart fellow in organizing such a business—with your labour, mind you—and yet you're trying your hardest to ruin it...."

Several voices answered at once:

"Ruin him, not likely!"

"Grab while the grabbing's good!"

"It's the only time we can breathe freely when he's on the booze...."

My talk immediately became known to Sashka. He rushed into the bakery, slim and elegant in a grey suit and, baring his teeth snarled:

"Aiming at my job, are you? No fear—you're damned cunning but too green...."

Everybody stared hungrily, hankering for a fight, but though Sashka was spry, he was prudent; besides, we had already tried conclusions: having taxed my patience with his constant cavilling and petty pricks I had told him one day that I would give him a good hiding unless he left me in peace. It had been in the evening of a holiday, outside in the yard; all the men had dispersed, and he and I were alone.

"Come on!" he had said, throwing his jacket down on the snow and rolling up his shirt sleeves. "Here goes! No hitting in the mug, though—only on the body! I need my mug for the shop, you know...."

It was a vanquished Sashka who pleaded:

"I say, my good fellow, don't tell anyone you're stronger than me—do me a favour! You're a temporary person here, a bird of passage, and I've got to live with these people! Get me? Fine! Thanks! Come in and have a cup of tea...."

Closeted with him in his tiny room over a cup of tea I listened to the well-chosen words of his animated conversation.

"My good fellow—of course, its perfectly correct that I'm a bit, so to say, light-fingered—speaking as man to man—but, when you come to consider all the circumstances...." And, leaning confidentially over

to me across the table, his eyes flashing with a hurt expression, he declaimed, as though he were singing a song:

"Am I any worse than Semyonov, less clever than he? Aren't I younger, aren't I good-looking, aren't I smart ... why, you just give me a chance to get my tooth into something, give me the most paltry business to start with, I'd soon have the ball at my feet, I'd show you what's what—it'd take your breath away! With my face and figure couldn't I marry a widow with capital, eh? Or even a young lady with a dowry—aren't I worth it? I can feed hundreds of people—what's Semyonov? Makes you sick even to look at him ... queer-looking sheatfish—fancy him in a room when he ought to be in a slough! Blessed eyesore!"

His red, greedy mouth pursed in a thin whistle.

"Eh, my good fellow! A bishop leads an honest life—but then everybody knows he feels pretty dull and miserable and the flesh is weak.... D'you know the police clerk, Loshkin? It's him who wrote the composition: 'The Parable of the Bishop.'—a very instructive person, though a shocking drunkard. Well, the deacon in the parable plainly says: 'No, My Lord, you're most unreasonable. Life without theft is quite unfeasible.' "

That slick, graceful body with the red head reminded me of the ancient darts—a flaming missile hurtling into the night on a blind errand of death and destruction.

During these days of the master's drinking bout Sashka was at fever heat—it was disgusting and fascinating to watch him flying around catching the rubles like a hawk small prey.

"Things are beginning to smack of prison," Shatunov boomed into my ear, "you keep out of the way, see you're not dragged in...."

He showed me increasing signs of attention and all but danced attendance on me, as though I were infirm, now bringing in flour and firewood for me, now offering to mix the dough.

"What's the idea?"

He muttered, avoiding my eyes:

"Never mind that! Your strength'll come in useful for other things ... you got to look after it—good health's a thing a man gets only once in his life...."

And, of course, asked in a low voice:

"What's the meaning of 'phrase'?"

Or he would suddenly communicate a queer idea:

"The *Khlisti* sectarians are quite right in believing that Our Lady is more than one...."

"What d'you mean?"

"Never mind what it means."

"But you say yourself that God is one for all?"

"So He is! But people are different and they fit Him to their own needs ... the Tatars, for example, the Mordvinians.... That's where the sin is!"

One night, sitting with me before the oven, he said:

"It wouldn't be bad to break an arm, or a leg, or fall ill with some disease that would show itself...."

"What's that?"

"Some kind of deformity, you know...."

"Are you in your right mind?"

"Very...."

Throwing a look around him, he explained:

"It's like this: I thought I'd be a sorcerer—I was awfully keen on it. My grandfather on mother's side was a sorcerer, and my father's uncle too. Down at our place his uncle was a famous sorcerer and village quack, a beekeeper too—everybody in the gubernia knew him, and even the Tatars and Chuvashes, the Cheremyssi acknowledged him. He's over a hundred now, and about seven years ago he took a young girl, an orphan Tatar girl—and got children too! He can't marry any more—he's been married three times."

Heaving a deep sigh he went on slowly and pensively:

"Now, you say it's a fake! You couldn't live to a hundred by faking! Anybody can fake, it doesn't soothe the soul...."

"Just a minute! But what d'you want the deformity for?"

"Ah—the soul's pitched over the other way.... I'd like to roam the world as far as I could, go through and through! Have a look how it all stands ... how it lives, what it hopes for! Yes. But with a phiz like mine I haven't got no excuse for going on a pilgrimage. Folks would ask, 'what's the idea your wandering about?' Couldn't make out a case. So I was thinking, now, if my arm was withered, or sores broke out, say.... Sores are worse—folks are afraid of 'em...."

He fell silent, his slanting eyes gazing into the fire.

"Have you made up your mind about that?"

"I wouldn't talk about it if I hadn't," he said, puffing. Talking about things you haven't made up your mind about is just scaring people, as it is they. . . ."

He waved his hand with a hopeless gesture.

Artem, smiling drowsily and rubbing a dishevelled head, softly came up to us.

"I dreamt that I was bathing and had to make a dive—stepped back and plunged in—flop!—and banged my head against the wall! Golden tears started pouring from my eyes. . . ."

Indeed, his nice eyes were filled with tears.

Some two days later, in the night, when I had placed the bread in the oven and fallen asleep, I was awakened by wild screams: within the arch on the threshold of the pretzel bakery the boss stood belching foul oaths—like beans from a burst sack the words came tumbling out of him, each filthier than the other.

At the same instant the door leading into the master's room fell open with a crash, and Sashka the clerk crawled screeching onto the threshold, while the boss, gripping the doorposts with his hands, kicked him in the chest and sides with an air of business-like concentration.

"Oh . . . you'll kill me . . ." moaned the lad.

Semyonov calmly punctuated each kick with a grunt of satisfaction, trundling the doubled-up body before him, and adroitly tripping up Sashka every time he attempted to jump to his feet.

The workmen rushed out from the pretzel bakery, forming a silent huddled group—their faces were not visible in the early dusk, but one could sense an undercurrent of fear. Sashka squirmed at their feet, gasping:

"Brothers . . . he'll kill me. . . ."

They fell back crumbling up like a decayed wattle fence under the wind, when suddenly Artem dashed out and yelled into the boss' face:

"That's enough!"

Semyonov recoiled. Sashka dived into the crowd like a fish and disappeared.

It became very quiet, a tense silence of several seconds reigned, during which one knew not who would win—man or beast.

"Who's that?" the boss demanded hoarsely, peering at Artem from under a cupped hand, and raising the other hand to the level of his head.

"Me," cried Artem overloudly, falling back; the boss lunged over to him but Osip stepped forward and received the blow of his fist in his face.

"Look here," he said calmly with a toss of the head, expectorating, "hold on, don't fight!"

And instantly, Pashka, the soldier, the gentle Laptev and the boiling-man Nikita, with hands behind backs and thrust in pockets, closed in threateningly on the boss, all with heads lowered, as though they intended to butt him, and all shouting together in unnaturally loud voices:

"That's enough! Have you bought us? Aha-a! We won't stand it!"

The boss stood motionless, as though rooted to the worm-eaten battered floor. His hands were folded on his stomach, his head slightly inclined as though listening to these seemingly unaccountable cries. The uproar increased as the dark mob of men, barely illumined by the yellow flame of the lamp on the wall, surged around him, here and there a head with bared teeth looming in the patch of feeble light as though torn from its body, all shouting, clamouring, while above them all rose the voice of Nikita the boiler:

"You've sucked up all my strength! What'll you have to show off before God? Ah, man, man!"

Curses were lashed to a dirty foam and here and there men began brandishing their fists under Semyonov's nose. He seemed to have fallen asleep standing.

"Who made you rich? We did!" shouted Artem, while the Gypsy held forth, as though reading from a book:

"You bear it in mind, we don't agree to handle seven sacks of flour a day. . . ."

Dropping his arms the boss turned around and walked away in silence, shaking his head queerly from side to side.

The pretzel bakery was seized by a mood of peaceable though none the less lively jubilation. Everyone assumed a business-like air, fell to their work with zest, and looked at one another with new eyes as it were—trustfully, kindly and embarrassedly, while the Gypsy chirruped:

"Get a move on there, chappies, stir your stumps! Heigh-ho . . . everything fair and square! We'll show the fellow what work is! Come on, make it hum!"

Laptev stood in the middle of the workshop with a sack of flour on his shoulder, licking and smacking his lips:

"See what it means . . . when you club together. . . ."

Shatunov, who was weighing the salt, boomed:

"Kids could beat father if they clubbed together."

The men all resembled bees at springtime. Artem was in particularly high feather. Only old Kuzin snuffled his customary tune:

"Well, you little devils, what are you thinking of, drat you. . . ."

A cold leaden mist enveloped the belfries, minarets and house tops; the town looked as though it were decapitated, and the people, too, seemed headless from a distance. A cold drizzle hung in the air, rendering breathing difficult; everything around was tinted a dull silver, and, where the night lights had not yet been extinguished, a pearly hue.

Water from the roofs dripped to the stone pavement with a dreary sound, horseshoes rang out hollowly on the cobbles of the road, and somewhere high up in the mist the wailing voice of an invisible muezzin called mournfully to morning prayers.

I was carrying a basket of buns on my back, and I felt like walking on endlessly, passing the mist, making my way into the fields out onto the broad road and the distant trail, far away to where the spring sun had doubtlessly already risen.

A horse with bent neck and high-stepping forelegs loomed past me out of the mist—a big, grey horse in dark spots, with a baleful gleam in its bloodshot eye. On the box, holding the tightly drawn reins, sat Yegor, as erect and stiff as a wooden carving; in the cab behind lolled the figure of the boss clad in a heavy fox coat, although it was warm.

This grey unruly horse had more than once smashed the conveyance to pieces; last autumn Yegor and the boss had been brought home covered with mud and blood and with crushed ribs, but both of them loved and pampered this fat well-fed animal with the malevolent, unintelligent look in its bleary bloodshot eyes.

Once, when Yegor was cleaning the horse, which only a minute before had bitten him in the shoulder, I suggested that it would be good

to sell the vicious beast to the Tatars for slaughtering. Yegor straightened up, and, aiming the heavy currycomb at my head, snarled:

"Go 'way!"

That man never spoke to me, and if I ever attempted to draw him into conversation he walked away with his head lowered like a bull; only once he suddenly gripped my shoulder from behind, shook me and muttered:

"I'm ever so much stronger than you, *katzap*, I could do with three of your likes, and you with one hand! Get that? If the boss only...."

This speech, uttered with considerable feeling, affected him so strongly that he was unable to finish it, and the blue veins swelled at his temples and his face broke out in a sweat.

Saucy little Yashka said of him:

"He's got three fists but he's a muff!"

The street grew narrower, the air more damp; the muezzin's cries had ceased, the clatter of hoofs had died away in the distance, and everything was wrapped in an expectant hush.

Little Yashka, tidy and clean in a pink shirt and white apron, opened me the door, and as he helped me in with the basket, whispered warningly:

"The boss..."

"I know."

"In a temper..."

At the same instant a voice behind the cupboards growled:

"Blatterer, come here...."

He was sitting on the bed, of which he occupied almost a third. Sofia lay half-dressed on her side, her cheek pillowed on her folded palms; one leg was bent under, the other bare leg she had thrown across the boss' knees; she met me with a smiling glance of strangely limpid eyes. The boss was evidently in her way—half her thick hair was braided, the other half lay tumbled over a red, rumpled pillow. Holding the girl's small ankle in one hand, the boss flicked her amber-yellow toenails with the other.

"Sit down. Well ... let's have a serious talk..."

Stroking Sofia's instep he bawled:

"Yashka, the samovar! Get up, Sova..."

She said lazily and quietly:

"I don't want to...."

"Come, come, get up!"

He pushed her leg off his knees and said slowly, with a wheezy cough:

"We're obliged to do some things whether we like it or not! Life itself goes against the grain...."

Sofia slid clumsily to the floor, baring her legs above the knees, and the boss said reprovingly:

"You've got no shame at all Sova...."

She began to plait her hair, saying with a yawn:

"What do you care about my shame?"

"I'm not alone here, am I? There's a young lad there...."

"He knows me...."

With sullenly puckered brows and blown cheeks Yashka carried in the samovar, which looked very much like him—it was just as small, neat and swaggeringly clean.

"O hell," swore Sofia, undoing the plait with a rough gesture, and tossing back her wavy hair over her shoulders sat down to the table.

"Well," began the boss, thoughtfully narrowing his shrewd green eye and closing the dead one entirely. "It was you taught 'em to kick up a row?"

"You know...."

"Sure.... What's your reason?"

"They're having a hard time."

"I like that! Who's having an easy one?"

"Your lot's easier."

"Bow wow!" he mocked. "A lot you understand! Pour him out some tea Sova. Is there any lemon? I'll have lemon...."

The rusty fan hummed softly in the ventilation window above the table, the samovar, too, sang—one could hear these sounds despite the boss' talk.

"Let's make it brief. If you've got the men disorderly, you've got to bring 'em in order. Isn't that right? Otherwise you're not worth your salt. Aren't I right Sova?"

"I don't know. It doesn't interest me," she said calmly.

The boss suddenly brightened:

"Nothing interests you, you fool-woman! How are you going to live, I'd like to know?"

"I won't take lessons from you...."

She sat leaning back in her chair, stirring the tea in a small blue cup in which she had put five lumps of sugar. Her white blouse had come open in front, exposing a large goodly breast in blue veins heavily charged with blood. Her incongruous face looked sleepy or thoughtful, her lips relaxed like those of a child.

"So well," went on the boss, searching my face with a brightened eye, "I want to fix you up in Sashka's place, eh?"

"Thanks. I won't take it."

"Why not?"

"Doesn't suit me...."

"How d'you mean?"

"Well—my soul's not in the job."

"Again the soul!" he sighed, and having damned the soul in picturesque terms, continued in a squealing voice, with withering scorn:

"If I could at least get one look at that blessed soul I'd try it with my fingernail—see what it's made of. It's crazy—everyone talks about it, but you never see it! All you see is just sheer stupidity, sticky like pitch—oh, you.... When you do get hold of a fellow who has a scrap of honesty, he's sure to be a fool...."

Sofia slowly raised her eyelashes, together with her brows, smiled ironically and asked gaily:

"I wonder—have you met honest men?"

"I was honest myself when I was young!" he exclaimed in an unfamiliar voice, hitting himself in the chest, then prodded the girl in the shoulder:

"All right, now you're honest—but what's the use of it? You're a fool! So what?"

She broke into a laugh—it seemed to ring a little false: "There you are ... all you've seen is people like me.... Found an honest woman for you!"

He cried excitedly, his eyes flashing:

"I used to work and was ready to help everybody—so I was! I used to like it—helping people, I used to like having things pleasant around me ... but I'm not blind! When everybody begins to crawl over you like lice...."

It was distressing to the point of tears. A senseless ache, something dank and turbid like the mist outside, weighed upon the heart. Live with these people? One could sense in them an insoluble misery, be-

stowed on them for a lifetime, a sort of organic deformity of the heart and mind. One's heart was wrung with pity, weighed down by a sense of one's impotence to help them in any way, and they infected one with this nameless malady.

"Twenty rubles till Whitsun—take it?"

"No."

"Twenty-five? Come on? Have a good time, girls and everything!"

I felt like saying something to make him understand how impossible it was for us to live side by side, carry on together, but I could not find the necessary words and felt disconcerted under his heavy, expectant, and unbelieving gaze.

"Leave the man alone," said Sofia, putting sugar into the cup; the boss made a motion with his head:

"What'you cramming yourself with sugar for?"

"D'you grudge it?"

"It's bad for the health, you horse! Look the way you're bulging.... Ah, well! So we don't suit each other. You're against me for good and all?"

"I want you to dismiss me...."

"Well yes ... of course!" said the boss musingly, drumming his fingers. "So... so! He that will not when he may, when he fain would shall have nay. Have your tea, go on.... We met without joy and parted without blows...."

We drank our tea long and silently. The samovar gabbled like a contented dove and the ventilation fan maundered like an old beggar woman. Sofia looked into her cup, smiling meditatively.

Suddenly the boss asked her in a voice once more grown cheerful:

"A penny for your thoughts, Sova? Trump it up right away!"

She started, then sighed and let fall in a slow, flat, toneless voice, like a very sick woman, strange words that burned themselves for ever into my memory:

"I was thinking—after the altar, bride and bridegroom should be locked up in church, all by theirselves, that's what they ought to do...."

"Faugh!" the boss spat. "What gibberish she thinks up...."

"Ye-es," she drawled with knitted brows, "I bet you it'd be stronger then ... you rotters would then...."

The boss rose up from his chair, giving the table a heavy jolt.

"Stop that! Harping on it again?"

She lapsed into silence, shifting the tea things back into place.

I got up.

"Well, run along," said the boss morosely. "Go on. Ah well!"

In the street, still wrapped in mist, the walls of the houses oozed turbid tears. Dark figures straggled lonesomely in the wet gloom. Somewhere smithies were at work—two hammers could be heard in measured beats, and they seemed to be asking:

"Are those people? Is that life?"

I took my last pay on Saturday, and Sunday morning the boys arranged a farewell party: in a dirty but cosy little public house there gathered Shatunov, Artem, the Gypsy, the gentle Laptev, the soldier, Nikita the boiler and Vanok Ulanov in cheap lustrine trousers worn over his boots and a dazzling waistcoat with glass buttons over a new pink cotton shirt. The novelty and gaudiness of his outfit quenched the insolent light of his shameless eyes, his shrivelled little face looked inane, and a guarded timidity appeared in all his movements, as though he were all the time afraid of his costume splitting or of someone coming up and taking the waistcoat off his narrow chest.

All the men had been to a bath the previous evening and today had smeared their hair with oil, which imparted a holiday gloss.

The Gypsy took charge of the ceremonies, shouting out orders like a junketing merchant:

"Waiter—some more hot water!"

We drank tea, and vodka in the same breath, which rapidly reduced us all to a state of bland and subdued intoxication. Laptev rubbed his shoulder against me and, pushing me to the wall, urged:

"Let's have a last word before you go, an eye opener . . . we need the word badly, you know . . . a straight, true word! . . ."

Shatunov, sitting opposite me, lowered his eyes under the table, explaining to Nikita:

"A man's a passing thing. . . ."

"Where's one to go," sighed the boiler sadly, "how's one to go. . . ."

Everybody looked at me in a way that made me feel very embarrassed and very sad—I might have been going far away, never to see these men any more who were today so oddly near and dear to me.

"But I'm staying here in town," I reminded them again and again, "we shall be seeing one another. . . ."

But the Gypsy, tossing his black locks and solicitously watchful that the tea he was pouring out was of uniform strength, tempered his ringing voice and said:

"Though you're staying here in town, but you won't be feeding our bugs any more."

Artem commented softly with a gentle smile:

"You're not the word of our songs any more. . . ."

It was warm in the public house; savoury odours tickled the nostrils, and makhorka smoke floated around in blue misty waves. The heady noises of a clear spring day poured freely into an open window in the corner, swaying the drooping flowerets of the purple fuchsia and stirring the plant's edged little leaves.

A clock hung on the wall facing me, its pendulum drooping motionless and weary and its dark handless dial resembling Shatunov's broad face, which today looked more drawn than usual.

"A man, I tell you, is a passing affair," he repeated insistently. "A man goes his way and passes. . . ."

His face had taken on a sallow tone, and his eyes closed gently with a swift smile:

"I like to sit by the gates of an evening and watch the people go by: unknown people hurrying to an unknown destination . . . and maybe some of 'em . . . with a good soul in 'em. May the Lord bless 'em!"

Maudlin little tears welled from under his lashes and suddenly disappeared as though they had instantly dried on his flushed face. He repeated hollowly:

"May God give 'em all his blessings! And now let's drink to friendship, to affection and good-fellowship!"

We quaffed the toast and exchanged succulent kisses, nearly upsetting the loaded table in the process. Nightingales sang in my breast and I loved all these men with a poignant heartache. The Gypsy smoothed his moustache—incidentally wiping a little sneer off his lips—and likewise made a speech:

"Lord lumme, sometimes, brothers, your heart plays such a grand tune—just like a Mordvinian psaltery! Take the other day, when we all stood up against Semyonov, and today . . . here, now. . . . You

can't help it! I just feel noble—you can say what you damned like! A reg'lar gentleman s'elp me God! And I won't yield an inch to anybody! Say anything you like, tell me straight what you think of me—I won't be the least offended. Swear at me—say Pashka's a thief, a scoundrel! I won't accept it... won't believe it! That's why I won't get angry, because I won't believe it! And—I know the way of life.... Osip—what you said about people—it's quite right! I used to think, brother, you were a dull-witted man, but I'm mistaken! You're quite right—we're all worthy people...."

Nikita the boiler came out softly and sadly with his first words that morning:

"We're all ... very unhappy...."

Amid the general merriment and gay conversation these words went unnoticed, as unnoticeable among men was the person who had uttered them. He was by this time in a mellow state and sat nodding drowsily, his eyes quenched, his peaked face resembling a faded maple leaf.

"Strength's in friendship." Laptev was saying to Artem.

Shatunov said to me:

"Keep an ear open for the words, pick 'em up—maybe they'll form the verse!"

"How will I know whether they'll form it?"

"You'll know!"

"What if they form a different verse?"

"A different verse?"

Osip eyed me suspiciously, then said after a moment's thought:

"There can't be a different verse! For the general happiness of men there's only one verse, there isn't any other!"

"But how am I going to know that it's the one?"

He lowered his eyes and whispered mysteriously:

"You'll see! Everybody'll see it at once!"

Vanok fidgeted in his chair, running an eager eye over the room which was now filled with a noisy crowd. He moaned:

"Gee, it'd be good to strike up a song now!"

Then suddenly gripping the seat of his chair and shrinking, he gasped in a terrified whisper:

"Sh ... the boss!..."

The Gypsy seized a full bottle of vodka and swiftly set it down under the table, then immediately placed it firmly back on the table, saying in annoyance:

"This is a pub...."

"So it is!" Artem threw in loudly, and all fell silent, pretending not to notice the fat bulk of the boss threading its way among the tables and waddling down impressively towards our company. Artem took notice of him first and half-rose from his seat with a cheerful greeting:

"Happy holiday, Vassili Semyonich!"

Halting within a couple of paces Semyonov silently scanned the company with his green eye—the men too greeted him with a silent bow.

"Chair," he said quietly.

The soldier jumped up and gave him his.

"Drinking vodka?" he said, settling himself into it with a heavy sigh.

"Having tea," said Pashka with a grin.

"Out o' bottles...."

The whole room seemed to be hushed in tense expectancy of a row, but Osip Shatunov got up, filled his glass with vodka and held it out to the boss, saying gently:

"Drink our health with us, Vassili Semyonich...."

A sickening weight oppressed the heart as the boss with slow deliberation lifted his short heavy arm—and one was uncertain whether he would knock the glass out of the profferred hand or take it.

"Why not," he said at length, gripping the stem of the wineglass between his fingers.

"And we'll drink yours!"

The boss stared into the glass with his green eye, gnawing his lips, and repeated:

"Why not.... Well ... cheerio, then!"

He splashed the vodka into the froggy aperture of his mouth. Pashka's swarthy face broke out in spots. Swiftly refilling the glasses with a shaky hand he said in a ringing voice:

"Don't be angry with me, Vassili Semyonich, we're people, too, you know! You were a workman yourself, you ought to know...."

"Come, come, don't play the fox," the boss interrupted in a quiet moody tone, examined us each in turn with a reminiscent look, brought his gaze to rest on my face and said with a sneer:

"People.... You're not people, you're jailbirds.... Come on, let's drink...."

Russian good nature, never quite devoid of cunning, twinkled softly in his eye, and that twinkle fanned a flame in all our hearts—little smiles appeared upon the men's faces, and an abashed guilty look flitted like a shadow in their eyes.

We clinked glasses and drank. The Gypsy burst out again:

"I want to speak the truth...."

"Don't holler!" said the boss making a wry face and waving him off. "Yelling right in my ear! Who the devil wants your truth? Work is what's wanted...."

"Wait a minute! Didn't I show you work these three days?"

"You'd do better if you did your own thinking...."

"No, you just tell me—didn't I show work...."

"That's how it should be."

"That's how it will be!"

The boss took stock of us all in a single glance, nodded his head and repeated once more:

"That's how it should be. I say nothing—what's good is good! Here, soldier-boy, order a dozen of beer...."

The command sounded triumphant and still further raised the general good humour. The boss shut his eyes and added:

"I've drunk rivers of vodka with strangers, but it's a long time since I've drunk with my own folks...."

This was the last drop of oil on hearts that hungered for kindness, human hearts that were robbed of the joys of life. All drew closer together, and Shatunov said with a sigh, on behalf of all as it were:

"We didn't in the least want to offend you—but we were fagged out, had a hard time over the winter, that's the reason."

I felt I was out of place amid this festive reconciliation which grew ever more unpleasant. The beer went quickly to the men's heads, already fuddled with vodka fumes, and they gazed with ever-growing canine rapture at the boss' coppery face—it even struck me as rather unusual, that face, with its green eye lighted up by a gentle, trustful, wistful look.

The boss spoke in a quiet casual tone, like a man who knew that his meaning would be grasped at once, while he wound his silver watch chain round his fingers:

"There are no strangers here.... We're all fellow countrymen I take it, all from the same county...."

"Duckie, so we are! Fellow countryman," appealed Laptev in a thrilled voice of inebrious emotion.

"What's a dog want with wolf's habits? A dog like that's no good about the house...."

The soldier bawled at the top of his voice:

"Atten-shun! Hark!"

The Gypsy, peering furtively into the shrewd eyes of his master, yelped foxishly:

"You think I don't understand anything?"

The atmosphere grew merrier and another dozen of beer was ordered. Osip lurched against me and said with a sluggish tongue:

"The boss ... he's the same as the bishop ... the archbishop in the monastery's the boss!..."

"Who wants him here, damned nuisance!" added Artem in an undertone.

The boss mechanically drained glass after glass of beer in silence, clearing his throat now and then impressively, as though he were about to say something. He took no notice of me, and his glance occasionally alighted on my face with a blank unseeing expression.

I got up imperceptibly and went out into the street, but Artem overtook me, well in his cups, and burst into tears, saying through his sobs:

"Ah, brother ... I'm left all alone now ... all alone!..."

I met the boss several times on the street; we greeted each other, he solemnly raising his warm cap with a plump hand, saying:

"Keeping alive?"

"Keeping alive."

"Well, keep on," he sanctioned and, casting a critical glance over my clothes, he propelled his bulk off sedately.

One of these encounters took place outside a public house, and the boss proposed:

"What about a drink of beer?"

We descended four steps to a little room in a semi-basement; the boss sought out the darkest corner, lowered himself onto a thick-legged stool, and threw a look round as if counting the tables—there were five of them, besides our own, all covered with pinkish-grey rags. A little old woman with drowsily nodding grey head in a dark shawl was knitting a stocking behind the bar.

The grey, stone, indestructibly stout walls were adorned with squares of pictures; one of them depicted a scene of wolf hunting, another, General Loris-Melikov minus one ear, a third Jerusalem, and the fourth a pair of bare-breasted girls, on one of whose broad bosoms was clearly inscribed in large printed characters: "Vera Galanova, the students' darling, price 3 kopecks," while the other had her eyes gouged out. These absurd and incongruous blotches exercised a very depressing effect.

Through the door glass one could see, above the green roof of a new building, the flushed evening sky, and high up in the air an innumerable flock of jackdaws.

The boss, breathing wheezily, surveyed the dismal place, questioned me idly as to how much I was earning, whether I was pleased with the job—he was obviously loath to speak and a prey to that peculiar Russian form of sickening boredom. Slowly sipping his beer he placed the empty glass on the table and gave it a flick with his finger—the glass toppled over, and I caught it before it rolled off.

"What for?" the boss said quietly. "Should ha' let it drop . . . it'd smash, I'd pay for it. . . ."

The church bells hastily began ringing for evening service, startling the jackdaws in the sky into a flurry.

"I like this kind o' place," resumed Semyonov, pointing his hand into the corner. "Quiet and no flies. Flies like the sun, its warmth. . . ."

He suddenly smiled quizzically:

"That fool-woman Sovka has gone and hooked up with a deacon! A bald-headed, seedy-looking fellow, and, of course, a hopeless drunkard. A widower. He chants hymns to her, and she cries like a child. . . . She shouts at me . . . but I—what do I care? I find it amusing. . . ."

He choked on some unuttered word, then went on in a jocular vein:

"I had an idea of marrying you two—you and Sofia.... I wonder how you'd have got on together!..."

This amused me, too, and my laugh evoked from him an answering, whimpering little laugh.

"Devils!" he howled, shaking his shoulders. "Blessed devils not of our God's creation ... phew...."

He wrung the tiny tears out of his variegated eyes with his fingers.

"What d'you think of Osip—you remember him? Chucked his job, the ass...."

"Where's he gone?"

"On a pilgrimage, they say.... With his experience and at his age he should ha' been a baker a long time ago—he's a good workman, knows his job, yes...."

He shook his head, drank some beer and, gazing at the sky from under a cupped hand, remarked:

"Look how many jackdaws! Wedding time.... Well, brother Blatterer—what's superfluous and what is really needed? Nobody, brother, knows exactly.... The deacon says: 'What's needed is for men, what's superfluous is for God!'... Of course he was drunk. Everyone wants to find an excuse for himself.... Look how many superfluous people there are in the towns—awful! All eating and drinking—but whose bread and drink is it, eh? Yes.... And where does it all come from?"

He suddenly rose to his feet, dropped a hand in his pocket and held the other out to me. His face wore a far-away look and his eye narrowed intently:

"Must be going. Good-bye."

He drew out a heavy frayed purse and said quietly as he fumbled in it with his fingers:

"The police inspector was enquiring about you the other day...."

"What did he want?"

The boss looked at me from under knitted brows and said in a tone of unconcern:

"Asked about your character, your tongue.... I told him your character was bad, and tongue too long. Well, good-bye!"

Pushing the door wide, and placing his stubby legs firmly on the worn steps he hoisted his ponderous stomach into the street.

I never saw him again, but ten years later I had occasion to learn, by a mere accident, of the end of his business career. The warder—I was in a political prison—brought me some sausage wrapped up in a bit of newspaper, and in that scrap of newsprint I read the following report:

"On Good Friday our town witnessed a rather curious spectacle. Vassili Semyonich Semyonov, the bun and pretzel baker, well known in the business world, rode about the town in a tearful condition, paying visits to the homes of his creditors whom he sobbingly assured that he was absolutely ruined and implored them to put him in prison. Knowing the prosperous state of his affairs, no one believed him, and his importunate wish to spend the holidays in prison merely raised a laugh—the eccentricities of this odd gentleman were well known to everybody. But what was the consternation of the commercial world when several days later it transpired that Semyonov had disappeared without a trace, leaving debts to the sum of about fifty thousand rubles and having disposed of everything that was saleable! There can be no doubt that this is a case of fraudulent bankruptcy."

There followed an account of futile search for the insolvent fugitive, the exasperation of the creditors and reminiscences of Semyonov's various oddities. I read this bit of soiled and greasy paper and stopped by the window lost in thought—these cases of fraudulent, improvident and unfortunate bankruptcies, these cases of stealthy, cowardly, impotent feeling of life were too frequent with us in Russia.

What malady is it, what calamity?

You have a man who lives and tries to create something, draws into the channel of his intentions a multitude of other men's brain, will and brawn, devours a mass of human effort, then suddenly and capriciously throws it all up unfinished and unaccomplished, and very often throws himself out of life. And so the arduous toil of men perishes without a trace, and the fruit of often painful travail withers in the bud.

The wall of the prison is old and low and not terrifying—immediately beyond it, mounting into the caressing spring sky, looms the red-brick pile of the wine monopoly, and next to it, in a maze of scaffolding, a new tenement house is being built.

Farther stretches a barren field, perforated by deep gullies and covered with green turf, and there, on the right, stands a sombre clump of trees on the edge of a ravine overhanging the Jewish cemetery. The golden buttercups dance in the field, a fat black fly strikes senselessly against the grimy windowpane—and I call to mind the boss' quiet words:

"Flies like the sun, its warmth. . . ."

Suddenly the dark basement of the public house rises before my eyes with its incongruous series of gaily-coloured pictures—the wolf-hunting scene, the city of Jerusalem, Vera Galanova "price 3 kopecks," the general without an ear.

"I like this kind o' place," the boss had said in a voice that sounded human.

I did not want to think of him. I gaze instead out of the window across the field, at the edge of which stands a blue forest, and beyond it, downhill, flows the Volga, the great river—it seems to flow sweepingly through one's soul, smoothly washing away the useless past.

"What's superfluous and what is really needed?" the boss' words jar on the memory.

I can see him with his bulky body lolling in the seat of the carriage, jouncing up and down, as he watches the hurrying current of life with a keen green eye. The wooden Yegor is perched on the box with his arms stretched taut like strings, and the grey ill-tempered horse strides out on its strong legs, its hoofs clattering loudly on the cold stone of the roadway.

"Yego' . . . whose am I? Devours a sheep—fills his belly—but, Christ, he's miserable!"

There was a suffocating sensation of something rising in the breast, as though the heart were swelling, overflowing with an agonizing pity for a man who does not know what to do with himself, who can find no place for himself on earth—perhaps through a surfeit of energy and not merely through indolence and the slavish pranks of a "recruit"?

One feels pity like a poignant pain—it matters not who he is, one pities the shipwreck of frustrated vitality, and he excites a passionate and conflicting feeling, like a mischievous child in the heart of a mother: one must strike him where one would fain caress him. . . .

The little figures of the bricklayers can be seen crawling over the lime-spattered planks of the scaffolding enfolding the huge red bulk of the new edifice, clustering at the top of the building like little bees, pushing it up higher and higher every day.

And as I gaze at this busy hum of men and doings I call to mind that somewhere amid the maze of roads of the great and perplexing world, slowly wends his way a lonely wayfarer, Osip Shatunov, gazing about him with mistrustful eyes, lending an eager ear to spoken words—mayhap they will form into the "verse of general happiness."

A DROLL STORY

WHEN THE RED-HAIRED doctor with the large nose, after tapping Yegor Bykov's body with his cold fingers, said emphatically, in his deep bass voice that the disease had been neglected and was now dangerous, Bykov felt as if someone had wronged him, just as he had felt on that pitch-dark night, in his young days, when he was a raw recruit, during the Turkish war, lying among the prickly bushes at Yeni-Zagra with a broken leg, the rain drenching him to the skin and the pain unhurriedly ripping his flesh from his bones.

"Does that mean I'm going to die?" he asked.

The doctor sat down at the table to write out a prescription, tried the rusty pen and mumbled something, but Bykov, staring resentfully at the window did not hear him. In the street feathers, shavings and dust were being driven helter-skelter before the wind.

"You have been drinking too much," the doctor said.

The sick man mentally swore at the doctor and answered angrily:

"That's not the cause. Lots of people drink, don't they? But they don't all die before their time!"

He heard a still small voice within him say tantalizingly:

"Take a hen. She will go on living, lay eggs and hatch chickens. But you—you will die, and all the labour of your hard life will have been in vain."

Silently seeing the doctor to the door, Bykov, wearing slippers on his bare feet and a grey dressing gown over his underclothing, glanced at the mirror. It reflected with unusual distinctness a narrow, gaunt face, mournfully lit up by greenish eyes, and a long straight beard that fell from his cheeks and chin to his breast. The face did not look good.

Bykov sighed, moaned softly, sat down in a leather armchair by the window and, breathing hard through his nose, felt a gnawing pain in his right side, tirelessly boring through his liver and causing the

drunken feeling of weakness and resentment at having been wronged to spread all over his body.

"I've been drinking too much! But what do you solace yourself with, fool?" he snarled at the doctor, whom he saw getting into his droshky.

"Shall I put the samovar on?"

The fat, stupid cook, Agaphia, stood at the door.

"How many times have I told you, red mug, not to put the armchair in the sun, near the window! Look how it's faded. Do you think the sun shines to spoil furniture?"

"You shifted it there yourself," answered Agaphia, quite unruffled.

Bykov remembered how painful it had been for him to shift the heavy armchair, and this, together with the woman's unruffled demeanour, irritated him still more.

"Go to the devil!" he said.

Agaphia vanished. Bykov, watching her go, thought to himself bitterly:

"She will live another forty years, but I must die! What's going to happen to the property? I didn't even have time to get married, I was always so busy. I should have married immediately after the war; I would have had children now. Prudence prevented me. And I began taking the cure too late. Who was to know that my life was fated to be a short one?"

His head sank to his breast and he complained aloud:

"Oh, Lord, Lord...."

What vexed him, and seemed sillier than all, was that he had no one to whom to leave the property he had accumulated after twenty years of effort and cunning. Leave it to a monastery, or to some other holy cause? His reason could not consent to this. He knew perfectly well that priests and monks, and other people who had charge of God's property on earth, were unreliable, that they were ignorant sinners no less than he was. And he was not quite certain about God either. His attitude towards God was one of wariness and distrust. He always felt that God knew all his deeds and thoughts, that He was closely watching him, and that it was no other than God who had repeatedly put a spoke in his wheel, had rebuked him for his avarice, which was only human, and the driving force of life. There were times when he, Bykov, had had certain matters all nicely arranged, but suddenly a

small flame flared up in his soul, like a match, and awakened grey, nebulous thoughts, awakened the fear of sin and of punishment, and sometimes even roused something resembling a feeling of pity towards men, which, however, he succeeded in suppressing.

He realized perfectly well that it was not the Devil who was playing with him, but God, compelling him, against his own reason, to yield to people; and he used to say, half in jest and half in resentment, to his hanger-on and confidant, Kickin, a timid hunchback, with eyes like a bird's:

"Why should I have pity for people? Nobody had pity for me. Nobody treated me with kindness."

"Absurd, of course," agreed Kickin.

Suddenly remembering Kickin, he took up a broomstick and tapped at the ceiling with it. Two or three moments later a little hunchback came noiselessly through the door. He had bandylegs and as he walked one foot stepped over the other, and he waddled like a duck.

"Well?" he asked, timidly blinking his eyes like a sick hen.

"I'm going to die! Do you hear?"

Kickin passed the palm of his hand down his beardless face.

"Perhaps he's lying," he said, meaning the doctor.

"No. I know it myself."

"Humph! It's too early."

"That's the whole point! Bah! What does it matter. If I must die, I must. You can't escape death. I am a soldier. But what am I going to do with my property?"

The hunchback poured out the tea, scraping his feet on the floor as he did so, and said with a sigh:

"According to the law, your property should pass to your nephew, Yakov Somov."

"Yes, he's my nephew, once removed!" growled Bykov angrily, and the anger intensified the pain in his side. "I don't even know what he's like. I haven't seen him more than about five times."

"Still, according to the law...."

"The law!..." snapped Bykov with an oath.

"In that case, leave it to charity," advised Kickin hesitantly.

"Oh, no! I won't sow my seeds on stony places."

"That's not amusing, of course."

Bykov thought for a while, and after giving vent to his wrath a little longer he told the hunchback to invite the nephew to come and see him the next day.

"I'll see what kind of an animal he is," he said.

Yakov Somov came in the evening, bowed respectfully, and without offering to shake hands, said:

"How do you do?"

His voice was not loud, but clear and high-pitched, and the words he uttered sounded significant: they were obviously not empty words, but filled with goodwill. He was not tall, but well-built, mild, bluish eyes shone serenely in his rugged face, a tuft of fair hair stuck out obstinately over his left ear like a Cossack's forelock and a small, fair, curly moustache glistened beneath his large nose. There was something strong, clean and attractive about him. Bykov noticed this at once, but, habitually suspicious of people, he said to himself:

"A stupid face. He must be a petticoat hunter."

Closely scrutinizing the young man, who was poorly dressed in a blue blouse, a duck jacket, and trousers of the same material worn over his top boots, Bykov, wincing with pain, enquired of his nephew in a matter-of-fact way how old he was, what his occupation was, how he spent his spare time, and so forth. It transpired that Yakov was nineteen years old, was a salesman in a timber yard, sang first tenor in the church choir, and was fond of fishing and reading. Listening to the lad calmly relating all this, Bykov thought to himself resentfully:

"He talks as if he were at confession. He must be lying. He has guessed why I have called him, and is pretending to be a goody-goody."

Involuntarily he blurted out with a crooked smile on his sallow face:

"I am dying!"

And he heard the lad answer:

"Why should you say that?"

"What do you mean, why?" Bykov asked in surprise and anger. "I'm very sick!"

And then he said emphatically to himself:

"That boy's a fool!"

But Yakov Somov went on to speak in a soothing, persuasive tone that sounded strange to Bykov.

"There's a cure for every illness," he said. "Carrot juice, for example. A year ago I got consumption, and our choirmaster's mother, a very kind and wise old lady, suggested that I should drink a glass of carrot juice every morning on an empty stomach. I did, and I got well."

Smiling pleasantly, Somov passed his hand down his throat and chest, and Bykov felt as if the calm words his nephew was uttering were easing his pain.

"You had consumption, but I have something else," he said.

"But consumption is a disease too. You must certainly try carrot juice, or horse-radish pickled in alcohol. Horse-radish is better, because it contains saltpetre, and saltpetre is the best thing against decay. When fish is salted they add saltpetre to prevent them from decaying. All disease is a product of decay, you know."

It was exceedingly pleasant to hear Yakov Somov speaking. The words poured from his lips like fine sand, and buried Bykov's distrust of his nephew's youthfulness.

"How do you know all this?" he asked him.

Yakov eagerly, as if relating it to an old friend, told Bykov about a friend he had had, an educated man and a splendid angler, who had committed suicide the previous autumn.

"Why did he do that?"

"Because of unrequited love...."

"Commit suicide—that's silly!"

"He was straightforward."

"What's that?"

"He was straightforward in his feelings...."

"Ah!" said Bykov to himself. "He's a queer lad. Talkative. He's young, of course...."

And so, quite a time passed in this light conversation until Somov, glancing at the slow-moving hands of the clock on the wall, said that it was time for him to go for rehearsal, and after respectfully taking leave, he went away.

Yegor Bykov stretched out on a couch and became lost in thought. Long conversations always tired him. What was there to talk about? You can see at once what a man wants of you, and you always know what you want of him. But this one was different, even though he was a boy. He was modest and made no reference to his relationship with Bykov. He did not call him uncle once, although he certainly knew his

uncle was quite alone. Perhaps it was only his craftiness? But it didn't look like it.

Kickin came back from the warehouse, where he had been taking in a consignment of hemp, sat down at the table, tired and perspiring, and asked:

"Was he here?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"You can't tell at first sight, but he seems to be friendly."

Kickin poured out the tea, and hungrily and greedily chewing bread and sausage, listened closely to his master's musing.

"He's one of the soothing sort. They are deceivers. I don't trust 'em. Nor the friendly ones either—they're not the quality for me. People are accustomed to live as if the Lord had sent them to make a laughing stock of each other."

"That's true!" said the hunchback feelingly. All his life he had been mercilessly ridiculed for his deformity.

"That's the whole point! And the Devil sets us against each other like fighting cocks. People sin and the Devil laughs, but nobody knows what God's intentions are. The Lord, like the police-officer in the theatre, looks on and says nothing...."

Bykov went on talking in this resentful tone for some time and then, wearily closing his eyes, he asked:

"What have you heard about him, Yakov, I mean."

Kickin spread some honey on a slice of bread, turned round together with his chair, and reported:

"His master, Titov, says that he is an industrious lad, but he sometimes lets his imagination run away with him."

"What does he mean?"

"Titov couldn't explain, but as far as I could understand, Yakov is inclined to do things he ought not to. I asked the Deacon about him, and he can't praise him enough. But, of course, you can't believe what he says, because they are friends, they go fishing together. His landlady told me that he drinks only in company, and the company he keeps are a poor lot—the foundrymen at Kononov's, mechanics and the barber...."

"You don't expect him to keep company with the City Governor, do you?"

"He doesn't bring any women home. He likes cleanliness and order, and he's kind."

"Kind?"

"Yes."

"That's because he's young! Well, well.... He must be aware that you've been making enquiries about him and must guess why I called him, don't you think so?"

"I doubt it. I was very careful."

Bykov stopped talking and thought for a while. Then he said:

"Well, what's to be done? I suppose it's got to be. Still, make some more enquiries about him. And tell him to come here again. Say that I forgot to invite him."

And then he exclaimed in a tone of gloomy vexation:

"But just think what's happened to me! I slaved and slaved, and accumulated so many sins on my soul—but for whom? For a stranger, a milksop! What do you think of that, eh?"

"It's a bad joke," the hunchback said emphatically, blinking his round eyes.

Bykov's illness seemed to have been waiting for the doctor's verdict, for after the latter's visit it took a rapid turn for the worse. The dull pain in his side increased. His mind became confused, and he felt as though the maggots of sorrow and resentment were tirelessly wriggling and gnawing in every part of his body.

"How's things?" enquired Kickin.

Bykov growled in his surly manner:

"Hard. This is the first time I'm dying. I'm not used to it yet."

He was fond of a joke and could crack a good one himself. This gift stood him in good stead when the people he had wronged reviled and swore at him.

"It was God's will that I should get the better of you," he would say on such occasions.

He was not in the mood for jesting now, however. It was from sheer force of habit that he, as always, had jeered at Kickin, who was impervious to ridicule. He remained on his couch for whole days with his head in the corner, under the icon, feeling that it was becoming hollow like a drum, empty of all thought except one:

"I'm dying. Why?"

Now and again, to drown this thought, he muttered the half-forgotten words of the prayer:

"Lord, God, Almighty ... deliver me from all torment, preserve me from wickedness ... from evil spirits, of the day and of the night...."

But he found that far from helping him to resign himself to the will of God, to the inevitability of his untimely death, these words only intensified his sense of wrong and suffering.

He got up, and throwing a grey dressing gown over his shoulders, he walked past the mirror to the blue, bottomless pit of the window. The mirror, as he passed it, reflected a tall, gaunt figure, ashen face, dull eyes and matted beard like those of a man in jail. He picked up a comb from the dressing table, sat down in the armchair, combed his hair and beard, and then sat gazing into the street, at the houses, separated by thickly-planted gardens, solidly built and strong, calculated to last for centuries.

The street was hot, quiet, and deserted. The neighbours had all left for their country houses, and the janitors were idling at the gates. It was very quiet, except for the birds twittering in the gardens; but this did not disturb his bitter thoughts of God's injustice.

"Those houses, for example," he mused, "those brick human nests, built on foundations that lie deep in the ground, will stand for an incalculable time, but man, the builder of houses, who beautifies the earth with the labour of his hands, is condemned to die within a short space of time. Why? Why is Yegor Ivanov Bykov, Cavalier of the Order of St. George and Merchant of the Second Guild, who has not yet lived half a century, condemned to an untimely death? Is he more sinful than others? And should a man be condemned to death for being a sinner?"

The sick man felt better on the evenings when Yakov Somov came. His nephew's conversation distracted him from his gloomy thoughts and aroused acute interest in this young man, a desire to understand him. It also aroused burning envy of him, because he would live long, lead a quiet life and be rich, and all as a result of another's labours. He would be able to live without sinning. Wasn't that unjust? And even ridiculous and silly?

Yakov's conversation was indeed extremely interesting, and often Bykov was pleasantly surprised by their novelty. But to him it seemed

that the views his nephew expressed were a strange compound of folly and wisdom. This prevented him from arriving at a definite opinion about his nephew, although he was in a hurry to form that opinion.

"Is he foolish by nature, or because of his youth?" he would ask himself as he listened to Yakov. The latter smiled pensively and said:

"It's dull to live as other people live, but it is hard to live differently."

"That's so," agreed Bykov. "But people are not all alike."

And he was extremely vexed when this good-looking lad, who while not actually challenging that last remark, nevertheless went on to say with emphasis:

"They're all alike in the main thing, if you look into it properly."

"What is the main thing?"

"Wanting to live on the fruits of other people's labour."

Bykov silently stroked his beard and thought about the matter. Yes, his nephew was right. But he himself will be living on the fruits of his, Bykov's, labour. Did he understand that, or not? If he understood it, then he was arguing against his own interests and was therefore a fool. And if he did not understand it, he was a fool, just the same.

Trying to probe down to the very essence of Yakov's character, he said:

"Life, little brother, is like war. Its law is very simple: Don't miss your opportunity!"

"That's quite true. And that's the cause of all the trouble."

"But trouble cannot be avoided!"

Yakov smiled, but said nothing.

Bykov thought that the smile on his nephew's virginal face was inopportune, unjustified, unnecessary, and that there was something offensively condescending about it.

"He thinks he's clever," he thought to himself, peering at Yakov through his half-closed eyes.

What he disliked still more was when Somov stopped talking in the middle of a conversation and remained silent with lowered eyes, fingering his teaspoon, or a button on his coat; remained silent like a man who had something very important to say but did not wish to say it.

Once this silence so infuriated Bykov that he burst out hoarsely:

"Do you understand what I'm saying to you, or don't you?"

Yakov answered politely, even guiltily:

"I understand, but I don't agree!"

"Why not?"

"I have a different opinion."

"What opinion? Out with it! Talk and argue! Why do you keep quiet?"

Yakov answered in the same polite tone:

"I don't like to argue. And besides, I can't. In my opinion, argument only perpetuates disagreement among men."

"So people ought to keep quiet! Is that what you mean?"

Yakov ignored this question and went on to explain:

"People argue not in order to find the truth, but rather to conceal it," he said. "The truth that has been given to men is very simple: Become as little children. Love thy neighbour as thyself. It is disgraceful to argue against that."

"He's a saint!" thought Bykov in vexation, and he laughed sardonically, although the laugh increased his pain.

"Well, can you be like a child? Can you love your neighbour? Tell me! Ekh! Just now you agreed that life was like war, and now.... That won't do, little brother. That's weak!"

Unabashed by this banter, Yakov said with quiet persistence:

"After all, there is no other way of averting unhappiness, and people ought to turn their thoughts in this direction."

"Where to? Which direction?"

"In the direction of living simply, like children."

"You are a fool, young man! Children are the most vicious creatures on earth, don't you know that? Watch them, and see how they pummel each other like little savages."

The nephew smiled, but said nothing.

Bykov wanted to upbraid him but restrained himself. Moaning with pain he said gloomily:

"All right. Go! I'm tired."

He sat down at the window, and watching the reddish clouds casting their glare over the gardens he became lost in thought.

"A queer lad!" he mused. "His brain is full of jelly. He's like a shadow, you can't get hold of him, nohow.

"Oh, Lord! Riddles, riddles everywhere....

"He eats slowly. That's a bad sign. Lazy people eat slowly. And he eats little, bites off small pieces like a gentleman, and chews his

food for a long time like an old man, although his teeth are quite sound. And he is pensive. What's he got to think about at his age? And he walks pensively too, as if he were in a strange land. There is something of the 'beautiful maiden' in his face, and if it wasn't for his forelock he'd look quite like a girl.

"Become as little children . . . the fool! Try to live like that! Perhaps he isn't a fool, but simply softhearted. He hasn't been through the mill and his heart hasn't been hardened. And being young, the lad thinks he'll be able to go through life without being wronged or wronging others; without sin. That wouldn't be bad; but it's impossible!"

Bykov's thoughts ran over his own hard life and he became so filled with pity for himself that he felt he could spare a modicum of this pity for his nephew.

"He knows that it is hard to live differently from the way other people live, and he ought to know that life without sin is like porridge without butter. It would be dry. A man wants to sleep on a soft bed. Still, Yakov is a pleasant fellow, and he must have some Bykov blood in his veins."

But when Kickin came Bykov said sarcastically:

"Well, brother, my heir is not one of the perky sort. No! He's a saint! We must become as little children, he says. D'you hear that?"

"That's from the Bible," the hunchback said diffidently.

"What?"

"From the Bible. Christ there. . . ."

Bykov growled angrily, putting his hand to his aching side he hissed between his clenched teeth:

"Christ is the Son of God, but I am the son of Ivan Bykov, a peasant. That makes a lot of difference! Christ didn't deal in hemp, and he didn't live among us."

His anger rose, and banging his fist on the leather arm of his armchair he continued:

"If you want to live like Christ, take off your coat and boots and walk in sackcloth and barefoot! And cut off that forelock!"

Excitement tired him. He winced with pain and stopped speaking. After a while he growled at Kickin:

"And you too mumble: Christ, Christ! Christ is no companion for a hunchback. No. Do you hear? Birds, which are of no use to anyone, may sing, but a man must die. Christ was not aware of that."

Kickin said, cautiously prompting Bykov:

"In the garden of Gethsemane Christ also complained about his fate."

Bykov was delighted to hear this and he began to talk again, rapidly and excitedly:

"That's so! I remember that! There you are! He didn't like to die before his time. And I am only human...."

He groaned with pain, sank more deeply in his armchair, and stretching out his legs, said in a plaintive voice:

"Well, what's to be done, Kickin? Into whose hands will my property fall? This is downright mockery. I saved, and scraped, and sinned, and now all at once everything is to be thrown into the garbage pit. What?"

He went on in this strain for a long time, complainingly and angrily, extending his arm one moment and tapping the flower pots on the window sill another. Kickin listened to him with bowed head, drumming his fingers on the angular knee of his bandy legs. After a while he said:

"On the other hand, if Yakov is not to have the property, and if charitable institutions are not to have it, then it will be escheated, and the government will take it...."

Bykov clicked his teeth and said laughing:

"It sounds as if I've been deprived of all rights and condemned to life-long penal servitude!"

"Exactly. That's the joke."

"Funny, isn't it?"

"There's no other way...."

Both remained silent for a long time, each racking his brains to find another way out. At last the hunchback advised Bykov to invite Yakov Somov to come and live in the house, and while he was there to watch him more closely and teach him how to live. "Perhaps," he said, "the lad will settle down when he feels the responsibilities imposed upon him by the possession of property."

They decided to do this.

The rain beat against the windowpanes, the wind howled, and when the glassy twilight of the street was lit up by flashes of lightning and a bluish-grey light broke into the darkened room, it seemed as

though the flower pots were falling off the window sill, and as if everything in the room, shuddered and started moving across the floor to the white patch of the door.

The logs were burning brightly in the tiled stove. Yegor Bykov was sitting at the open grate, warming his cold feet, and warm, reddish patches flitted over his grey dressing gown, his knees and chest, lighting up part of his beard, but leaving his face in the shade, a blind face with closed eyes.

Kickin was sitting awkwardly huddled up on a low footstool with his arms folded over his pigeon chest, looking up into Yakov's face with a queer look in his eyes, which reflected the flickering flames. Yakov was leaning against the stove and speaking in a low, even voice, as if he were telling a story:

"The more property is accumulated, the more envy and hatred grow among men. The poor see this enormous wealth. . . ."

"Uhu!" exclaimed Bykov, opening his eyes. Kickin heaved a sigh, picked up the poker and stirred the fire in the stove. The wood crackled and a shower of burning embers dropped onto the copper sheet in front of the stove.

Bykov put out his foot to extinguish the embers and glowered. How ugly and unpleasant everything seemed to him! Kickin's face looked like a battered leather ball, tufts of grey hair protruded from his skull, his frog-like mouth was open with astonishment, and his ears were like those of a wild animal, like the Devil's. Yakov looked like a picture drawn on the white tiles, and although he was dressed well, everything he had on was new, it did not make him look any more attractive.

"Well?" Bykov asked ironically. "So you think the poor will dare to rob the rich, is that it?"

"There must be a fair division of wealth. . . ."

"Is that so?" said Bykov. "Is that so? Those are queer ideas you've got in your head, brother!"

"That's what millions think."

"Have you counted them?"

"It's true. The people are angry," said Kickin, cautiously, gazing into the fire. "They are all very discontented."

Bykov raised his eyebrows in an unnatural way and growled:

"You shut up! I'm not saying anything, am I?"

It was not yet two months since Yakov had moved into the house, but Bykov noticed that the hunchback was more and more often cautiously expressing agreement with Yakov's arguments, and that he looked at the lad in an obsequious way. The cur was evidently scenting its new master.

"What people, eh!" groaned Bykov in utter disgust.

And his nephew was either exceedingly foolish, or else extremely crafty. It was hard to say what he was after. He spoke so suavely and endearingly, and evidently wanted imperceptibly, to make people agree with him that the root of all unhappiness in life, the root of all its evils, lay in wealth. This was a deformed, a hunchback idea, and did not suit Yakov at all. He was obviously playing the hypocrite. But why? He knew that he would be rich when his uncle died, and he did not in the least look like a philanthropist who would give all his wealth to the poor. He displayed the habits of a businessman, showed respect for property, and had a passion for order and cleanliness. He soon made the janitor hustle and helped him to clean up the neglected courtyard; took stock of the goods in the warehouse and found that the salesman had been stealing. He obviously had no liking for beggars....

But still, he was a mystery. You couldn't get to the bottom of him, find out what he really was. And that forelock of his. He had a stubborn forelock like that sticking inside his noddle, in his brain.

What if he is talking all this extraordinary, disgusting heresy deliberately, to confuse and irritate a sick man in order to drive him into his grave the sooner? This thought alarmed Bykov as it flashed through his mind, and one day he bluntly asked Yakov:

"Why do you talk all this nonsense?"

"To make things clear," answered the nephew, opening wide his sheep-like eyes. His eyes were double too. Sometimes they looked so soft and kind; but most often they were fixed and dull, as if they were sightless—this was always the case when he talked his heresies.

"We must have clarity," he said. "All people must unite closely for their mutual assistance...."

"Unite! Against whom?" retorted Bykov in a hoarse, angry voice. "Where's the enemy? The enemy lies within the people themselves. Don't you understand that?"

"It is wrong to live in strife," answered the boy obstinately. "Is it not said: If you sow the wind you will reap the whirlwind? The public conscience must be appeased, otherwise there will be a nation-wide rebellion...."

"That's a lie!" shouted Bykov in a rage.

Day and night he asked himself whether Yakov was fit to be his heir, or not. These thoughts distracted his mind from the thought of death, and at times it even seemed to him that his pain was retreating before them.

"He's a mysterious fellow. Very mysterious! Every beggar knows that man's real fortress and protection in life is wealth, property. Even moles grubbing underground know that...."

At night, when everything on earth was wrapped in silence as if pondering over the departed day, when the thoughts of men becoming more ponderous, were almost visible and the tight skein of the mind, slowly unwinding, stretched its dark threads in all directions, Bykov, listening intently, guessed that the two upstairs were also awake. He even thought he could hear Yakov's persistent voice and see his eyes, and the look of amazement on the hunchback's wrinkled face. Evidently Yakov was talking about reforming the Constitution and of the necessity of restricting the power of the tsar. That whelp even dared to talk about things like that!

People had talked in whispers about this during the Turkish war, and they had begun to think like this again because war had broken out again. It was the civilians stirring up trouble because they didn't want to fight, were afraid of being called to arms. At the time of the Turkish war they even tried to kill the tsar but missed the opportunity, so they killed him after the war.

"But that's all nonsense! Joshua went to war. King David was a meek man and wrote psalms, and yet he could not help going to war. Monks went to war. Pious princes fought the Tatars. Saint Alexander Nevsky mercilessly beat the Swedes. But none of these were killed by their own people. What utter nonsense!"

Tired of the couch, Bykov got up and sat down by the window and gazed at the stars and at the chubby, womanish face of the moon. The sky, though gaudily decked with stars, exuded melancholy. He went on musing:

"Father Fyodor, the priest at the Cathedral, was fond of saying

that people did not admire enough the wonderful magnificence of the sky, but all the same he cheated at cards and nobody wanted to play with him."

He recalled the quarrel he had had with the priest after he had told him that there was nothing magnificent about the sky, that it reminded him of man's insignificance, and that it looked much better in the daytime when it was bare and lit up by the sun. The sky was more pleasant at night when it was hidden by clouds and you couldn't see it, and it seemed as if it wasn't there. Man was created for the earth, and when priests tried to take his mind off it, it was like dragging a conscript bridegroom from his wedding feast to the barracks. The priest had gone into a rage over that. . . .

The trees in the gardens had so closely merged with the darkness that it seemed as though somebody had dipped them in tar. The town was excruciatingly silent, so silent that one wanted to shout:

"Fire! Fire!"

"Lord, Lord! Why hast thou punished me?" groaned Bykov mentally. "Am I more sinful than other men?"

He reviewed the behaviour of his acquaintances. They were all worse than he, all more avaricious, and more covetous. He had a conscience: that is why he had never acquired intimate friends. He had lived his life alone, unhurriedly building himself a durable nest in which to lead a quiet life with a good and beautiful wife. It was good to have a handsome, buxom woman by one's side, to dress her like a doll, to go out with her on holidays, to ride with her in a carriage and pair and show off her finery, the jewels that ornamented her ample bosom, and thereby rouse the envy of all the other women. Yes, that was good!

Screwing up his eyes he peered through the twilight at the heavy furniture in the room and recalled with what hopes he had bought it Property is of great importance: with it a man lives as if in a fortress. If all the furniture were taken out of the room, the room would look like a large coffin.

"Oh, why? Oh, why? Oh, Lord?"

And all the time he was musing he thought he heard Yakov's voice in the hunchback's garret, whirring like a sewing machine, softly embroidering with words the pattern of his heresies.

"He sticks to his opinions. That's not bad, even if the opinions are childish. When I was young I didn't know what I wanted."

Imperceptibly Bykov's thoughts assumed a different hue. In any case, he had no other heir but Yakov. That was his luck! But he at once felt that this was irrational, and so he tried to invent some justification for it; but he could find none better than that the boy was modest and sober, and that he would grow wiser when he became rich.

When, for a brief moment, he stopped thinking of Somov as his heir and thought of him only as the lad he was, he really liked him. He felt with astonishment that in his nephew's queer, obstinate ideas, there was a reason different to the one which had guided his own life, a reason alien to him, but one that flowed from a heart unshadowed by life, that flowed from a strong belief in something. Often, observing how the involved and sometimes incomprehensible words of his nephew formed themselves into understandable ideas, he almost envied him, and he deliberately frowned in order to hide his involuntary smile. He thought to himself:

"Clever, isn't he? He's only a fledgeling, but how sweetly he sings! But when he gets my feathers, he'll sing a different song. It's easy for him, the little beast. . . ."

He liked particularly to hear Yakov speak about his former employer, Titov, to hear what an awful drunkard he was. Listening to him relate these stories about Titov, he even laughed heartily, opening his mouth wide and exposing his teeth, snorting and closing his eyes tight with pleasure. It was pleasant to see his enemy made to look ridiculous and pitiful, and pleasant to feel that his heir's keen, vigilant eyes saw the weaknesses and deformities of men.

"You are observant! That's useful. It's always useful to see which leg man is lame on. If it's the left, strike at the right, and if it's the right, strike at the left!"

And Yakov related in his clear voice the following:

"When Titov gets one of these fits and goes on the booze, he meets Baltiski, the engineer, and for about ten days they indulge in trick drinking. What they do is this: They send Christopher, the manservant, into the garden at night to bury about twenty bottles of wine and vodka in different spots so that even the necks of the bottles don't show. Next morning the two go into the garden with their walking sticks to 'pick mushrooms,' that is to say, they scour the ground with their sticks and when they find a bottle of vodka they cry out joyously: 'A White!' They go into the arbour and empty the bottle. After that

they go to look for more 'mushrooms.' When they find a bottle of red wine they call it a 'Red cap.' If it's a bottle of champagne they call it 'Champignon.' If it's a bottle of cognac they call it a 'Yellow cap,' and if it's a bottle of liqueur they call it a 'Browny.' And so they go on, all day long, searching for bottles and drinking in the order in which they find them. Sometimes they will start the day with liqueur, drink one bottle and then go out for another. They get so drunk that Titov crawls on the grass on all fours like King Nebuchadnezzar and sings the air from the opera 'Demon':

I am he whom no one loves,
By all living beings accursed. . . .

And Baltiski lies on the ground weeping bitterly because he cannot unearth a bottle with his teeth and moans and wails:

"'Where's all my strength gone? Where's all my strength gone?'"

Bykov laughed, although the laughter increased the gnawing pain in his side, but Somov went on speaking in an obvious tone of regret:

"It makes you laugh, of course; but still, I'm sorry for such men. They possess enormous strength. They could move mountains, you know! But they only work with two fingers. It's not true when they say that people are greedy. No, I don't see any greed in their work!"

"You are young, and that's why you don't see much," said Bykov, only in order to contradict, but to himself he thought:

"I can't understand the lad. When he talks about business he reasons like a businessman. What he says is true. People are not greedy in their work. They're lazy! But it all sounds so absurd, so unusual. Fancy an employee regretting that his employer is not doing his work well! He says that people should work conscientiously. But if you want to make people work conscientiously, with all their might, you've got to knock all these childish ideas out of your mind!"

"Your ideas are all mixed up, Yakov," he said to his nephew with gloomy vexation. "You are not logical. You are too flighty. . . ."

Somov stopped talking, lowered his eyes, and tried to flatten his forelock but only made it stand up all the more.

Suddenly the merchants in the town became alarmed over something and for whole days they dashed about the street in their carriages, looking very grave. Bykov, sitting at the window, watched these

restless movements of men who were not accustomed to hurry themselves, and he asked Kickin:

"What are they dashing about like that for?"

He had noticed, too, that the hunchback's usually gloomy face had brightened and his chicken-like eyes had lost their painful bleariness. This despised little creature had even begun to walk with a firmer step, and no longer waddled on his bandy-legs as he used to do. Now, when he walked, it seemed as though he had springs inside him, in his hump. Blinking his eyes rapidly, now spreading out his arms and now tugging at his braces, he related something that was absolutely incomprehensible, something about an unprecedented public scandal, in which the City Duma, the Artisan Administration, the merchants, the nobility and even the clergy were involved.

"I tell you, Yegor Ivanich, it's a huge joke," he said.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Bykov. "Is the Governor in town?"

"Of course."

"Is the tsar alive?"

"Quite."

"So what's the matter?"

Kickin smiled an ugly smile, quite unusual for him, and enquired:

"What are you asking about?"

"Fool!"

Yakov would no doubt have told him about what was going on in town in a more intelligible manner, but he had asked leave to go to Moscow, and had been hanging out there for over a week, seeing the sights of the capital. But the town was becoming more and more filled with an unusual excitement and murmur, like that heard during Easter week, or when there was a big fire somewhere.

"What's going on?" he demanded of Kickin angrily.

"You see what it is, Yegor Ivanovich. The people are demanding...."

"Wait a minute! Don't rattle away like that! What people? The peasants?"

"The peasants too...."

"What ... too?"

"They're demanding land."

"From whom?"

"Well, you see...."

And then the hunchback began to talk utter twaddle. Wriggling on his chair like a crab in boiling water, and smiling guiltily, he mumbled:

"Everybody is demanding an account from everybody else...."

He rubbed his hands. A light of intoxicated joy, which contradicted the alarming story he was telling, shone in his eyes, and he irritatingly stamped and scraped his crooked feet under the table. Then he blurted out:

"Universal discontent has raised its voice. Minds have sobered and everybody is agreed that it is impossible to go on living in this way...."

"Which way, you hunch-backed devil?"

"The way we are living now! Everything is being talked about quite fearlessly, and some people talk as if they have been asleep up to now and everything in the past has been only a dream to them. This is God's truth! Determination and perseverance...."

The hunchback was sitting sideways towards Bykov with his beardless, aged face turned towards him. His faded jacket had slipped up to his pointed hump, exposing his white shirt, inflated like a bladder, and his braces. His trousers were bespattered with mud almost up to the knees.

"What a miserable creature I am living with," thought Bykov.

"It's a huge joke, Yegor Ivanich!" continued Kickin. "Everybody's in the street, and crowding around the Duma...."

"Go to the Devil!"

Left alone, Bykov mused:

"A miserable worm like that, and yet he upsets me! I'll give him some money and tell him to clear out. Now that I've got Yakov, I don't need him...."

Yakov arrived in the evening of a rainy day and came down to tea looking very solemn, as if he had come back from communion in church. There was a strained look in his face, his forelock stuck up more obstinately than ever, his brows were drawn over his eyes as if he were troubled by something, and his voice was low and hoarse. He did not sit down to table in his usual modest way, but pushed the chair up with his foot. This increased Bykov's alarm and roused in him a foreboding of evil.

"Well, how's things in Moscow?"

Clipping each word in an unpleasant way, his nephew began to talk thoughtfully, but in an unusually loud voice, as if he were taking an oath in court before giving evidence. He talked for a long time, ignoring his uncle's angry questions, and often pausing to recall something, or to think of an appropriate word.

"He's lying! Trying to frighten me," thought Bykov, offended by Yakov's failure to answer his questions, and angrily watching the hunchback impatiently wriggling in his chair and opening his frog's mouth, evidently wanting to put in a word here and there.

"They're hand in glove with each other, the devils...."

Yakov related something that was absolutely incredible. All classes, for some reason, had suddenly risen in anger, and were demanding an amelioration of their conditions, each in conformity with its interests, and everybody wanted to fight everybody else, as if they were drunk.

"Well, what's going to come of it?" enquired Bykov, suspiciously and angrily.

Somov thought for a moment, sighed audibly, and said:

"Something bad will come of it if we do not achieve a universal awakening of conscience and mutual aid. I am very sorry to have to cause you any anxiety, Yegor Ivanich, but I cannot conceal from you that there may be a complete armed revolution."

"That's a lie!" said Bykov, firmly and emphatically. "Where are they going to get the arms from? It's a lie! You are taking advantage of the fact that I am sick and can't go into the street.... You're trying to frighten me. To kill me with fright."

Banging his fist on the table, so hard that the cups and saucers jumped, he shouted hoarsely, while his eyes bulged:

"I'm not an old woman! I don't believe the world's coming to an end! You can't frighten me! I'm not afraid of anything! While I'm alive—the property's mine...."

He stopped speaking when his nephew, blushing deeply, turned round towards him with his chair and, coughing hoarsely, said slowly and distinctly, as if he were hammering nails into a board:

"In that case let me talk to you quite frankly. You suspect me of coveting your property. Konstantin Dmitrievich, here, has told me about it. You are wrong, and your opinion deeply offends me. I don't want your wealth. I decline it. I am even ready to make a written statement that I will not accept the legacy. I will write it this very

night and hand it to you. I came to live with you here only because you are a sick and lonely man and you found it dull. I know that you are a better man than many others, because you are straightforward and possess other good qualities. You could quite legally have ruined Becker, the high school teacher, and have reduced him to beggary, and also the Kasimirsky girls, but you did not do so. That is why I respect you, and it explains why I have lived in your house. But I can't live with you any longer! Farewell!"

Yakov's voice was quite hoarse by now, and he finished speaking almost in a whisper. He coughed, got up from his chair and went to the door, saying as he went:

"Of course, I am very grateful, but I am sorry. . . ."

"Wait!" shouted Bykov, tightening the girdle of his dressing gown and, for some reason, raising the tassels to his shoulders. "Wait! Don't be so hotheaded!" But Yakov was already gone. Bykov then got up, extended his arms, and holding the ends of his girdle as if they were reins, he shouted to Kickin:

"Bring him back!"

The hunchback jumped up, spun round and vanished.

"What do you think of that, eh!" mumbled Bykov audibly, gazing at the door in amazement and listening to the whispering he heard on the staircase leading to the upper floor. What astonished him was not Yakov's refusal of the legacy, but the fact that he knew about Becker, that silly fellow who had fallen into the clutches of a usurer, and about the beautiful Kasimirsky sisters who had been almost ruined by their dissipated father.

"'I respect you,' he said! He is offended! Why he's still a child!"

When Somov came back into the room Bykov laughed disconcertedly and said:

"You are a queer fellow! Why did you flare up like that, eh? Come here and sit down! The legacy is yours, not only because I want it to be yours but also because you have a legal right to it."

Yakov, leaning on the back of a chair, said firmly:

"I don't want to talk about the legacy."

"You don't? Do you really mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it. Soon, perhaps all legacies will be abolished."

"What's that?" Bykov asked, swinging the tassels of his girdle.

He felt as he had never felt before; as a hungry beggar must feel when he unexpectedly receives a savoury meal.

"You must not be angry with a sick man!" he continued. "Nobody can deprive you of the legacy. The law wouldn't permit it."

Yakov sat down and said:

"That law should be abolished. It only causes a lot of unhappiness."

"All right, we'll abolish it," said Bykov jestingly, looking closely at his heir. It seemed to him that Yakov was unwell. His girlish face was drawn, his lips were livid, and he kept licking them. His eyes were hollow and looked gloomy and dull.

"You have a temperature, haven't you?"

"No," answered Yakov, stroking his forelock. "Only I want you to be serious. There is a big movement of the people against the rich, and some are demanding that all their wealth be taken away. . . ."

"Don't be afraid," said Bykov confidently. "Don't be afraid. Nobody will take it away!"

"I'm not afraid. I myself am in favour of it. . . ."

Bykov, with a rattling sound in his throat, drew as much air into his lungs as he possibly could and audibly exhaling it together with the pain began to talk slowly and distinctly, like the priest Fyodor preaching a sermon:

"A man without property is a bare bone: property is his flesh. Do you understand? Flesh!"

He brought the palm of his hand down smartly upon the leather arm of his armchair and repeated:

"Flesh! And a man lives in order to build up his flesh, to the utter fulfillment of all his desires. The world exists for the fulfillment of desires, and that is the object of all human endeavour. He who wants little is worth little. . . ."

"Yes, and now everybody wants everything," Yakov interrupted with a smile.

"What's that? What do they want? Don't believe what they say, believe what they do. It's not enough to want things, you must make them. When there will be plenty of everything there will be enough for everybody, and everybody will be contented."

And then Bykov went on to say in the mildest tone he could command:

"I'm not a fool. I understand. You want everybody to live like Christ, simply and purely. It's true that Christ wanted to have everything shared out equally, but he lived in a poor world, whereas we are living in a rich one. In Christ's time there were not so many people, and their wants were little, but still there was not enough for all. But now we have become greedier. There's so many of us now, and everybody wants everything. That being the case: Work, save and accumulate. . . ."

Bykov himself was astonished at the thoughts he uttered. They had arisen suddenly and independently of himself. They had come like strangers, but interesting strangers. This disconcerted him. But one of the thoughts seemed to him to be wise and true, one that easily solved the sinful confusion of life. And listening to himself speak he went on to say:

"First of all, then, we must work and save, and then share out equally, even with cripples who are unfit for anything. They must have a share too, so that there shall be no poverty, and no squalour, and not even a shadow of sin. Yes, that's how it should be. Everybody should have enough to eat, everybody should live to the best of his ability, and nobody should be covetous, or design evil against others. Every man should be holy in himself. Yes! That's right! Every man should be a saint."

Bykov went on talking and became more and more amazed as he felt that his train of thought was developing without end, and that he so easily found the words he needed. It even began to seem to him that the tight skein of these ideas had long, always, lain rolled up at the bottom of his soul, and that today it had begun to unwind, releasing an endless thread of immense strength. This unwinding of the skein made Bykov gasp for breath, as if he were riding swiftly over a smooth road in the winter. He expressed these new-found words with extraordinary ease, as if he had always thought them. It was pleasant to feel oneself so unusually clever, and to see the hunchback listening and smiling with an intoxicated smile, and Yakov bending over the chair looking at him so fondly with the eyes of a girl. And all this was so touching, the consciousness that he could feel the forces which bound men together was so thrilling, that tears welled up in Bykov's eyes, and overcome by weakness, he leaned against the back of his armchair and mumbled, wearily closing his eyes:

"Who finds any pleasure in doing evil to men? But the need, the inescapable need to work is great, oh, so great! And we must hurry—for death awaits us all...."

Kickin jumped up from his chair and said in a tone of anxiety:

"You're tired, Yegor Ivanich. Go and lie down. Yasha—let's take him to bed!"

Supporting Bykov by the arms, they led him to his bed, tenderly laid him into it and noiselessly departed, the hunchback hobbling in front and Yakov following him with bent head, stroking his forelock.

Wrapped in the warm cloud of care bestowed upon him by Kickin and Yakov, Bykov, for several days, lived in the unusual state of solemn exaltation that one feels on a birthday. He lost a great deal of strength during those days and it was found necessary to hire a nurse to look after him, a tall, silent woman, as thin as a pole, with a pock-marked face and colourless eyes. Resignedly feeling his strength oozing out, Bykov saw through the haze of his exalted mood that Kickin's sallow face was careworn and that his eyes were restless with anxiety; that Yakov too had become more reticent, and that his face was pale and gloomy. He disappeared several times a day, and when he came back he talked of events reluctantly, and with great reserve.

"They are sorry for me," thought Bykov. "They are both sorry for me. They don't want to disturb me. Evidently my end is drawing near."

But the thought of death frightened him now still less than it had done before. His resentment at the thought that he was dying had lessened, had become less bitter, although he could not help thinking to himself: "If only I could live with Yakov a little longer. And Kickin is a good fellow too. They understand me now. I opened my soul to them, and they understood me."

And laughing to himself he thought about his heir:

"I proved to him how wealth should be regarded, and now the lad is upset because he had said: share it out among the poor! What do you think of people, eh?"

"What's going on in town?" he asked the nurse, wishing to verify Kickin's confused and his nephew's laconic information.

"They're still in rebellion," answered the woman in a tone of indifference, as if rebellion was an everyday affair among the people of this city, like getting drunk, and buying and selling

goods. Every now and again she yawned, covering her mouth with the palm of her hand; and then she rapidly crossed herself. Sleep was congealed in her colourless eyes, and her noiseless footsteps were as lithe as a cat's.

The shooting began in the city between Saturday and Sunday, at the dawn of a dull rainy day. The first shots were fired somewhere far away and sounded subdued in the rain-saturated air.

Bykov listened to the firing for several minutes. It sounded as if a crow were pecking at the wet sheet iron of a roof. He woke the nurse and asked her:

"What's that tapping?"

The nurse raised her head like a snake, looked through the grey squares of the windowpanes, listened for a moment and said:

"I don't know. Shall I give you your medicine?"

"Shut up!"

The tapping became more persistent and drew nearer. Soon it sounded like the clicking of the beads of an abacus in the hands of a skilful clerk.

"It sounds like rifle fire," said Bykov gloomily. Old soldier that he was he was certain that it was rifle fire. "Go up and wake the others," he said to the nurse.

The nurse went off, tucking loose strands of hair under her kerchief and swaying in the twilight, as if she were being buffetted by the wind. Bykov sat down on his bed, straining his ears, and stroking his hair and beard with trembling hands.

"They're shooting, the sons-of-bitches! I wonder who is shooting, and whom they're shooting at?"

The nurse came running down the stairs in great alarm and almost before she reached the door she shrieked in her silly squeaky voice:

"They're shooting! At your roof!"

"Fool!" said Bykov sternly. "They're firing blank cartridges."

"Oh, no, they're not!"

"Shut up! That's manoeuvres. They're not allowed to fire ball cartridges in town."

"Oh, no, good master, you're wrong!"

The woman ran to the window and opened it. Rattling sounds burst into the room. Bykov recognized the sounds as that of rifle and revolver fire. Suddenly a bomb exploded. The tinkle of broken glass

was heard and sinister flashes were reflected in the windows of the house opposite. The woman sank to the floor, crossed herself and moaned:

"Lord, Lord!"

Kickin entered the room, waddling on tiptoe, wearing an overcoat and a peaked cap. His face, lit up by the lamp, looked like a lifeless bronze mask.

"What's happening?" shouted Bykov. "Where's Yakov?"

"He's gone."

"When did he go? Where did he go?"

The hunchback took off his cap spread out his crooked arms guiltily and said:

"I said to him, Yegor Ivanich, I said to him: keep out of it, keep out! Although it's quite true that they deceived us...."

"Who?"

"The authorities. The government. And Yasha said: no, I must go! Our comrades.... Disgusting, he said. He's with Kononov's foundrymen...."

Bykov felt as if he had been lashed with a whip. Slipping his feet from the bed to the floor he shouted hoarsely:

"My gown! Take me to the window! Hey, woman!"

The nurse looked out of the window and said with a shrug of her shoulders:

"You can do as you like! A fire's started. I'm going home!"

But she did not go. She did not even get up from the floor, but remained on her knees at the window.

Kickin helped Bykov to dress, mumbling the while:

"I hope nothing comes flying through the window...."

"Shut up!" said Bykov sternly. "You are in with them, I know."

The firing was close now. They could even hear a long drawn out cry:

"A-a-h!"

Then came the sound of bars being knocked off gates, of gates swinging open, of a tree being felled with a couple of axes, and a squeaky woman's voice was heard shouting in alarm:

"Run by the back gardens!"

Bykov shuffled up to the window and saw a black horse galloping down the street with a figure crouching in the saddle, which made

the horse look like a camel. Judging by the uneven patter of its hoofs the horse was evidently lame. Three dark figures crept past in single file, hugging the fences and the walls of the houses. The last one was dragging a long pole, the free end of which was scraping the flagstones of the sidewalk and slipping over the curb.

"Thieves!" Bykov decided, feeling an ominous silence and hollowness growing inside him which echoed all the sounds he heard, and in which his thoughts were submerged and extinguished. A bullet flew past, rustling the dry leaves on the trees.

"Ricochet," commented Bykov, and then he heard Kickin's timid voice saying:

"You had better get away from the window."

Bykov dug the hunchback in the shoulder and said:

"So it's a rebellion?"

"An uprising of the workers, Yegor Ivanich."

"Is Yakov, Yashka, in this?"

"Yes, he's with Kononov's men."

"Go!" said Bykov, pointing through the window into the street. "Go and call him! Tell him to come home at once! The rascal! Why did you keep quiet about it all this time?"

Kickin mumbled guiltily:

"Yasha told you. Didn't he say there would be an armed revolution?"

"Go! If Yasha gets killed I'll make your life a misery!"

Bykov's chin was trembling so hard that it looked as though his beard would fall off. Drawn up, as if standing at attention, tall and grey, he stood in the grey patch of light from the window, with bulging eyes, chattering teeth and trembling legs, while his gown hung down in folds, as if it were flowing from his gaunt shoulders.

Kickin vanished.

"I'm going home," the nurse said again.

Keeping his eyes fixed on the street, which was now blotted out by a mist, Bykov sank heavily into his armchair. The firing had subsided to some extent, the sounds of axes were now rarer, something fell heavily against a fence, or a gate, and the sound of crashing timber was heard. Bykov couldn't understand why the telegraph wires were so taut and vibrating. And then, with unnatural swiftness, muffled sounds were heard in the street, the pattering of feet, the crash

of shattered wood and a familiar voice, high-pitched but hoarse, shouted:

"Take the gates down! There are barrels in the yard! Roll them out!"

"Those are the barrels in my yard," guessed Bykov.

Voices floated up from the street shouting:

"Fasten the wire to the lamppost! Pull it across the street.... Cut the pole down.... My leg! Mind my leg, you devil!"

"That's Yashka's voice!" said Bykov aloud. "Yes, that's he!"

He didn't want to think of what Yakov was doing, but for all that, he leaned against the window sill and mumbled:

"He's protecting the house. He's not letting them in."

The nurse was scurrying from one corner of the room to another and wailing:

"Lord! Oh, Lord!... Robbers are breaking in!"

"Sit down!" shouted Bykov. "Sit down, or I'll put this stick across your back! Be quiet!"

And taking up the broomstick with which he tapped at the ceiling when calling Kickin, he brandished it at the nurse. His chin was still trembling, his moustache got into his mouth. He plucked at his moustache and beard, and his chin would not remain still. The silence within him became more and more sinister, and deeper became the hollowness which echoed the noise of the street, the shouts, the crash of shattered timber and the sounds of distant firing.

"Put it up on its end!" commanded a bass voice at the gate.

Day was already breaking and the figures of people could now be discerned fairly distinctly in the mist. There were no more than a hundred of them, crowding to the left of Bykov's house and filling the street in which they were building a barricade of telegraph poles, dragging them by the wires like the antennae of a sheatfish. They hauled bales of hay from the neighbouring yards; they dragged out a cart, and with shouts of mutual encouragement were pulling down a fence. The windows of the silent houses watched this fuss and bustle with a blind and glassy stare, and now and again the shadows of people appeared at the windows, only to vanish again.

In the distance a bugle shrilly sounded the "fall in!"

"Look out!" shouted the bass voice. Then came a crashing and scraping, and something collapsed upon the flags of the sidewalk.

"They're wrecking the place," said Bykov aloud, turning to the nurse, as if asking for her advice. "Do you hear? They're smashing everything up!"

Trembling with cold, he pulled his gown over his chest, poked his head still further out of the window, and saw Yakov running to the gates with a long crowbar on his shoulder. He was followed by about a dozen other men armed with rifles and axes, and one with a shaft from a cart. They flung themselves at the gate like one man. Yakov sprang into the yard like a cat and shouted:

"Take the gates down! Take the barrels!"

It was all as improbable as a dream. Bykov looked, but could not believe his eyes. It was the hysterical screech of the nurse that brought him to his senses:

"Robbers! Robbers!"

The gates swung open and the men rushed into the yard.

"Stop!" shouted Bykov, mustering all his remaining strength for the effort. "Stop, you devils! Yashka—chase them out!"

He saw Yakov raise his face, as round as a pancake, up to him and heard him shout:

"They deceived us, uncle! They are killing the people!"

And then he heard the plaintive voice of the hunchback:

"Yegor Ivanich—stand back from the window!"

The left leaf of the gate rose up, swayed and fell with a crash into the courtyard. The men rushed at it and dragged it into the street, while others began to tear down the second leaf and roll out the barrels. Among them was the little hunchback.

Bykov, swearing like a trooper, picked up a flower pot with a cactus plant and hurled it into the yard at the men, but it flew wide. Bykov saw this and yelled at the nurse:

"Give me the flower pots, the chairs, everything!"

His voice sounded frightful. The woman, bent double, silently rushed about the room, carrying flower pots from the window sills and dragging chairs to the window by the arms and legs, while Bykov, swaying, mustering all his remaining strength and groaning with pain, hurled at the men everything he could lift, gasping and swearing savagely all the time.

"Yashka! I'll kill you! Koska! You bloody cripple!"

A shot was fired, the tinkle of glass was heard, plaster dribbled

from the ceiling, and the nurse, uttering a shriek, sat down on the floor and supported herself with her arms. Bykov turned round to her and yelled:

"None of that! You're not killed! Bring some more things up, you bitch!"

Several simultaneous shots were heard in the street, quite close, and somebody at the gates cried out in a shrill voice:

"We're out-flanked!"

Bykov saw his nephew drop and crawl across the yard, dragging one leg, while a bearded fellow dropped the shaft he was carrying and fell on his back on the ground, knocking his head so hard that his cap fell off. At that moment grey-clad soldiers appeared at the gate out of the mist, bending low, carrying their rifles at the ready with their bayonets thrust forward.

"Surrender! Lie down!" they shouted.

Shots were fired at the fugitives.

Bykov laughed like mad. Extending his arm and pointing down into the street he yelled hoarsely, stamping his feet:

"Stab that one! The one that is crawling, wearing a hat! Stab him! And there's the hunchback, hiding behind the barrel, the hunchback!"

The nurse opened another window and also began to shriek:

"Stab them!... Stab them! Chase them away...."



31—830

THE LOWER DEPTHS

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS

MIKHAIL IVANOV KOSTYLYOV, *aged 54, owner of a lodging house*

VASSILISA KARPOVNA, *his wife, aged 26*

NATASHA, *her sister, aged 20*

ABRAM (ABRAMKA*) MEDVEDEV, *their uncle, a policeman, aged 50*

VASSILI (VASKA) PEPPEL, *aged 28*

ANDREI (ANDRYUSHKA) KLESHCH, *a locksmith, aged 40*

ANNA, *his wife, aged 30*

NASTYA (NASTKA), *a streetwalker, aged 24*

KVASHNYA, *a woman of about 40 who peddles dumplings*

BUBNOV, *a capmaker, aged 45*

SATIN
THE ACTOR
Approximately the same age, about 40

THE BARON, *aged 33*

LUKA, *a Pilgrim, aged 60*

ALYOSHKA, *a cobbler, aged 20*

KRIVOI ZOB
THE TATAR
Longshoremen

* The ending "-ka" attached to Russian first names is derogatory, and has been retained in this translation to indicate the emotional tone conveyed by the Russian. Since the -ka form is so close to the original name, there seems little likelihood of its use leading to confusion.—*Trans.*

Act I

(A cellar resembling a cave. The heavy vaulted ceiling is smoke-blackened and in places the plaster has fallen off. Light descends from a square window upstage right. A thin partition turns the right corner of the stage into a room for PEPPEL, *near the door of which stands* BUBNOV'S *bunk. A large Russian stove occupies the upper left corner. A door in the stone wall to the left leads to the kitchen, where live* KVASHNYA, *the* BARON, *and* NASTYA. *A wide bed enclosed by dirty cotton hangings stands at the wall between the stove and this door. Bunks are built against all the walls. Downstage left stands a cross section of log to which are attached a vise and an anvil. Behind the anvil, on a similar, but lower log, sits* KLESHCH, *trying keys in an old lock. The floor about him is cluttered with rings of miscellaneous keys, a battered tin samovar, a hammer and files, etc. The centre of the lodging is occupied by a large table, two benches and a stool, all of them dirty and unpainted.* KVASHNYA *is busy at the samovar standing on the table, the* BARON *is chewing a piece of black bread, and* NASTYA *is sitting with her elbows on the table, poring over a battered novel.* ANNA *can be heard coughing behind the curtains of the bed.* BUBNOV *is sitting on his bunk with a hat block between his knees, figuring out how to cut a cap out of strips of cloth ripped from an old pair of pants. Near him lie bits of rags and oilcloth and pieces of cardboard for making the visors of caps.* SATIN, *who has just awakened, is lying on his bunk and snarling. The* ACTOR *is coughing and moving about on top of the stove,* out of sight of the audience.*

It is a morning in early spring.)

* A Russian stove is so constructed that the space above the oven is large enough to serve as a bed.—*Trans.*

BARON: What next?

KVASHNYA: Oh no you don't, my darling, says I. Keep your distance, says I. I've already had my try at that sort of thing, and you couldn't drag me to the altar again for a hundred baked crawfish, says I.

BUBNOV (*to Satin*): What're you grunting about?

(SATIN *snarls again.*)

KVASHNYA: Me, a free woman, as is her own boss, to go and have herself writ into somebody else's passport, says I, that I should become the slave of some man—not on your life! Oh no! Not if he was the King of America himself!

KLESHCH: That's a lie!

KVASHNYA: What's that?

KLESHCH: That's a lie. You'll marry Abramka! . . .

BARON: (*grabbing Nastya's book and reading the title*): "Fatal Love. . . ." (*Laughs.*)

NASTYA: (*reaching for the book*): Here, give it back! . . . Come on! . . . No fooling!

(*The* BARON *teases her by waving the book in the air.*)

KVASHNYA (*to Kleshch*): You're a red-headed old goat, that's what you are! A lie! How dare you insult me like that!

BARON (*striking Nastya over the head with the book*): You're a fool, Nastka! . . .

NASTYA (*snatching the book away*): Give it to me! . . .

KLESHCH: What a fine lady! . . . But you'll marry Abram all right! . . . That's all you're waiting for! . . .

KVASHNYA: Oh yes, of course! What else? . . . The way you've rode your wife to death. . . .

KLESHCH: Shut up, you bitch! That's none of your business! . . .

KVASHNYA: O-ho! Don't like to hear the truth!

BARON: There they go! Nastka, where are you?

NASTYA (*without raising her head*): Oh, get out!

ANNA (*peering out from behind the curtains*): The day's begun! For God's sake . . . don't shout. . . . Don't quarrel!

KLESHCH: Whining again!

ANNA: Every blessed day!... You might let a person at least die in peace!

BUBNOV: Can't scare death off with a little noise....

KVASHNYA (*going over to Anna*): How'd you ever live with that fiend, my poor dearie?

ANNA: Leave me alone.... Go away....

KVASHNYA: H'm-m. A martyr for you!... Any easier in your chest today?

BARON: Kvashnya! Time to go to market!...

KVASHNYA: Right away! (*to Anna*) Wouldn't you like some nice hot dumplings?

ANNA: No thanks.... Why should I bother to eat?

KVASHNYA: You just try them. Good and hot—loosen up your cough. I'll leave them here in this bowl so's you can help yourself when you feel like it. Come on, me lord! (*to Kleshch*) Br-r-r! You evil spirit, you!

(*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ANNA (*coughing*): Heavens!...

BARON (*slyly giving Nastya's head a push*): Drop it... you little fool!

NASTYA (*muttering*): Get out!... I'm not interfering with you any.

(BARON *whistles a tune as he goes out on the heels of* KVASHNYA.)

SATIN (*raising himself on his bed*): Who beat me up last night?

BUBNOV: What difference does it make to you?...

SATIN: None, I suppose.... But what did they beat me up for?

BUBNOV: Were you in a card game?

SATIN: Yes....

BUBNOV: So that's why they beat you up....

SATIN: The scoundrels!...

ACTOR (*poking his head over the edge of the stove*): They'll beat you to death one of these days....

SATIN: You're an ass.

ACTOR: Why?

SATIN: You can't kill a person twice.

ACTOR (*after a pause*): Why not? I don't see... why not.

KLESHCH (*to Actor*): Get down off that stove and straighten up in here.... Afraid of spoiling your hands?

ACTOR: That's none of your business....

KLESHCH: Wait 'till Vassilisa comes in. She'll show you whose business it is! ...

ACTOR: To hell with Vassilisa! It's the Baron's turn to clean up today.... Baron!

BARON (*entering from kitchen*): I haven't time to clean up.... I'm going to market with Kvashnya.

ACTOR: That's none of my business.... You can go to jail for all I care, but it's your turn to sweep the floor.... I'm not doing anybody else's job for him....

BARON: The hell with you! Nastka will sweep the floor.... Hey there, fatal love! Wake up! (*Grabs the book away from her.*)

NASTYA (*getting up*): What do you want? Give it back! Funny, aren't you? And you call yourself a gentleman! ...

BARON (*handing back the book*): Sweep the floor for me, Nastya. That's a good girl.

NASTYA (*going into the kitchen*): Oh, sure! ... Just the thing!

KVASHNYA (*at the kitchen door, to the Baron*): Come on! They'll manage here without your help.... Hey, there, Actor! It's you they're asking, so be so kind ... it won't break your back!

ACTOR: Humph! ... Always me.... I don't see why....

BARON (*entering from the kitchen with a wooden yoke on his shoulders from which are suspended two baskets containing crocks covered with cloths*): Heavier than usual today....

SATIN: Was it worth getting yourself born a Baron?

KVASHNYA (*to the Actor*): You get after that sweeping, now!

(*She exits through the passage, letting the* BARON *go out first.*)

ACTOR (*climbing down off the stove*): It's harmful for me to inhale dust. (*Proudly.*) My organism is poisoned with alcohol.... (*He becomes meditative, sinking down on one of the beds.*)

SATIN: Organism.... Organon....

ANNA: Andrei Mitrich....

KLESHCH: Now what do you want?

ANNA: Kvashnya left me some dumplings.... Take them and eat them.

KLESHCH (*going over to her*): What about you? Don't you want them?

ANNA: No.... Why should I eat? But you're a workingman.... You need them....

KLESHCH: Are you afraid? Don't be afraid.... You can't tell..., maybe....

ANNA: Go ahead and eat them. I'm feeling bad... I guess it'll be soon now....

KLESHCH (*going out*): Don't worry.... You may still get better.... It sometimes happens. (*Goes into the kitchen.*)

ACTOR (*loudly, as though he had suddenly awakened*): Yesterday the doctor in the clinic said to me: your organism, he said, is completely poisoned with alcohol....

SATIN (*smiling*): Organon....

ACTOR (*insisting*): Not organon. Or-gan-ism....

SATIN: Sicambre!

ACTOR (*waving his hand at him*): Idiocy! But I'm talking serious... yes I am! If your organism is poisoned... then it must be harmful to sweep the floor ... to breathe that dust.

SATIN: Macrobiotics!... Hah!

BUBNOV: What's that you're garbling?

SATIN: Words.... Then there's that—trans-scen-dep-tal....

BUBNOV: What does that mean?

SATIN: Don't know.... Forgot....

BUBNOV: Then what do you say it for?

SATIN: Just for fun.... I'm sick of all the words people use, brother.... I'm sick of all our words! I've heard them all a thousand times!...

ACTOR: In Hamlet they say, "Words, words, words!" A wonderful play!... I acted the part of the gravedigger....

KLESHCH (*entering from the kitchen*): When are you going to start acting the part of the floor sweeper?

ACTOR: Mind your own business!... (*striking his breast*) Ophelia! "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered!..." (*At some distance off stage is heard a confusion of voices, cries, police whistles. Kleshch sits down to work, making a rasping noise with his file.*)

SATIN: I love queer, incomprehensible words.... When I was a boy, working in a telegraph office, I did a lot of reading.

BUBNOV: Were you a telegraph operator, too?

SATIN: Yes.... There are some fine books ... and a great many curious words.... I was a well-educated person ... did you know that?

BUBNOV: Heard it a hundred times. What if you were?... A lot of difference it makes now.... Take me, for instance. I was a furrier once. Had my own shop. My hands used to be all yellow from dying the fur—hands and arms, right up to the elbow. I was thinking they'd stay like that to the day of my death. I thought I'd die with those yellow arms ... and now look at them.... Just plain dirty.... Humph.

SATIN: Well, what of it?

BUBNOV: Nothing. That's all.

SATIN: Just what was the point of your speech?

BUBNOV: Nothing special. Just an idea.... It turns out that however you paint the outside, it all rubs off.... It all rubs off. Humph!

SATIN: Oh, how my bones ache!

ACTOR (*sits hugging his knees*): Education is nothing; it's talent that counts. I once knew an actor who could only read out his role by syllables, but when he acted, the theatre rocked and roared with the rapture of his audience.

SATIN: Bubnov, lend me five kopecks!

BUBNOV: I've only got two....

ACTOR: I'm telling you it's talent you need to be an actor. And talent means believing in yourself, in your ability....

SATIN: Give me five kopecks and I'll believe you're a genius, a hero, a crocodile, a police officer.... Kleshch, give me five kopecks!

KLESHCH: Go to the devil! Too many like you around.

SATIN: What are you swearing about? Don't I know you haven't got a kopeck to your name?

ANNA: Andrei Mitrich ... I can't breathe ... so stuffy....

KLESHCH: What can I do about it?

BUBNOV: Open the door into the passage....

KLESHCH: Oh yes, of course. You up there on your bed and me on the floor.... Change places with me and you can open the door.... I've got a cold as it is.

BUBNOV (*calmly*): It's not me that wants the door open.... It's your wife that's asking....

KLESHCH (*sullenly*): There are plenty of things a person can ask for....

SATIN: The way my head's humming! ... Why do people have to go and lam each other over the bean?

BUBNOV: Not only over the bean, but over the whole remaining territory of the body. (*Getting up.*) Going out to buy some thread.... Wonder what's keeping our landlord and his wife so long today? ... Maybe they've kicked the bucket. (*Goes out.*)

(ANNA *coughs.* SATIN *lies motionless with his hands under his head.*)

ACTOR (*glancing miserably about him, goes over to Anna*): Feeling bad?

ANNA: It's so stuffy.

ACTOR: I'll take you out into the passage if you want. Come on, get up. (*He helps her rise, throws some rags about her shoulders and leads her out.*) Come, come.... Steady! I'm sick myself ... poisoned with alcohol....

KOSTYLYOV (*in the doorway*): Out for a walk? How pretty the two, the lamb and the ewe....

ACTOR: Get out of the way.... Can't you see we're sick? ...

KOSTYLYOV: Go right ahead! By all means.... (*Humming a church tune through his nose, he glances suspiciously about the lodging, turning his head to the left as though listening for something in Peppel's room. Kleshch viciously jangles the keys and rasps with his file, watching the movements of the landlord from under his brows.*) Scratching away?

KLESHCH: What's that?

KOSTYLYOV: I say, scratching away? (*Pause.*) H'm-m.... Now then, what was it I wanted to ask? (*Speaking quickly and in a low voice.*) Has my wife been here?

KLESHCH: Didn't see her....

KOSTYLYOV (*stealing toward the door to Peppel's room*): You're taking up a lot of space for two rubles a month, aren't you? A bed, and a place to sit on besides. H'm-m. Worth at least five rubles, honest to goodness. Have to throw on another half ruble....

KLESHCH: Throw on a noose and choke me to death.... On your last legs, and still figuring out how to grab another half ruble! ...

KOSTYLYOV: Why should I choke you? Who'd profit by that? Go on living for your pleasure, and the Lord help you. But I'll throw on that extra half ruble just the same ... buy some oil for my icon lamp and let it burn before the holy image, a sacrifice in retribution for my sins, and for yours too. You never think of your sins, do you now? Oh, it's a wicked person you are, Andryushka! You wife has dried up from your meanness.... Nobody likes you, nobody respects you.... Scraping away at that iron of yours, getting on everybody's nerves....

KLESHCH (*shouting*): Did you come here just to poison my life?

(SATIN *roars.*)

KOSTYLYOV (*with a start*): Good gracious, my good man....

ACTOR (*entering*): I fixed her up out there in the passage, wrapped her up....

KOSTYLYOV: You have a kind heart, brother. That's a good thing.... It'll all be counted to your credit....

ACTOR: When?

KOSTYLYOV: In the next world, brother.... There everything, every little deed, is counted....

ACTOR: Maybe you'll reward me for my kindness right here and now.

KOSTYLYOV: How could I do that?

ACTOR: By crossing out half my debt....

KOSTYLYOV: Hee-hee! You will have your fun, your little jokes!... As though a kind heart could be rewarded with money! Goodness is the highest of all blessings. But a debt's a debt, which means it must be paid.... As to the kindness you show an old man like me, you shouldn't think of getting rewarded for it!

ACTOR: A rapscallion, that's what you are, old man!...

(*Goes out into the kitchen.* KLESHCH *gets up and goes out into the passage.*)

KOSTYLYOV (*to Satin*): The scraper here ... he ran away. Hee-hee! He doesn't like me....

SATIN: Who but the devil could like you?

KOSTYLYOV (*playfully*): Now why should you say such things to me! Me, as loves you all so!... Don't I know that you're all my

brothers, my poor, unfortunate, fallen brothers? . . . (*Suddenly and quickly.*) Ah . . . Vaska—is he home?

SATIN: Take a look. . . .

KOSTYLYOV (*going over and knocking at the door*): Vassili!

(*The* ACTOR *appears in the kitchen door chewing something.*)

PEPPEL: Who's there?

KOSTYLYOV: It's me . . . me, Vassili.

PEPPEL: What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV (*moving away*): Open the door. . . .

SATIN (*without looking at Kostylyov*): He'll open the door, and there she is. . . .

(*The* ACTOR *gives a snort.*)

KOSTYLYOV (*uneasily, in a lowered voice*): What? Who's there? What did you say?

SATIN: You addressing me?

KOSTYLYOV: What was it you said?

SATIN: Nothing special. . . . Talking to myself. . . .

KOSTYLYOV: Watch your step, brother! A joke's a joke, but in the right place! (*Knocks sharply at the door.*) Vassili!

PEPPEL (*opening the door*): Well? What do you have to come bothering me for?

KOSTYLYOV (*peeking into the room*): I . . . you see . . . you. . . .

PEPPEL: Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV: I have some business with you. . . .

PEPPEL: Did you bring the money?

KOSTYLYOV: What money? Wait a minute. . . .

PEPPEL: The seven rubles for the watch. Where is it?

KOSTYLYOV: What watch, Vassili? . . . My goodness, you. . . .

PEPPEL: Look out! People saw me sell you that watch yesterday for ten rubles—three rubles down, seven to come. Let's have it. Why do you stand there blinking your eyes at me? Hanging around disturbing everybody instead of going about your business.

KOSTYLYOV: Sh-h-h! Don't be angry, Vassili! The watch . . . it's. . . .

SATIN: Stolen goods! . . .

KOSTYLYOV: I don't handle stolen goods. . . . How dare you. . . .

PEPPEL (*taking him by the shoulders*): What are you bothering me for? What do you want?

KOSTYLYOV: Me? Why, nothing.... Nothing at all. I'll be going ... if you're like that....

PEPPEL: Get out, and bring me that money!

KOSTYLYOV (*leaving*): Phooh! Such coarse people! ...

ACTOR: A real comedy!

SATIN: Good. That's what I like....

PEPPEL: What was he doing here?

SATIN (*laughing*): Can't you guess? Looking for his wife.... Why don't you bounce him off, Vassili?

PEPPEL: As though I'd ruin my life for a swine like that! ...

SATIN: Be smart about it. Then you could marry Vassilisa and start collecting our rents.

PEPPEL: Wouldn't that be fun! Before I knew it you'd guzzle down all my property and me in the bargain, out of the goodness of my heart.... (*Sitting down on one of the beds.*) The old devil.... Woke me up. And I was having such a nice dream: I was fishing, and caught a huge pike! Couldn't find a pike that size outside of a dream. There she is on the end of the line, and me scared the rod will snap, so I get a net ready ... here, thinks I, right away now....

SATIN: That wasn't a pike. That was Vassilisa....

ACTOR: He caught Vassilisa long ago....

PEPPEL (*angrily*): You can all go to the devil ... and take her with you.

KLESHCH (*entering from the passage*): Devilishly cold!

ACTOR: Why didn't you bring Anna in? She'll freeze out there....

KLESHCH: Natashka took her into the kitchen....

ACTOR: The old man will chase her out....

KLESHCH (*sitting down to work*): Then Natasha will bring her back.

SATIN: Vassili! Lend me five kopecks! ...

ACTOR (*to Satin*): Humph! ... Five kopecks! Vassili! Lend us twenty kopecks! ...

PEPPEL: Better hurry or they'll be asking for a ruble! Here!

SATIN: Giblartar! Thieves are the finest people in the world!

KLESHCH (*sullenly*): Money comes easy to them! ... They don't work....

SATIN: Lots of people get money easy, but not many give it up easy.... Work? Find me work it's a pleasure to do, and maybe I'll do it.... H'm. Maybe. When work is a pleasure, life is a joy. When work is duty, life is slavery! (*To the Actor.*) Come, oh Sardanapalus! Let us be going!

ACTOR: Let us be going, oh Nebuchadnezzar! I'll get as soused as forty thousand sots!

(*They go out.*)

PEPPEL (*yawning*): How's your wife?

KLESHCH: You can see it won't be long now....

(*Pause.*)

PEPPEL: I can't help wondering why you keep on scraping away there.

KLESHCH: What do you expect me to do?

PEPPEL: Nothing....

KLESHCH: How'd I feed myself?

PEPPEL: Other people manage....

KLESHCH: Those? Do you call them people? Tramps! Ragamuffins! Scum of the earth! I'm a workingman, and it makes me ashamed just to look at them. I've been working as long as I can remember. You think I won't pull myself out of here? I will all right. I may scrape all the skin off my body, but I'll crawl out of here. Just you wait ... my wife will die soon.... I've only been living here six months ... but it seems like six years....

PEPPEL: We're all as good as you are, so there's no sense in talking like that.

KLESHCH: As good! They have no honour, no conscience! ...

PEPPEL (*indifferently*): What are they good for—honour and conscience? You can't wear honour and conscience on your feet in place of boots.... It's only those in power who need honour and conscience....

BUBNOV (*entering*): Br-r-r! ... I'm frozen.

PEPPEL: Bubnov! Have you got a conscience?

BUBNOV: What's that? A conscience?

PEPPEL: That's right.

BUBNOV: What do I want one for? I'm not rich.

rarrr! That's what I say: it's only the rich who need honour and a conscience. But Kleshch here is bawling us out. Our consciences, he says....

BUBNOV: *What's he want, to borrow a conscience?*

PEPPEL: *Oh no, he's got a fine one of his own.*

BUBNOV (*to Kleshch*): So you're selling it? Well you won't find a customer here. If it was some old cards now, I might be interested ... and then only if you'd let me have them on credit....

PEPPEL (*instructively*): You're a fool, Andryushka! When it comes to conscience, you'd do well to listen to Satin ... or even the Baron....

KLESHCH: There's nothing they can teach me....

PEPPEL: They've got more brains than you have ... even if they are drunks....

BUBNOV: The man who's drunk and also wise, has won himself a double prize....

PEPPEL: Satin says everybody wants his neighbour to have a conscience, but nobody wants one himself.... And that's the truth....

(*Enter* NATASHA. *She is followed by* LUKA *with a stick in his hand, a knapsack on his shoulders, a pot and a tea kettle tied to his belt.*)

LUKA: Greetings to you, my honest people.

PEPPEL (*stroking his moustache*): Ah, Natasha!

BUBNOV (*to Luka*): We were honest in the past—the year before last.

NATASHA: Here's a new lodger....

LUKA: It's all the same to me. I have respect for crooks too. Not even a flea but has its merits, the way I look at it. They're all of them black, they all of them jump.... Now where were you thinking to put me up, my dear?

NATASHA (*pointing to the kitchen door*): In there, granddad....

LUKA: Thank you, my girl. If you say there, then it's there I go.... Any place that's warm is home to old bones....

PEPPEL: A queer old fellow you've brought in, Natasha....

NATASHA: More interesting than you are! ... Andrei! Your wife is sitting in our kitchen.... After a while come get her.

KLESHCH: All right.... I'll come....

NATASHA: You might be a little gentler with her now . . . you can see it won't be long.

KLESHCH: I know. . . .

NATASHA: It's not enough to know. You've got to understand. After all, it's dreadful to die. . . .

PEPPEL: I'm not afraid. . . .

NATASHA: You don't say! . . . Such a fine brave fellow! . . .

BUBNOV (*with a whistle*): The thread's rotten! . . .

PEPPEL: Honest to goodness, I'm not. I'd die right now, this very minute! Go ahead and take that knife and stick it in my heart . . . I'll die without so much as a gasp. I'll even be glad, because it's by a clean hand! . . .

NATASHA (*going out*): Who are you kidding?

BUBNOV (*with a wail*): This thread is rotten! . . .

NATASHA (*at the door to the passage*): Don't forget about your wife, Andrei. . . .

KLESHCH: All right. . . .

PEPPEL: That's a girl for you!

BUBNOV: She's all right. . . .

PEPPEL: Why is she . . . like that with me? Putting me off. . . . She'll only be ruined if she stays here. . . .

BUBNOV: It's because of you she'll be ruined. . . .

PEPPEL: Why because of me? I . . . pity her.

BUBNOV: Like the wolf pities the lamb. . . .

PEPPEL: That's a lie! I pity her a lot. It's hard for her to live here. I can see that.

KLESHCH: You just wait until Vassilisa catches you talking to her.

BUBNOV: Vassilisa? H'm-m. She's not one to give away things for nothing. . . . A ferocious dame! . . .

PEPPEL (*lying on the bed*): You can both go to the devil! . . . A couple of prophets!

KLESHCH: You'll see. . . . Just wait. . . .

LUKA (*singing in the kitchen*): Midnight glo-o-om . . . the road is lost in da-a-rkness. . . .

KLESHCH (*going into the passage*): What's he howling about? Another one! . . .

PEPPEL: How boring it all is! . . . What makes me get so bored at times? You live along, day after day, and everything's fine. And

then all of a sudden it's as though you caught a chill. Boring as hell....

BUBNOV: Boring? Humph!

PEPPEL: Yea, yea!

LUKA (*singing*): Ah-h! No pa-a-th in sight!...

PEPPEL: Hey! Old man!

LUKA (*peering through the door*): Is it me you're calling?

PEPPEL: It's you all right. Cut the singing.

LUKA (*coming out*): Don't you like it?

PEPPEL: I'd like it if it was good....

LUKA: In other words, it's no good?

PEPPEL: You guessed it....

LUKA: You don't say! And here I was thinking I had a good voice. It's always like that: a person thinks to himself—don't I do that nice now? But other people don't like it, and there you are!...

PEPPEL (*laughing*): That's the truth!...

BUBNOV: Just complained you were bored, and now you're laughing.

PEPPEL: What's it to you, you old croaker!...

LUKA: What's that? Who's feeling bored?

PEPPEL: Me. I'm the one....

(*Enter the* BARON.)

LUKA: You don't say! There's a girl sitting there in the kitchen reading a book and crying. Really. Tears stealing down her cheeks.... And I says to her: "What is it, my darling?" And she says, "The poor man!" And I says, "What man?" "Here in the book," she says. Now what would make a person spend time on things like that? Bored, I guess, like you....

BARON: She's a fool....

PEPPEL: Ah, the Baron! Had your tea?

BARON: Yes.... What next?

PEPPEL: Like me to set you up to a half-pint?

BARON: Naturally.... What next?

PEPPEL: Get down on all fours and bark like a dog.

BARON: Idiot! What are you, one of these merchants? Or just drunk?

PEPPEL: Go on and bark to amuse me.... You're a gentleman ... and once upon a time you didn't count people like us as human beings....

BARON: Well, what next?

PEPPEL: Well, so now I'm telling you to get down on all fours and bark like a dog, and you're going to do it ... do you hear?

BARON: All right, you fool! I'm going to do it. But I don't see what fun it can give you, once I myself realize I've become almost worse than you are. You wouldn't have tried to make me get down on all fours when I was your superior....

BUBNOV: That's right!

LUKA: And very well put! ...

BUBNOV: What's past is past and nothing left but chicken feathers.... None of your fine gentlemen here.... All the colours washed off, and only a bunch of naked people left....

LUKA: In other words, everybody's equal.... But were you really a baron, my good man?

BARON: What do you call this? Who are you, you hobgoblin?

LUKA (*laughing*): I've seen a count, I've seen a prince ... but never before have I seen a baron, and a mangy one at that....

PEPPEL (*laughing*): A baron! Who put me to shame! ...

BARON: Time to have more sense, Vassili!

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! When I look at you, brothers, the way you live—H'm-m-m....

BUBNOV: Wake with a groan, sleep with a moan—that's the way we live.

BARON: We lived better once upon a time.... H'm. I remember waking up in the morning and having coffee served to me in bed.... Coffee and cream! ... Yes I do!

LUKA: It's human beings we are, all of us. No matter what airs we put on, no matter how we make believe, it's human beings we were born, and it's human beings we'll die.... And people are getting wiser, the way I see it, and more interesting.... The worse they live, the better they want to live.... A stubborn lot, human beings!

BARON: Who are you, old man? ... Where did you come from?

LUKA: Me?

BARON: Are you a pilgrim?

LUKA: We're all pilgrims on this earth.... I've heard it said that this very earth of ours is a pilgrim in the skies.

BARON (*sternly*): Let that be as it may, but you—have you a passport?

LUKA (*hesitating*): Who are you, a detective?

PEPPEL (*joyfully*): Good for you, old man! Got you that time, you Baron you!

BUBNOV: H'm-m. He told it to our gentleman, all right!

BARON (*embarrassed*): Well, what of it? I was only kidding, old man. I don't own one of those papers myself....

BUBNOV: Liar!

BARON: That is ... I have a paper ... but it's no good....

LUKA: They're all the same those papers.... None of them's any

PEPPEL: Baron! Let's go have a drink....

BARON: Suits me! Well, good-bye, old man.... You're a rascal, that's what you are!

LUKA: Takes all kinds of people to make the world....

PEPPEL (*at the door into the passage*): Well, come on if you're coming! (*Goes out; the Baron hurries after him.*)

LUKA: Was he really a baron once?

BUBNOV: Who knows? It's true he's from the gentry.... Even now, all of a sudden he'll do something that shows he's from the gentry. Apparently hasn't yet lost the habit.

LUKA: Belonging to the gentry's like having the smallpox—a person may recover, but the scars remain.

BUBNOV: He's all right on the whole ... just gets up on his hind legs once in a while ... like about your passport....

ALYOSHKA (*enters slightly drunk, whistling and playing on an accordion*): Hey, lodgers!

BUBNOV: What are you bawling about?

ALYOSHKA: Excuse me.... Forgive me. I'm very polite by nature....

BUBNOV: Been on a spree again?

ALYOSHKA: To my heart's content! The policeman Medyakin just threw me out of the station and said, "Don't dare let me catch a sniff of you on the street again ... not a teenty weenty!" says he. But I'm

a person of character! . . . My boss snarls at me . . . but what's a boss? Phooh, phooh! A mere misunderstanding! . . . He's a drunk, my boss is . . . and I'm a person who doesn't care about nothing. I don't want nothing! Here, take me for a half a ruble. I don't want nothing! (*Nastya enters from the kitchen.*) Offer me a million—don't want it! And do you think a guy like me'll let himself get bossed around by a pal who's a drunk in the bargain? Nothing doing! I won't have it! (*As she stands in the doorway, Nastya watches Alyoshka and shakes her head.*)

LUKA (*kindly*): What a muddle you've got yourself into, young man. . . .

BUBNOV: Human idiocy! . . .

ALYOSHKA (*throwing himself on the floor*): Here, eat me up! I don't want nothing! I'm a desperate fellow! Try and prove to me who's my betters! Why am I any worse than the rest? That Medyakin says to me, I'll smash your mug in if I catch you on the street! But out I'll go! I'll go out and lie down in the middle of the street . . . here, run over me! I don't want nothing!

NASTYA: The poor fellow! . . . So young, and making such a fool of himself. . . .

ALYOSHKA (*catching sight of her and getting up on his knees*): Mademoiselle! Parlez français! Merci! . . . Bouillon! I've been on a spree!

NASTYA (*in a loud whisper*): Vassilisa!

VASSILISA (*opening the door quickly and addressing Alyosha*): You here again?

ALYOSHKA: How d'ye do! . . . Be so kind. . . .

VASSILISA: I warned you not to show yourself around here, you puppy . . . and here you are again!

ALYOSHKA: Vassilisa Karpovna! . . . Here, I'll play you a funeral march . . . want me to?

VASSILISA (*taking him by the shoulder*): Get out!

ALYOSHKA (*moving toward the door*): Wait a minute! . . . You can't do that! The funeral march . . . I just learned it! A brand new tune. . . . Wait a minute! You can't do that!

VASSILISA: I'll show you whether I can or not! . . . I'll set the whole street against you . . . you heathen! . . . You're too young to go around yapping about me! . . .

ALYOSHKA (*running out*): I'm going!...

VASSILISA (*to Bubnov*): Don't let me catch him here again, do you hear?

BUBNOV: *I'm not your watchdog....*

VASSILISA: What do I care what you call yourself. Don't forget *you're living on charity.* How much do you owe me?

BUBNOV (*undisturbed*): *Haven't counted....*

VASSILISA: *Well I'll count it.* all right!

ALYOSHKA (*opening the door and shouting*): Vassilisa Karpovna! You can't scare me!... You can't scare me-e-e! (*Hides.*)

(LUKA *laughs.*)

VASSILISA: And who might you be?...

LUKA: A traveller.... A pilgrim.

VASSILISA: For the night or to stay?

LUKA: I'll have a look around first....

VASSILISA: Passport!

LUKA: If you like....

VASSILISA: Hand it over!

LUKA: I'll deliver it... to your apartment in person.

VASSILISA: A traveller!... A hobo's ... more like it.

LUKA (*with a sigh*): You're not a very gentle soul!...

(VASSILISA *goes over to the door of* PEPPEL'S *room.* ALYOSHKA *pokes his head in the kitchen door and whispers, "Has she gone?"*)

VASSILISA (*turning to him*): You still here?

(ALYOSHKA *disappears with a whistle.* NASTYA *and* LUKA *laugh.*)

BUBNOV (*to Vassilisa*): He's not here....

VASSILISA: Who?

BUBNOV: Vaska....

VASSILISA: Did I ask you where he was?

BUBNOV: Well ... you were sniffing around everywhere....

VASSILISA: I'm looking to see that everything's in order, understand? Why hasn't the floor been swept yet? How many times have I ordered you to keep this place clean?

BUBNOV: It's the Actor's turn to sweep....

VASSILISA: I don't care whose turn it is! If the sanitary inspector comes and lays a fine, I'll throw you all out!

BUBNOV (*calmly*): And then what'll you live on?

VASSILISA: Don't let me find a crumb on the floor! (*Going toward the kitchen and speaking to Nastya.*) What are you moping around here for? With your mug all swollen up. Standing there like a dummy—sweep up this floor! Seen Natasha? ... Has she been here?

NASTYA: I don't know.... I didn't see her....

VASSILISA: Bubnov! Was my sister here?

BUBNOV (*indicating Luka*): She brought him in....

VASSILISA: And that one—was he home?

BUBNOV: Vassili? Yes. Natasha spoke to Kleshch.

VASSILISA: I'm not asking you who she spoke to! Dirt everywhere.... Filth! A bunch of swine! Get this place cleaned up ... do you hear me? (*Goes out quickly.*)

BUBNOV: The amount of meanness in that woman!

LUKA: No fooling with her! ...

NASTYA: Anybody'd get mean living like this.... Tie anybody up to a husband like hers....

BUBNOV: She's not tied very tight....

LUKA: Does she always go around exploding like that?

BUBNOV: Always. You see she came to see her lover, and he wasn't here.

LUKA: That *is* aggravating, of course. (*Sighing.*) Dear, dear, dear! The number of different people as go bossing this earth of ours ... all of them threatening fearful threats, and still there's no order here ... and no cleanliness.

BUBNOV: They want order, but lack the brains to make it. Still, the floor's got to be swept ... Nastya! Why don't you do it?

NASTYA: Oh, yes, of course. What do you think I am, a chambermaid?... (*After a moment's silence.*) I'm going to get drunk today ... crazy drunk.

BUBNOV: At least that's something....

LUKA: Why is it you're wanting to get drunk, my girl? Just a little while back you were crying, and now you say you want to get drunk!

NASTYA (*challengingly*): I'll get drunk and start crying all over again ... that's all!

BUBNOV: Not very much. . . .

LUKA: But what's the cause? Even a pimple has its cause. . . .

(NASTYA *shakes her head in silence.*)

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! Such people! Whatever's going to become of you? . . . Here, I'll sweep the floor for you. Where's the broom?

BUBNOV: Behind the door in the passage.

(LUKA *goes out into the passage.*)

BUBNOV: Nastya!

NASTYA: What?

BUBNOV: Why did Vassilisa go after Alyosha like that?

NASTYA: He's been telling everybody that Vaska was sick of her and was going to throw her over for Natasha. . . . I'd better get out of here—move to another place.

BUBNOV: What's that? Where to?

NASTYA: I'm sick of it all . . . I'm not wanted here. . . .

BUBNOV (*calmly*): You're not wanted anywhere . . . and nobody's wanted on this earth.

(NASTYA *shakes her head, gets up and quietly goes out into the passage.* MEDVEDEV *enters, followed by* LUKA *with the broom.*)

MEDVEDEV: I don't think I know you. . . .

LUKA: And do you know all the others?

MEDVEDEV: I'm supposed to know all the people on my beat. . . . But I don't know you. . . .

LUKA: That's because not all the earth falls within your beat, uncle. . . . There's a little bit left over. . . .

(*Goes out into the kitchen.*)

MEDVEDEV (*going over to Bubnov*): My beat may not be so big . . . but it's worse than any big one. . . . Just now, before laying off for the day, I had to take that shoemaker Alyoshka to the station. . . . Can you imagine? Lays right down in the middle of the street, starts playing on his accordion and yelling "I don't want nothing!" Horses

going by, and all kinds of traffic. Might have run over him or anything.... Noisy youngster.... But I've fixed him up now all right.... Seems to like making a row....

BUBNOV: Coming over for a game of checkers tonight?

MEDVEDEV: All right. H'm-m.... What about that—Vaska?

BUBNOV: Nothing special.... Same as ever....

MEDVEDEV: In other words ... alive and kicking?

BUBNOV: Why not? No reason why he shouldn't be alive and kicking....

MEDVEDEV (*doubtfully*): You think so? (*Luka enters from the passage carrying a pail.*) H'm-m.... There was some gossip going around about Vaska.... Didn't you hear it?

BUBNOV: I hear lots of gossip....

MEDVEDEV: About Vassilisa: It seems.... Have you noticed anything?

BUBNOV: What, for instance?

MEDVEDEV: Well ... anything in general. Maybe you know and are lying about it. Everybody knows.... (*Sternly.*) Don't you go lying, now!...

BUBNOV: Why should I lie?

MEDVEDEV: Something's up, all right! The dirty dogs! They say that Vaska and Vassilisa ... you know ... but what's it to me? I'm not her father—only an uncle. What are they laughing at me for?... (*Enter Kvashnya.*) Whatever's come over the people lately—laughing at everybody.... Ah, it's you!... Back already!

KVASHNYA: My most respected police force! Bubnov! Again he kept pestering me at the market. Nothing will do but I must marry him!...

BUBNOV: Go ahead.... Why not? He's got money, and hasn't gone rickety yet....

MEDVEDEV: Me? Ho-ho!

KVASHNYA: You old wolf, you! Keep off my sore spot! I tried it once, my dear!... For a woman to get married is like jumping through a hole in the ice in January. Once she's done it, she'll never forget it....

MEDVEDEV: Hold your horses.... Husbands are different.

KVASHNYA: But I'm the same. As soon as my darling better-half passed out—may he sizzle in hell!—I sat there blissfully for a

whole day all by myself: just sat there trying to believe my good luck....

MEDVEDEV: If your husband beat you without good cause ... you should have complained to the police.

KVASHNYA: I complained to God for eight years. He didn't help.

MEDVEDEV: It's forbidden to beat your wife nowadays.... Very strict nowadays. Law and order! Mustn't beat anybody without good cause.... You can only beat somebody to preserve order....

LUKA (*leading in Anna*): Now you see, we made it.... How can you go walking about all by yourself, so weak on your pins? Where's your place here?

ANNA (*showing him*): Thank you, granddad....

KVASHNYA: There she is, a married woman. Look at her!

LUKA: Put together very shaky, she is, poor little thing! ... Goes through the passage, clutching the wall and moaning.... You shouldn't let her go around by herself like that.

KVASHNYA: Forgive us such an oversight, good sir. Her chambermaid, it seems, is having the day off.

LUKA: You think it's a joke ... but how can you neglect a person like that? Whatever he's like, every person has his own worth....

MEDVEDEV: Have to keep an eye on her. What if she should die all of a sudden? That'd be a nuisance all right.... Have to watch her!

LUKA: You're quite right, Sergeant....

MEDVEDEV: Well, now... I may not quite be a Sergeant as yet....

LUKA: You don't say! From the looks of you, now—a real hero!

(*Noise and confusion in the passage. Stifled cries are heard.*)

MEDVEDEV: Somebody raising a row?

BUBNOV: Sounds like it....

KVASHNYA: I'll go have a look....

MEDVEDEV: I've got to go too.... Oh, these duties! And I can't understand why we should pull people apart who are fighting! They'd stop of themselves when they got tired.... It'd be better to let them slug each other as much as they liked.... They'd remember it and wouldn't be so quick to pick a fight the next time....

BUBNOV (*getting off the bunk*): You speak to your chief about that....

KOSTYLYOV (*throwing open the door and shouting*): Abram! Come quick!... Vassilisa's after Natasha.... She'll kill her.... Hurry!

(KVASHNYA, MEDVEDEV *and* BUBNOV *rush into the passage.* LUKA *shakes his head and looks after them.*)

ANNA: Oh Lord!... Poor Natasha!

LUKA: Who's fighting?

ANNA: Our landladies.... Sisters....

LUKA (*going over to Anna*): What are they fighting over?

ANNA: Nothing special.... Too much energy ... that's all....

LUKA: What's your name?

ANNA: Anna ... I keep looking at you—you remind me of ... my father so soft and gentle....

LUKA: Got pushed around a lot. That's what makes me so soft.... (*He gives a crackling laugh.*)

(CURTAIN.)

Act II

(The same scene. Evening. SATIN, KRIVOI ZOB, *the* BARON *and the* TATAR *are playing cards near the stove, while* KLESHCH *and the* ACTOR *look on.* BUBNOV *and* MEDVEDEV *are having a checker game on* BUBNOV'S *bunk.* LUKA *is sitting beside* ANNA. *The lodging is lighted by two lamps, one of them on the wall near the cardplayers, the other on* BUBNOV'S *bunk.)*

TATAR: Once more I play. That's all I play....

BUBNOV: Zob! Sing! (*Sings.*)

Every morn the sun is rising....

KRIVOI ZOB (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

TATAR (*to Satin*): Shuffle cards. Shuffle good. We know how you play....

BUBNOV and KRIVOI ZOB (*together*):

Day and night the prison sentries,
Ah-h!
Watch the window of my room....

ANNA: Fights ... insults ... nothing else.... That's all I've seen ... all I've known.

LUKA: Ah, my poor dearie, don't fret!

MEDVEDEV: Hey, where are you moving! Watch out! ...

BUBNOV: H'm-m. Well....

TATAR (*shaking his fist at Satin*): Why you hide them cards? ... I see! ... You!

KRIVOI ZOB: Forget it, Asan! They'll cheat us anyway.... Bubnov, start up the song again!

ANNA: I can't remember ever having had enough to eat ... counted every crumb of bread ... trembling all my life ... afraid I might

eat more than the other person.... Never had anything to wear but rags.... Why?

LUKA: Poor little child! Are you tired? Everything will be all right.

ACTOR (*to Krivoi Zob*): Throw on your Jack—your Jack, damn you!

BARON: And we hold—the King!

KLESHCH: They always win.

SATIN: That's our custom....

MEDVEDEV: King!

BUBNOV: Me too ... humph!

ANNA: I'm dying....

KLESHCH: Now you see, you see! Quit the game! Prince, quit it, I say!

ACTOR: Can't he think for himself?

BARON: You watch out, Andryushka, or I'll send you flying straight to hell!

TATAR: Come on. Deal again. The pitcher bring water and broke herself.... Me too.

(KLESHCH *shakes his head and goes over to* BUBNOV.)

ANNA: I keep thinking: dear God, will this torture keep up in the next world too? There too?

LUKA: No, no. You won't suffer there, my pretty. Lie in peace. Everything will be all right. You'll have a good rest there.... Be patient just a little longer.... Everybody has to be patient ... everybody in their own way. (*He gets up and goes into the kitchen with quick little steps.*)

BUBNOV (*singing*):

Guard my window at your pleasure—

KRIVOI ZOB:

I shall never run away!

(*in unison*)

Though I languish for my freedom,
Ah-h!
Chains are forcing me to stay!

TATAR (*shouting*): Aha! Put card up sleeve!

BARON (*with some embarrassment*): Well ... where do you expect me to put it—up your nose?

ACTOR (*convincingly*): Prince, you are mistaken.... No one has ever....

TATAR: I see! Cheat! I no play!

SATIN (*gathering up the cards*): All right, get out, Asan.... You knew we were cheats. Why did you ever start playing with us?

BARON: Lost twenty kopecks and makes a noise like three rubles!... And calls himself a prince!

TATAR (*angrily*): Gotta play fair!

SATIN: What for?

TATAR: What you mean, "what for"?

SATIN: That's what I said—what for?

TATAR: You don't know?

SATIN: No, I don't know. Do you know?

(*The* TATAR *spits in anger, while the others laugh at him.*)

KRIVOI ZOB (*complacently*): You're crazy, Asan! Can't you understand that if they tried living honestly, they'd starve to death in three days?...

TATAR: What's to me? Gotta live honest.

KRIVOI ZOB: Harping on the old string. Come on, let's go have our tea... Bubnov!

Ah, my chains, my iron halter....

BUBNOV:

Unrelenting iron guard....

KRIVOI ZOB: Come on, Asan! (*He goes out singing.*)

I can neither lose nor break them....

(*The* TATAR *shakes his fist at the* BARON, *then follows his friend out.*)

SATIN (*laughing and addressing the Baron*): Once again, your honourable honour, it seems you have been dumped in a ditch. H'm,

an educated gentleman, and don't know how to slip a card up your sleeve! . . .

BARON (*shrugging his shoulders*): How the devil it ever happened! . . .

ACTOR: No talent. . . . No faith in yourself. . . . Without that—nothing. Failure.

MEDVEDEV: I've got one King . . . but you've got two already. . . . H'm-m.

BUBNOV: One King will do if you think it through. . . . Your move.

KLESHCH: You've lost already, Abram Ivanich!

MEDVEDEV: Keep out of this . . . do you hear? Shut up! . . .

SATIN: Winnings—fifty-three kopecks!

ACTOR: Three of them go to me. . . . But what do I want with three kopecks?

LUKA (*entering from the kitchen*): Well, now you've cleaned up the Tatar, I suppose you'll be going out for some vodka?

BARON: Come along with us!

SATIN: I'd like to see what you're like when you're drunk.

LUKA: No better than when I'm sober. . . .

ACTOR: Come on, old man . . . I'll recite you some verses. . . .

LUKA: What's that?

ACTOR: Poetry.

LUKA: Poetry? What do I want with poetry?

ACTOR: It can be—amusing. . . . But also—sad. . . .

SATIN: Well, poet, are you coming?

(*Goes out with the* BARON.)

ACTOR: Coming. . . . I'll catch up with you! Listen to this, old man. It's from some poem . . . I can't remember the beginning. . . . Can't remember! (*Rubs his forehead.*)

BUBNOV: Here goes your King! . . . Your move!

MEDVEDEV: I shouldn't have moved there . . . damn it all!

ACTOR: Formerly, when my organism was not yet poisoned with alcohol, I had a good memory, old man. But now brother—everything's over for me now. I always brought down the house with those lines—tremendous applause. And you don't know what applause means, my friend. . . . Applause is like vodka! I used to come out and stand like this (*strikes a pose.*) I'd stand like this . . . and (*he is*

silent). Can't remember a word . . . not a word. My favourite poem. . . . That's pretty bad, isn't it, old man?

LUKA: Nothing very good about it, I should say, once it's your favourite you've forgotten. All your soul goes into your favourite.

ACTOR: I've drunk up my soul, old man. . . . I'm ruined, friend. . . . And why am I ruined? Because I had no faith in myself. . . . I'm done for. . . .

LUKA: That's nothing. You have to take a cure. They cure people of drunkenness nowadays, you hear? Cure them free of charge. . . . Opened up a kind of healing centre so to speak, to cure them for nothing. Seeing's how they admit that a drunkard's also a human being, and as they're even glad when he wants to be cured. So you just go there. Go ahead! . . .

ACTOR (*meditatively*): Where? Where is this place?

LUKA: It's—in some city or other . . . what do they call it? A funny name. . . . Don't you worry, I'll tell you the name all right. . . . In the meantime, you be getting yourself ready. Cut out the vodka. . . . Take yourself in hand and hold on. . . . And then you'll take a cure and begin life all over again. . . . Won't that be fine? All over again. Just make up your mind . . . once and for all!

ACTOR (*smiling*): All over again. . . . All from the beginning. . . . Yes, that sounds fine. . . . H'm. . . . All over again. (*Laughs.*) Of course! I can do it! Don't you think I can do it?

LUKA: Why not? A person can do anything, if he wants to bad enough. . . .

ACTOR (*as though suddenly waking up*): You're a little cracked, aren't you? Well, good-bye for the present. (*Whistling.*) Good-bye, old man. (*Goes out.*)

ANNA: Granddad.

LUKA: What is it, dearie?

ANNA: Talk to me. . . .

LUKA (*going over to her*): All right, let's have a chat. . . .

(KLESHCH *watches them, then silently goes over to his wife, looks at her and makes movements with his hands, as though there were something he wanted to say.*)

LUKA: What is it, brother?

KLESHCH (*under his breath*): Nothing....

(*Slowly goes toward the door to the passage, stands before it a few seconds, then suddenly goes out.*)

LUKA (*following him with his eyes*): It's hard for that man of yours.

ANNA: I can't be thinking of him now.

LUKA: Did he use to beat you?

ANNA: Awful.... It's because of him I got like this....

BUBNOV: My wife had a lover once. The rascal played a good game of checkers at times....

MEDVEDEV: H'm-m....

ANNA: Granddad, please tell me something.... I'm feeling so bad....

LUKA: That's nothing. That's just before you die, my pigeon. It'll be all right, dearie. You just keep hoping ... this is how it'll be—you'll die now, you see, and everything'll be quiet and peaceful.... You won't have to be afraid of nothing any more, nothing at all. Just lie there in peace and quiet. She calms everything down, death does, and she's kind to us poor mortals. So that's why they say: die and lie in peace. And that's the truth, my darling, because where can a person hope to get peace in this world?

(PEPPEL *comes in. He has had a drink, looks dishevelled and is in a sullen mood. He takes a seat on a bunk by the door and remains there silent and motionless.*)

ANNA: But there in that other world—will we be tortured there too?

LUKA: There won't be anything there. Nothing at all. You just believe me. Peace and quiet and nothing else. They'll summon you before the Lord God and say: See, Lord, it's your faithful servant Anna who has come....

MEDVEDEV (*sternly*): How do you know what they'll say there? You're a fine one, you are!

(*On hearing* MEDVEDEV'S *voice,* PEPPEL *lifts his head and listens.*)

LUKA: If I say it, I must be knowing it, Sergeant....

MEDVEDEV (*with reconciliation*): H'm-m.... Maybe. I suppose that's your business.... Even if I'm not quite a Sergeant yet....

BUBNOV: Double jump....

MEDVEDEV: You devil...I hope you....

LUKA: And the Lord God will look at you so gentle and tender like, and say: of course I know Anna! And he'll say: You just lead our Anna right into Paradise—that's what he'll say. Let her rest up a bit.... I know what a hard life she had... I know how tired she is.... Let Anna have peace and quiet now....

ANNA (*gasping*): Oh, granddad. Dearest granddad.... If it would only be like that! If only ... peace and quiet ... not to feel anything....

LUKA: You won't feel anything, my pretty. Nothing at all. Believe me. You must die now gladly, without any fear. Death. I'm telling you, is like a mother to little children....

ANNA: But ... maybe ... maybe I'll get well?

LUKA (*smiling deprecatingly*): What for, my dear? Just to be tortured again?

ANNA: To live ... just a little ... just a little longer. Once you say there won't be any suffering there ... I could bear it here ... I could.

LUKA: There won't be anything there at all. Simply....

PEPPEL (*getting up*): You're right.... But maybe—you're wrong!

ANNA: (*startled*): Oh Lord!...

LUKA: What's that, my handsome fellow?

MEDVEDEV: Who's shouting?

PEPPEL (*going over to him*): Me! What of it?

MEDVEDEV: No point in your shouting, that's what! A person should conduct himself peaceful....

PEPPEL: Blockhead!... And their uncle! Ho-ho!

LUKA (*to Peppel, under his breath*): *Stop shouting, you hear?* The woman's dying.... You can see the earth on her lips already. Don't interfere!

PEPPEL: Out of respect for you, granddad. You're a smart feller, granddad. You lie beautifully.... Nice to listen to your fairy tales. Go ahead and lie.... That's all right. Not many pleasant things to listen to in this world!

BUBNOV: Is it true the lady's dying?

LUKA: It looks serious....

BUBNOV: That means the end of her coughing.... An uneasy cough she had.... Double jump.

MEDVEDEV: Phooh! The devil take you!

PEPPEL: Abram!

MEDVEDEV: Who said you could call me by my first name!...

PEPPEL: Abrashka! Is Natasha sick?

MEDVEDEV: What's it to you?

PEPPEL: You better tell me. Did Vassilisa beat her bad?

MEDVEDEV: That's none of your business. It's a family affair.... Who are you to butt in?

PEPPEL: Whoever I am, you'll never get another look at Natasha if I don't want you to!

MEDVEDEV (*leaving his checkers*): What's that you're saying? Who are you talking about? If it's my niece you're thinking of.... Oof! You thief, you!

PEPPEL: I may be a thief, but you haven't caught me!...

MEDVEDEV: Just wait! I'll catch you ... all right, and soon!...

PEPPEL: If you catch me, it'll be to the grief of your dovecot. here. Do you think I'll keep my mouth closed in court? The wolf will bare his fangs. They'll ask me: Who taught you to steal and showed you where? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife! Who handled your stolen goods? Mishka Kostylyov and his wife!

MEDVEDEV: You're a liar. Nobody'll believe you!

PEPPEL: They'll believe me because it's the truth! And I'll drag you in too ... hah! I'll ruin all of you, you devils! You'll see!

MEDVEDEV (*frightened*): Liar! You—liar! What harm have I ever done you? Throwing yourself on me like a mad dog!...

PEPPEL: What *good* have you ever done me?

LUKA: H'm-m!

MEDVEDEV (*to Luka*): What are you croaking about? What business is it of yours? This is a family affair.

BUBNOV (*to Luka*): Keep out of it. It's not for me and you the noose is being drawn.

LUKA (*meekly*): Of course. I'm just saying if a person hasn't done another person any good, then he's done him bad....

MEDVEDEV (*missing the point*): Blah! We here, we all know each other, but you—who're you? (*With an angry snort he hurries out.*)

LUKA: The gentleman is angry.... Deary me! Your affairs here, brothers, are a bit tangled, as I see it!

PEPPEL: He's run off to tell Vassilisa....

BUBNOV: You're a fool, Vassili. Showing off how brave you are!... Watch out! It's all right to be brave when you go to the woods for mushrooms ... but there's no sense in it here.... They'll snap off your head in an instant.

PEPPEL: Oh no they won't! Nobody's taking a fellow from Yaroslavl with his bare hands!... If it's a fight they want, they'll get it!...

LUKA: But really now, don't you think you'd do well to clear out of here, lad? ...

PEPPEL: Where to? Come on, tell me where....

LUKA: Well now, Siberia for instance.

PEPPEL: You don't say! No thanks. I'll wait to get sent to Siberia free of charge....

LUKA: You listen to me and go out there. Out there you'll find the right path to follow. They need people like you out there.

PEPPEL: My path has been laid out for me already. My father sat in jail all his life and ordered me to do the same.... Ever since I was a kid I've been called a thief, the son of a thief....

LUKA: It's a fine place, Siberia. A golden country. Once a person is strong and has a good head on his shoulders, he'll feel as much at home there as a cucumber in a hothouse.

PEPPEL: Why do you keep on lying, old man?

LUKA: Eh?

PEPPEL: Gone deaf. What do you lie for, I say?

LUKA: And what that I say is a lie, do you think?

PEPPEL: *Everything.... There it's good, here it's good....* A pack *of lies. What for?*

LUKA: *Now you just believe me and go out there and see for* yourse'f. You'll say thank you. Why should you hang around here? And why should you be so anxious about the truth? Just think now—the truth may turn out to be an axe on your neck....

PEPPEL: It's all the same to me. If it's an axe, so it's an axe.

LUKA: Foolish lad. There's no sense in going and killing yourself off.

BUBNOV: What're the two of you quibbling about? . . . What sort of truth are you after, Vaska? And what for? Don't you know it well enough for yourself? . . . Everybody knows it. . . .

PEPPEL: Quit your croaking. Let him tell me. . . . Listen, old man—is there a God?

(LUKA *smiles, but says nothing.*)

BUBNOV: People go on living . . . like chips of wood on the river. . . . Build themselves a house . . . but the chips float off. . . .

PEPPEL: Well, is there? Speak up. . . .

LUKA (*quietly*): There is if you believe it; there isn't if you don't. . . . Whatever you believe in, that's what there is. . . .

(PEPPEL *stares at the old man in silent wonder.*)

BUBNOV: I'm going for my tea. . . . Anyone coming along to the inn?

LUKA (*to Peppel*): What are you staring at?

PEPPEL: Nothing. . . . Listen . . . you mean. . . .

BUBNOV: Then I'll go alone. (*Goes to the door and is met by Vassilisa.*)

PEPPEL: In other words, you. . . .

VASSILISA (*to Bubnov*): Is Nastya in?

BUBNOV: No. . . . (*Goes out.*)

PEPPEL: Humph! . . . She came. . . .

VASSILISA (*going over to Anna*): Still alive?

LUKA: Don't disturb her. . . .

VASSILISA: What are you hanging around here for?

LUKA: I can leave . . . if necessary. . . .

VASSILISA (*going to the door to Peppel's room*): Vassili, I have some business to speak to you about. . . .

(LUKA *goes to the door into the passage, opens it and slams it shut. Then he carefully climbs from one of the bunks up onto the stove.*)

VASSILISA (*from Peppel's room*): Vassili . . . come here!

PEPPEL: No I won't. . . . I don't want to. . . .

VASSILISA: H'm. . . . What's up? What are you sore about?

PEPPEL: I'm fed up. . . . I'm sick of all this business. . . .

VASSILISA: Sick of me too?

PEPPEL: Yes, you too....

(VASSILISA *pulls her shawl tight, pressing her hands to her breast. She goes over to* ANNA'S *bed, carefully glances through the curtains, and returns to* PEPPEL.)

PEPPEL: Well ... say what you want to....

VASSILISA: What's there to say? I can't force you to love me.... And besides, it's not my nature to go begging.... Thanks for telling the truth....

PEPPEL: What truth?

VASSILISA: That you're sick of me.... Or maybe that's not the truth?

(PEPPEL *looks at her in silence.*)

VASSILISA (*going up to him*): What are you looking at? Don't you recognize me?

PEPPEL (*with a sigh*): You're too damn good looking, Vassilisa ... (*She puts her hand on his shoulder, but he shrugs it off.*) ... but you never had my heart. I lived with you, and all the rest ... and still I never liked you....

VASSILISA (*under her breath*): So that's it! ... Well....

PEPPEL: Well, and there's nothing for you and me to talk about! Nothing at all.... Get away from me!

VASSILISA: Fallen for somebody else?

PEPPEL: What's it to you? ... If I had, I wouldn't ask you to help me get her....

VASSILISA (*significantly*): Too bad.... Maybe--I *could* help you get her.

PEPPEL (*suspiciously*): Get who?

VASSILISA: You know.... Why pretend? Vassili, I'm used to talking straight.... (*Lowering her voice.*) I won't deny it—you've offended me. Like lashing a whip at me, for no good reason and no purpose.... Said you loved me ... and then all of a sudden....

PEPPEL: Not all of a sudden.... It's been for a long time.... You have no heart, woman.... A woman ought to have a heart. Us men're beasts ... and you've got to ... you've got to teach us.... What did you teach me?

VASSILISA: Let bygones be bygones.... I know a person's not free in himself.... If you don't love me any more ... all right. That's how it'll be....

PEPPEL: So now it's all over between us? And we part peaceable, without any scenes.... That's good.

VASSILISA: Oh, no! Wait a minute!... You mustn't forget that while I was living with you, I thought you'd help me throw this yoke off my neck. I thought you'd help me get away from my husband, my uncle, from all this life. And maybe it wasn't you I loved so much as this hope, this idea of mine.... Understand? I was waiting for you to pull me out of it all....

PEPPEL: You're no nail, I'm no pliers.... I myself thought that since you were so smart—you *are* smart ... you're a clever one....

VASSILISA (*bending close to him*): Vassili, come on—let's help each other.

PEPPEL: How?

VASSILISA (*under her breath, but energetically*): My sister ... I know you like her....

PEPPEL: And that's why you beat her like that? You watch out, Vassilisa! Keep your hands off her!...

VASSILISA: Wait a minute. Don't flare up. We can arrange everything quietly, without getting mad.... How would you like—to marry her? I'd give you money besides—there hundred rubles. If I get more, you can have that too....

PEPPEL (*moving away*): How's that?... Why would you do that?

VASSILISA: Help me get rid of my husband.... Take that noose off my neck....

PEPPEL (*whistling softly*): So that's it! Oho! Smart of you all right!... Your husband in his grave, your lover in jail, and you yourself....

VASSILISA: Vassili! Why in jail? Don't do it yourself—get somebody else to do it. And even if you did it yourself, who'd know! Natasha ... think it over.... You'll have money ... go away somewhere.... I'll be free forever.... As for my sister—it'll be good for her to get away from me. It's hard for me to see her all the time.... She makes me sore because of you ... and I can't stop myself.... I torture her.... I beat her.... I beat her until it makes even me cry to see her.... But I beat her just the same and I'll keep on beating her.

PEPPEL: You're a brute. And boasting of your brutality.

VASSILISA: Not boasting. Just telling the truth.... Think of it, Vassili ... twice they threw you in jail on account of that husband of mine.... On account of his greediness.... He sucks my blood like a leech—been sucking it for four years. What kind of a husband is he? And he keeps squeezing Natasha out, nagging her, calling her a beggar. He's poison for everybody....

PEPPEL: You're a sly one....

VASSILISA: Everything's clear.... You'd have to be a fool not to understand what I'm after....

(KOSTYLYOV *enters quietly and comes creeping forward.*)

PEPPEL (*to Vassilisa*): Get out!

VASSILISA: Think it over. (*Catches sight of husband.*) What do you want? Come for me?

(PEPPEL *starts up and stares wildly at* KOSTYLYOV.)

KOSTYLYOV: It's me.... Me! You two here ... alone! H'm-m.... Having a talk? (*Suddenly he starts stamping his feet and screeching.*) Confound you, Vassilisa! ... You beggar you! (*He is frightened by the frozen silence with which this is received.*) Oh Lord, forgive me.... Leading me into sin again, Vassilisa! ... Here I am searching for you everywhere.... (*Screeching again.*) Time to go to bed! Forgot to fill the icon lamp again, damn you! ... You pig! ... You beggar! ... (*He shakes a trembling finger at her. Vassilisa slowly goes over to the door of the passage, watching Peppel intently.*)

PEPPEL: (*to Kostylyov*): Get out of here! ... Clear out! ...

KOSTYLYOV (*shouting*): I'm the boss around here! Get out yourself, you thief! ...

PEPPEL (*in a strained voice*): Clear out, I'm telling you. Mishka....

KOSTYLYOV: Don't you dare! I'll show you! I'll....

(PEPPEL *takes him by the collar and starts shaking him. Suddenly a great moving about is heard on top of the stove, and somebody yawns with a prolonged wail.* PEPPEL *lets go of* KOSTYLYOV, *who runs with a cry into the passage.*)

PEPPEL (*jumping up onto the bunk by the stove*): Who's that? ... Who's on the stove?

LUKA (*poking out his head*): Eh?

PEPPEL: You!

LUKA: Me.... Me myself.... Oh dear Lord in heaven!

PEPPEL (*shuts the door into the passage and looks around for the bar which secures it, but does not find it*): The devil! ... Climb down, old man!

LUKA: Ri-ight away! ... Coming down!

PEPPEL (*roughly*): Why did you crawl up on the stove?

LUKA: And where should I have crawled to?

PEPPEL: You went into the passage.

LUKA: That's a cold place for an old man like me....

PEPPEL: Did you ... hear anything?

LUKA: Indeed I did. And could I not have heard? Or perhaps you think I'm a deaf one? Ah, lad, luck comes your way.... You're a lucky one.

PEPPEL (*suspiciously*): Why lucky?

LUKA: Lucky that I crawled up on that stove.

PEPPEL: Ah.... What made you start all that noise?

LUKA: Began getting too hot for me, that's what.... And you can say thank you for that.... That lad there, thinks I, can be forgetting himself now ... can be squeezing the breath out of that old one....

PEPPEL: H'm.... I could have for sure.... The loathesome....

LUKA: Nothing strange about that. Easy as sitting down. Lots of times people make slips like that....

PEPPEL (*smiling*): Maybe you made such a slip yourself once upon a time?

LUKA: Listen, lad, listen to me. Keep away from that woman! Shoo her away! Shoo! Shoo!... She'll shove that man of hers out of this world without your help, and better than you could do it! Don't you listen to that she-devil!... Take a look at me. Bald, I am.... And what might be the cause? All those women ... I've known more of those women in my time than I had hairs on my head.... But this Vassilisa here, is worse than any harpy.

PEPPEL: I don't know whether I should say thank you or whether you too....

LUKA: Don't say anything. You'll not find better words than those I've spoken. Listen to me—the lady that you're liking here, you just take her under the arm, right about face, and forward march! Get away from here!... As far as you can go!...

PEPPEL (*sullenly*): If you could only figure people out—who are the good ones and who are the bad ones. It's too much for me....

LUKA: What's so difficult about it? A person's not always the same. It all depends on how his heart's tuned.... Today he's good, tomorrow he's bad.... But if that girl has a real grip on your soul, then be off with her, and make an end of it.... Or else be off alone.... You're young yet. Plenty of time to catch a woman....

PEPPEL (*taking him by the shoulders*): Tell me the truth. Why are you saying all this?...

LUKA: Wait a minute.... Let me go. I'll just have a look at Anna, here.... She was breathing so hard just now.... (*He goes over to Anna's bed, opens the curtains, looks in, then feels her hand. Peppel watches him thoughtfully, obviously disturbed.*) Have mercy, Oh Lord! Mercifully receive the soul of your servant Anna....

PEPPEL (*under his breath*): Dead?... (*He strains forward and looks at the bed without going over.*)

LUKA (*softly*): It's over now, her torture.... Where's that man of hers?

PEPPEL: In the pub, I suppose....

LUKA: We must be telling him.

PEPPEL (*shuddering*): I hate corpses....

LUKA (*going to the door*): What's there to like about them?... It's the live ones we should like.... The live ones.

PEPPEL: I'll go with you too....

LUKA: Afraid?

PEPPEL: Unpleasant.... (*He hurries out. The stage is empty and silent. Dull, incomprehensible sounds come from beyond the door into the passage. Finally the Actor enters.*)

ACTOR (*he does not close the door, but stands on the threshold, leaning against the jamb, and shouting*): Hey, old man! Where are

you? Now I remember! ... Listen! (*He takes two uncertain steps forward, strikes a pose, and recites.*)

Gentlemen! If no path can be found
To the sacred realms of truth,
Then worship the raving youth
Who lures our eyes from the ground.

(NATASHA *appears in the doorway behind the* ACTOR.)

ACTOR: Old man!

If tomorrow the sun declined
To illumine our earthly ways,
Then tomorrow the world would blaze,
With a thought from a crazed mind.

NATASHA (*laughs*): Pie-eyed. The simpleton!

ACTOR (*turning to her*): Ah! It's you? Where's that old man? ... That lovely old man? Nobody here, it seems. ... Farewell, Natasha! ... Fare thee well!

NATASHA (*entering*): Haven't said hello yet, and already it's farewell! ...

ACTOR (*blocking her path*): I'm—leaving. Going away. ... The spring will come, and I shall be no more. ...

NATASHA: Let me pass. Where is it you're going?

ACTOR: To search for a city—to take a cure. You too must leave. ... Ophelia, hie thee to a convent! ... There exists, it seems, a healing centre for organisms—for drunkards. A marvellous place for healing. ... Marble. ... Marble floors! Light ... food and cleanliness. All of it free. And the marble floors. I shall find it, be cured, and again. ... I am about to be reborn, as said the King ... Lear, Natasha. ... My stage name is Sverchkov-Zavolzhsky, but nobody knows that. Nobody. Here I have no name. ... Can you understand how that hurts—to lose one's name? Even dogs have a name. ...

(NATASHA *walks carefully around the* ACTOR, *goes over to* ANNA'S *bed and looks in.*)

ACTOR: No name—no man.

NATASHA: Look ... friend ... she's dead. ...

ACTOR (*shaking his head*): It cannot be....

NATASHA (*stepping back*): It's the truth.... Look....

BUBNOV (*in the doorway*): Look at what?

NATASHA: Anna.... She's dead.

BUBNOV: So she's stopped that coughing of hers. (*Steps over to Anna's bed, has a look, then goes to his own place.*) Have to tell Kleshch.... That's his business.

ACTOR: I'll go ... I'll say.... She's lost her name!... (*Goes out.*)

NATASHA (*from the centre of the room*): And me too ... some day ... like that.... Driven down into some basement ... downtrodden....

BUBNOV (*spreading out some old rags on the planks of his bunk*): What's that? What're you muttering about?

NATASHA: Just thinking to myself....

BUBNOV: Waiting for Vaska? Watch out! You'll break your neck on that Vaska....

NATASHA: Does it make any difference what I break it on? Let it be him. He's probably better than anybody else....

BUBNOV (*lying down*): That's your business....

NATASHA: It's a good thing, of course, her dying.... But a pity... Heavens!... What does a person live for?

BUBNOV: Everybody the same: get born, live, die. I'll die ... and you.... Why have pity? (*Enter Luka, the Tatar, Krivoi Zob and Kleshch. Kleshch is the last. He walks slowly and all stooped over.*)

NATASHA: Sh-h-h! Anna....

KRIVOI ZOB: We've heard.... May she rest in peace, now she's dead....

TATAR (*to Kleshch*): Have to haul her out. Have to haul her into passage. Can't have dead people here. Live people sleep here....

KLESHCH (*in a quiet tone*): We'll haul her out....

(*All go over to the bed.* KLESHCH *looks at his wife over the shoulders of the others.*)

KRIVOI ZOB (*to the Tatar*): You think she'll smell? Nothing to smell.... She dried up while she was still alive....

NATASHA: Good Lord, you might at least pity her!... You'd think one of you would have at least a word of pity! A fine lot you

LUKA: Don't be offended, dearie.... Never mind. How can we be expected to pity the dead? We don't pity the living.... We don't even pity ourselves, and you speak about the dead!

BUBNOV (*yawning*): And besides, you can't scare death off with words.... Sickness, you can, but not death.

TATAR (*moving away*): Call the police....

KRIVOI ZOB: The police for sure. Kleshch! Have you notified the police?

KLESHCH: No.... They'll make me bury her ... and I've only got forty kopecks.

KRIVOI ZOB: In that case, borrow something.... We can take up a collection—five kopecks—whatever you're able. But hurry up and notify the police or they'll be thinking you killed her or something....

(*Gets ready to lie down alongside of the* TATAR.)

NATASHA (*going over to Bubnov*): Now I'll dream about her.... I always dream about dead people. I'm afraid to go home alone.... It's dark out there in the passage....

LUKA (*following her*): It's the living ones you have to be afraid of, take my word for it.

NATASHA: You take me out, granddad....

LUKA: Come along, come along.... I'll take you. (*They go out. Pause.*)

KRIVOI ZOB: O-ho-ho! Asan! Soon it'll be spring, friend! ... Then we'll have a warm living. Already the muzhiks in the village are mending their ploughs and their harrows. Getting ready to turn the soil. H'm. And us? Eh, Asan? ... Snoring already, the damn Mohammedan....

BUBNOV: Tatars are good ones for sleeping....

KLESHCH (*standing in the middle of the lodging and staring dully before him*): What shall I do now?

KRIVOI ZOB: Go to sleep, that's what.

KLESHCH (*softly*): And what about her? ... (*Nobody answers him. Enter Satin and the Actor.*)

ACTOR (*shouting*): Old man! Come here, my loyal Kent! ...

SATIN: Miklukha-Maklai is coming! ... Hah!

ACTOR: Resolved and concluded! Old man! Where's that city? ... Where are you?

SATIN: Fata Morgana! The old fellow lied to you. . There's nothing like that. No city. No people.... Nothing at all!

ACTOR: Liar!

TATAR (*jumping off his bed*): Where's boss? I go for boss. No can't sleep, no take money.... Dead people.... Drunks.... (*Quickly goes out. Satin whistles after him.*)

BUBNOV (*sleepily*): Go to bed, fellows. Stop your noise.... Supposed to sleep at night.

ACTOR: Ah! Here lies a corpse!... "Our fishing nets have caught a corpse!..." Poetry.... Béranger!

SATIN (*shouting*): A corpse hears nothing! A corpse feels nothing!... So shout and yell! A corpse hears nothing!...

(LUKA *appears in the doorway.*)

(CURTAIN.)

Act III

(*A back yard littered with rubbish and overgrown with weeds. A high brick fire wall upstage cuts off a view of the sky. Along the wall grow elder bushes. On the right rises the dark wall of some sort of log building—perhaps a shed or stable. To the left stands* KOSTYLYOVS' *house with the lodging in the basement. It is grey and ramshackled with the stucco falling off. It stands at an angle, so that the far corner reaches almost to upstage centre, leaving only a narrow passage between the brick wall and the house. There are two windows in the house, one a basement window downstage, the other about six feet higher and upstage. Along the wall of the house lies a log some 12 feet long and an old wooden sledge which is overturned. Old boards and beams form a pile of wood near the building on the right. Day is drawing to a close and the rays of the setting sun illuminate the brick wall with a red glow. It is early spring; the snow has only recently melted and the black branches of the elder bushes are as yet without buds. On the log sit* NATASHA *and* NASTYA; *on the sledge* LUKA *and the* BARON, KLESHCH *is lying on the pile of wood to the right.* BUBNOV'S *face is seen at the basement window*)

NASTYA (*closing her eyes and nodding her head in rhythm to the singsong chanting of her tale*): So he comes at night to the garden, to the summer house, like we planned ... and I've been waiting so long I'm all atremble with fear and with sorrow. And he's all atremble, and white as a sheet, and in his hand he holds an involver....

NATASHA (*chewing sunflower seeds*): You see! It must be true what they say about students being desperate....

NASTYA: And he says to me in a fearful voice: My precious love....

BUBNOV: Ho-ho! Precious?

BARON: Shut up! If you don't like it you don't have to listen, but don't interfere with her lying.... Next!

NASTYA: My precious, he says, my beloved! My parents, he says, will never give their consent I should marry you ... and threaten to lay their curse on me forever for my loving you. And for that reason, he says, I must take my own life.... And there he has that big involver loaded with all those bullets.... Farewell, he says, beloved of my heart. There's no changing my mind.... I can't go on living without you! And I says to him: Oh my adored friend ... my Raoul!...

BUBNOV (*in amazement*): What? How's that? Growl?

BARON (*roaring*): You've forgotten, Nastka!... Last time he was Gaston!

NASTYA (*jumping up*): Shut up, you scum! You... homeless pups! As though you could understand love! True love. But me—I've known it—true love! (*To the Baron.*) You're a nobody!... A man with an edication. Claim you used to drink coffee in bed!...

LUKA: Wa-a-ait a minute! Don't go interfering now! Let her go on.... It isn't the words that count, but what's behind them—that's the thing. Go on, my girl. Don't you mind.

BUBNOV: A crow in peacock's feathers.... Well, let's hear the rest.

BARON: Next?

NATASHA: Don't listen to them.... Who are they? They're only jealous because there's nothing to tell about themselves....

NASTYA (*sitting down again*): I don't want to go on. I won't tell you any more.... Once they don't believe me and laugh at me.... (*Suddenly she stops, is silent a minute, and then, closing her eyes again, continues in a loud, impassioned voice, beating time with her hand and seeming to be listening to distant music*). And I say to him: joy of my life! Sun of my soul! Neither can I go on living in this world without you ... because I love you with all my soul and will go on loving you as long as the heart beats in this breast. But don't end your life, which your dear parents need so bad, since you're all the joy they have.... Throw me over! Better my life should be ruined with pining for you, my beloved! I'm all alone. I'm—that kind. Better for me to be ruined. It's all the same! I'm not worth anything.... There's nothing left for me....

Nothing left.... (*She covers her face with her hands and weeps silently.*)

NATASHA (*turning away and speaking under her breath*): Don't cry.... You mustn't....

(LUKA *smiles and strokes* NASTYA'S *head.*)

BUBNOV (*laughing*): Ho, there's a baby for you, eh?

BARON (*also laughing*): You think that's the truth, granddad? That's all out of that book, "Fatal Love...." A lot of nonsense. Let her alone!

NATASHA: What's it to you? Better keep your mouth shut, once the Lord saw fit to make you what you are.

NASTYA (*furiously*): You lost soul! You nobody! Where's your heart?

LUKA (*taking Nastya by the hand*): We'll go away from here, dearie. Don't let it bother you. You're the one that's right, not them. I know.... Happen you believe you had that true love, then surely you had it. Of course you did! But don't get angry with the fellow you live with.... Maybe it's jealousy makes him laugh.... Maybe he never knew that true kind! Maybe he never knew any kind at all. Come away....

NASTYA (*pressing her hands to her breast*): Believe me, granddad! I swear it was like that! ... Everything I said.... He was a student ... a Frenchman.... They called him Gaston.... He had a black beard and wore patent leather boots.... Strike me dead this minute if it's not the truth. And how he loved me! ... How he loved me!

LUKA: I know. Don't you worry. I believe patent leather boots, you say? Dear, dear, dear! And you loved him too? (*They disappear around the corner.*)

BARON: A stupid wench! ... Got a good heart, but impossibly stupid.

BUBNOV: What does a person want to lie like that for? And swearing it's the truth, like in court.

NATASHA: Because it's more pleasant to lie than to tell the truth. Me too....

BARON: You too? Next?

NATASHA: I keep dreaming and dreaming. And waiting....

BARON: For what?

NATASHA (*smiling in some embarrassment*): I don't know.... Just thinking that tomorrow ... somebody will come ... somebody—special.... Or else something will happen.... Also something—special. And I keep waiting.... Always waiting.... But when you come to think of it, what could happen?

(*Pause.*)

BARON (*with a wry smile*): There's nothing to wait for!... Me, for example, I'm not waiting for anything. Everything's ... over.... Passed. Finished. Next?

NATASHA: Or else ... I imagine that tomorrow I'll die all of a sudden.... And then everything goes cold inside me. Summer's a good time to imagine you'll die, because of the thunderstorms; you could always get struck by lightning.

BARON: Yours is a poor sort of life, and it's all the fault of that sister of yours—a devilish temper she's got.

NATASHA: Who's got a good sort of life? Everybody has it bad.... Don't I see it?...

KLESHCH (*until now he had been lying motionless and apparently detached, but at these words he springs up*): Everybody? That's a lie! Not everybody. If it was everybody then it wouldn't be so bad.... Then you wouldn't mind.

BUBNOV: What devil's forked you this time? ... Yelping like that!

(KLESHCH *lies down again, muttering to himself.*)

BARON: Better go make my peace with Nastka.... If I don't, she'll hold out on the drink money....

BUBNOV: H'm-m.... How people love to lie!... Nastya, now, you can understand her. She's used to painting up her mug, so she thinks she can do the same to her soul.... Rouge up her soul.... But ... what do the others want to lie for? That Luka, for instance.... Keeps on lying ... without getting anything out of it ... and him an old man.... What does he want to do it for?

BARON (*with a snort, as he goes out*): They've all got grey little souls.... They'd all like to rouge them up a bit....

LUKA (*entering from around the corner*): Why did you go and upset the girl, your lordship? Let her cry and have her fun.... If it gives her pleasure to let the tears flow, what harm does it do you?

BARON: She's stupid, old man. Gets on your nerves.... Today it's Raoul, tomorrow Gaston ... but always one and the same. But I better be going and making my peace with her just the same.... (*Goes out.*)

LUKA: Go ahead.... Be nice and gentle with her. It never does any harm to be gentle with a person....

NATASHA: You've got a good heart, granddad.... What makes you so kind?

LUKA: Kind you say? Very well, if that's the way you see it. (*The soft music of an accordion and singing comes from beyond the brick wall.*) Somebody has to be kind in this world.... You have to have sympathy for people. Christ loved everybody, and told us to do the same.... And I can tell you truly, that many a time you can save a person by pitying him in time. Like, for instance, that time I was a watchman on a country estate belonging to some engineer near the Tomsk city. This estate, now, stood in the middle of the woods. Well then ... winter it was, and me all alone on the estate ... splendid, I can tell you! But one day I hear noises—somebody breaking in!

NATASHA: Thieves?

LUKA: Thieves they were. Breaking in.... I pick up my gun and go out.... There they are, two of them ... opening a window, and so busy at it that they don't notice me. I yell at them: Hey, you! ... Get out of here! ... So they turn on me with an axe.... I warn them: If you don't keep back, I'll shoot! ... And I keep pointing my gun first at one, then at the other. Down they go on their knees, begging me to let them go, so to speak. But me, I'm mad by then ... on account of the axe, and I says to them: I chased you away, you pixies, but you wouldn't go.... So now, says I, one of you go cut a good switch off these bushes. They bring the switch. Now, says I, one of you get down, and the other give him a thrashing. And that's how, according to my orders, they flogged each other. And when the flogging was over ... they say to me: Granddad, they say, give us something to eat for the love of Christ. We've been traipsing around on empty bellies.... So there's your thieves for you, my dear! (*Laughs.*) ... There's your axe for you! And both of them fine chaps at heart.... I says to them: Now why couldn't you have come like that and just asked me for something to eat right at the start? ... We're sick and tired of asking, they say. You keep asking and asking

and nobody gives you anything. . . . After that they kept on living with me for the whole winter. One of them, Stepan by name, used to take the gun and be gone in the woods all day long. The other, Yakov they called him, was sick all the time. Kept coughing. . . . All three of us kept watch over that estate. Then when the spring came they said: Farewell, granddad. And off they went . . . heading for Russia. . . .

NATASHA: Were they—escaped convicts?

LUKA: That's what they were. Escaped convicts. . . . Escaped from the place where they were deported. . . . Fine chaps they were! . . . If I hadn't pitied them, now, happen they would have killed me . . . or done something else like that . . . and then it would have meant a trial, and jail, and Siberia. . . . What for? A jail can't teach a person what's right, and Siberia can't teach a person what's right . . . but a man . . . he can teach you, and very easy at that.

(*Pause.*)

BUBNOV: H'm-m. Take me, now. . . . I'm no good at lying. Why lie? The way I see it, go ahead and blurb the whole truth. What's there to be afraid of?

KLESHCH (*suddenly jumping up again as though he had been burned, and crying out*): The truth? What truth? (*Tearing at the rags which cover him.*) Here's the truth! No work. . . . No strength. That's the truth! No shelter! . . . Not even a place to seek cover! Nothing left but to die like a dog . . . there's your truth for you, the old devil! What do I want with your truth? All I want's a chance to take a breath . . . to take a living breath! What wrong have I done? . . . What do I want your truth for? I want a chance to live, god damn it! They don't let you live . . . and there's your truth! . . .

BUBNOV: Just see how the fellow's touched!

LUKA: Mother of God! . . . But listen, my friend. You. . . .

KLESHCH (*trembling with agitation*): You here all babbling about the truth! You, old man, trying to comfort everybody! . . . Let me tell you that I hate everybody! And that's the truth, may it be cursed and damned forever! Do you understand? It's high time you understood! May it be damned to hell, your truth! (*Runs around the corner of the house, looking back and shouting.*)

LUKA: Dear, dear, dear! How upset the fellow is! . . . Where has he run to?

NATASHA: Gone off his nut....

BUBNOV: Not bad! As good as play acting.... It happens that way sometimes.... He hasn't got used to life yet....

PEPPEL (*entering slowly from behind the house*): Peace to you, honest company! Well, Luka, you sly old fox, still telling your fairy tales?

LUKA: You should have heard how that man went off here just now!

PEPPEL: Who, Kleshch? What's wrong with him? I met him running away as if the devil was after him....

LUKA: Anybody'd run away if he'd had his heart touched like that.

PEPPEL (*sitting down*): I don't like the fellow.... Too mean and proud. (*Imitating Kleshch.*) "I'm—a workingman!" As though everybody else was worse than him.... Go ahead and work if you like it ... but why be so proud of yourself? If a person's worth depended on the amount of work he did ... then a horse would be better than any human ... goes on hauling day in and day out without a word. Natasha! Your folks at home?

NATASHA: They've gone to the cemetery ... then they planned to go to vespers....

PEPPEL: I was wondering why you were feeling so free.

LUKA (*turning thoughtfully to Bubnov*): The truth, you say?... The truth doesn't always help what's wrong with a person.... You can't always cure a soul with the truth.... Once, for instance, there was a case like this: a certain man I knew believed in a true-righteous land....

BUBNOV: In a what?

LUKA: In a true-righteous land. There should be, says he, a true-righteous land in this world.... And that land, thinks he, must be inhabited by special people—good people, people who honour each other, and who in every little thing help each other ... and everything in that land must be wonderfully fine. And that man kept planning to go and search for the true-righteous land. He was poor ... had a hard life ... and when things became so bad you'd think there was nothing left to do but lie down and die, he wouldn't give up, but would only smile to himself and say: That's all right. I can bear it. I'll wait just a little longer and then I'll quit this life and go to the true-righteous

land.... That was his only joy in life—his faith in the true-righteous land....

PEPPEL: Well, did he ever get there?

BUBNOV: Where? Ho-ho!

LUKA: And then to the village where he lived—this all happened in Siberia—they exiled a very learned man ... with all his books, and charts, and all sorts of things, being as he was a man of learning. And this poor man says to the man of learning, he says: be so kind as to tell me where this true-righteous land lies, and how to get there. Right then and there the learned one gets out his books and opens up his charts and looks and looks, but nowhere can he find that true-righteous land. Everything is in its place, all the lands are on the charts, but the true-righteous land is nowhere to be found!

PEPPEL (*in a subdued voice*): You don't say! Nowhere to be found?

(BUBNOV *laughs.*)

NATASHA: Stop your laughing.... Go on, granddad.

LUKA: The man can't believe it.... It must be somewhere, says he.... Take a better look, because if there's no true-righteous land, then all your charts and books are of no account.... The learned one doesn't like this at all. My charts, says he, are the very best, but there just ain't no such place as your true-righteous land. Then the poor man gets mad. What's that, says he? Here I've gone on living and living, and bearing it all because I was sure there was such a place, and now according to the charts it turns out that there ain't no such place! A swindle, that's what it is! And he says to the learned one: And you ... you wretch, says he, it's a rascal you are, and not a learned one!... And he gives him a whack over the ear—bang! Then another one—bang! (*After a moment's pause.*) And after that he goes home and hangs himself....

(*Everyone is silent.* LUKA, *smiling, glances at* PEPPEL *and* NATASHA.)

PEPPEL (*under his breath*): The hell you say!... Not a very pleasant story!...

NATASHA: Couldn't stand being fooled....

BUBNOV (*Sullenly*): Nothing but fairy tales....

PEPPEL: H'm.... So there didn't turn out to be any true-righteous land!...

NATASHA: It's a pity about the man....

BUBNOV: All made up!... Ho-ho! True-righteous land! All out of his head! Ho-ho! (*Disappears from the window.*)

LUKA (*nodding toward Bubnov's window*) : Laughing he is! Dear, dear, dear!... (*Pause.*) Well, friends ... a good living to you! Soon I'll be leaving....

PEPPEL: Where you going now?

LUKA: To the Ukraine.... I heard as how they've opened up a new faith there ... and I must have a look. People keep wanting and seeking something better.... May the Lord give them patience!

PEPPEL: Do you think they'll ever find it?

LUKA: Surprising what people can do! They'll find it all right. He who seeks, finds.... He who wants something bad enough, gets it!

NATASHA: Oh, if they'd only find something!... If they could only think up something better!...

LUKA: They'll think it up. Only we have to help them, my dear.... Have to respect them....

NATASHA: How can I help them? I need help myself....

PEPPEL (*determinedly*): Again ... I'm going to speak to you again, Natasha.... Here. In front of him.... He knows everything.... Come away—with me.

NATASHA: Where to? From jail to jail?

PEPPEL: I told you I'd give up stealing. I swear to heaven I'll give it up. And once I've said it, I'll do it. I know how to read and write.... I'll work.... He says we ought to go to Siberia of our own free will.... Shall we go? You think I don't hate this life? Oh, Natasha, I understand.... I see it all. I keep kidding myself by saying that people who are called honest steal a lot more than I do.... But it doesn't help. That's not what I want. I don't regret anything.... I don't believe in a guilty conscience.... But deep down inside of me I feel one thing: this is no way to live. You have to live better. You have to live so's to respect yourself....

LUKA: That's the thing, my lad! May the Lord help you.... May Christ show his mercy. That's the thing: a man has to respect himself....

PEPPEL: From my earliest years I've been a thief.... Everybody always called me Vaska the thief, Vaska, the son of a thief. Aha! So that's how it is? All right then, here I am—a thief! ... Understand? Maybe it was just for spite I became a thief. Maybe I'm a thief just because nobody ever thought of calling me anything else.... You call me something else ... Natasha, won't you?

NATASHA (*sadly*): Somehow I don't believe ... what anybody says.... And I'm uneasy today.... My heart keeps jumping as if I was expecting something to happen. You shouldn't have started talking this way today, Vassili....

PEPPEL: When else? This isn't the first time I've said it....

NATASHA: Why should I go with you? As for loving you—I can't say I love you so much.... Sometimes I like you ... and then again I just can't stand the sight of you ... I guess I don't love you.... When you love a person you can't see the bad in him ... but I see it in you.

PEPPEL: Don't be afraid. You'll come to love me. I'll teach you to love me.... You just say the word. I've had my eye on you for more than a year now ... and I see what a good and serious girl you are ... a person to be depended on.... I love you a lot, Natasha....

(VASSILISA *appears in the window in all her finery and stands listening, half hidden by the window frame.*)

NATASHA: Fallen in love with me—and what about my sister? ...

PEPPEL (*embarrassed*): Well, what about her? There are lots like her....

LUKA: Don't you think about that, my dear. When there's no bread, a person'll eat grass....

PEPPEL (*moodily*): Have a little pity on me. This is no life.... A dog's life, with no joy in it.... Like in a bog ... when everything you grab at gives way, because it's all rotten.... That sister of yours—I thought she was different. If she hadn't been so greedy for money, I'd have done anything for her sake. If she'd only been all mine.... But she wanted something else.... She wanted money ... and she wanted her own way.... Her own way so's she could live wanton. She couldn't help me any.... But you—you're like a young fir tree that bends, but holds....

LUKA: And I say to you, marry him, my girl. He's not a bad fellow. You just keep reminding him that he's a good one, so he don't forget. He'll believe you.... You just keep saying to him: Vassili, you're a good man. Don't forget to say that! And think well, now—where else can you go? That sister of yours is a mean beasty. And as for her husband—the old man is worse than any words ... and so is this whole life here.... Where else can you go? And this is a strong lad....

NATASHA: There's nowhere to go.... I know.... I've thought about it. Only—I don't believe anybody.... And there's nowhere for me to go....

PEPPEL: There's one road ... but I'm not letting you take it.... I'd rather kill you....

NATASHA (*smiling*): I'm not your wife yet, but here you are ready to kill me already....

PEPPEL (*taking her in his arms*): Forget it, Natasha! That's how it's got to be....

NATASHA (*pressing toward him*): I must tell you one thing, Vassili ... and I swear it before God. The first time you lift your hand against me ... or in some other way do me wrong ... I'll not spare myself.... Either I'll kill myself or....

PEPPEL: May my hand wither and drop off if ever I lift it against you!...

LUKA: Don't worry, deary, he needs you worse than you need him....

VASSILISA (*from the window*): So the match is made! Love, honour and obey!

NATASHA: They've come!... Oh, my God! They've seen us.... Ah, Vassili!

PEPPEL: What are you scared of? Nobody'll dare touch you now!

VASSILISA: Don't worry, Natasha, he won't beat you.... He's no more capable of beating than of loving.... I know!

LUKA (*under his breath*): That woman!... The snake she is!

VASSILISA: He just knows how to make pretty speeches....

KOSTYLYOV (*entering*): Natashka! What are you doing here, you lazybones! Spreading gossip? Complaining about your relatives? And you haven't put up the samovar? Haven't set the table?

NATASHA (*going out*): But you were planning to go to church...

KOSTYLYOV: It's none of your business what we were planning. It's up to you to tend to your business ... to do what you've been ordered.

PEPPEL: Shut up! She's not a servant to you any more! ... Natasha, don't go away! ... Don't touch a thing! ...

NATASHA: Don't you be giving me orders! ... Your time hasn't come yet. (*Goes out.*)

PEPPEL (*to Kostylyov*): Hands off! You've had your way with her long enough. She's mine now.

KOSTYLYOV: Yours? When did you buy her? How much did you pay?

(VASSILISA *laughs.*)

LUKA: Vassili, go away....

PEPPEL: What a gay couple you are! ... Look out, or you'll be laughing on the other side of your face!

VASSILISA: How scared I am! Just frightened to death!

LUKA: Vassili, go away! Can't you see she's just egging you on, just trying to get your dander up?

PEPPEL: Ah.... Oh yes. She's lying.... You're lying! You won't have things the way you want them!

VASSILISA: And I won't have them the way I *don't* want them, Vaska!

PEPPEL (*shaking his fist at her*): We'll see! ... (*He goes out.*)

VASSILISA (*disappearing from the window*): I'll fix you up with a wedding, all right!

KOSTYLYOV (*going over to Luka*): What are you doing here, old man?

LUKA: Nothing, old man....

KOSTYLYOV: Well ... they say you're leaving us?

LUKA: Time to be moving on....

KOSTYLYOV: Where to?

LUKA: Follow my nose....

KOSTYLYOV: Off on your wanderings.... Uncomfortable for you to stay in one place very long, eh?

LUKA: They say no water will flow under a stone....

KOSTYLYOV: That's said about a stone, but a person ought to settle in one place.... People shouldn't live like roaches—everyone crawl-

ing wherever he pleases.... A person should make himself at home in some place and not be a stranger everywhere.

LUKA: But if somebody's at home wherever he finds himself?

KOSTYLYOV: That means he's a tramp ... a useless creature.... There has to be some use from a person.... He has to work....

LUKA: You don't say!

KOSTYLYOV: How else?... What's a stranger, now? A stranger's a strange person, one who isn't like other people. If he's a pilgrim, now, a real pilgrim who knows a thing or two ... that's no good to anybody ... it may even be some truth he's picked up somewhere ... but I'm telling you it isn't every truth that's worth knowing ... then he'll keep it to himself. If he's a real pilgrim ... then he'll keep mum. Or else talk so that nobody knows what he's talking about.... And he shouldn't be after anything, or interfere in anything, or go upsetting people to no good purpose.... He shouldn't bother about how other people live.... It's for him to lead a pious life.... He ought to live in a cave in the forest where nobody can see him. He shouldn't mix up in people's business, trying to tell them what's right and wrong.... But he should pray for everybody ... for all our worldly sins—for mine and yours and everybody's. That's why he renounces the vanities of this world—so he can pray. That's how it is.... (*Pause.*) But you—what kind of a pilgrim are you? Haven't even a pashport.... A respectable person ought to have a pashport. All respectable people have pashports....

LUKA: You see how it is—there are people—and then, there are just plain creatures.

KOSTYLYOV: None of your cleverness, now. None of your riddles ... I guess I'm just as smart as you are. What's that you're saying—people and creatures?

LUKA: There's no riddle here. I'm just saying as there's barren soil ... and there's fertile soil ... and whatever you sow on fertile soil is bound to bear fruit.... That's all....

KOSTYLYOV: Well, what of it?

LUKA: Take you, for example.... If the Lord God himself should say to you: Mikhail! Be a human being! ... it wouldn't make any difference at all.... You'd just keep right on being what you are....

KOSTYLYOV: H'm.... You know what? My wife's uncle, he's a policeman. If I....

VASSILISA (*entering*): Mikhail Ivanovich, tea's ready!

KOSTYLYOV (*to Luka*): Get out of here. Don't let me catch you in my lodging again! . . .

VASSILISA: Yes, you better clear out, old man! . . . You've got a long tongue. . . . Who knows but what you're an escaped convict or something. . . .

KOSTYLYOV: Get out of here this very day, or else I'll. . . .

LUKA: Call your uncle? Go ahead and call him. . . . Tell him you've caught an escaped convict. . . . Maybe the uncle will get a reward—three kopecks or so. . . .

BUBNOV (*at the window*): Selling something? What's that for three kopecks?

LUKA: They're threatening to sell me.

VASSILISA (*to her husband*): Come on!

BUBNOV: For three kopecks? Watch out, old man. . . . They'll sell you out for one kopeck.

KOSTYLYOV (*to Bubnov*): So you've crawled out? Like a goblin from under the stove. (*Goes out with his wife.*)

VASSILISA: How many thieves and rascals there are in the world!

LUKA: Here's wishing you a good appetite. . . .

VASSILISA (*turning around*): Hold your tongue . . . you shrivelled mushroom!

(*Disappears behind the corner of the house with her husband.*)

LUKA: I'll be leaving tonight. . . .

BUBNOV: That's good. It's always well to leave while there's still time. . . .

LUKA: That's the truth for sure.

BUBNOV: I know what I'm saying. I probably escaped jail by leaving in time.

LUKA: You don't say!

BUBNOV: Yes I do. Here's how it was: my wife got mixed up with a furrier. . . . An able master. . . . Good at dyeing dog pelts into racoon. . . . Cats too—into kangaroos . . . and muskrats . . . and anything you like. A smart chap. It was with him my wife got mixed up . . . and they clung so tight to each other I had to look sharp so they didn't poison me or in some other way ship me off. Sometimes I'd happen to beat my wife—then the master'd beat me. He was a

fierce fighter. Once he pulled out half my beard and broke a rib. I used to get sore too.... One day I lammed my wife over the head with an iron poker... and a big war was on. But I see that nothing will come of it.... They'll get me yet. So I planned to bump off my wife.... Had it all thought out good. But I caught myself in time and went away....

LUKA: And that was the best thing to do—leave them alone to turn cats into muskrats the way they like....

BUBNOV: Only—the shop belonged to the wife—and stayed that way ... and I got left—in the state you see. But to tell the truth, I'd have drunk up the shop.... It's the drink with me that's....

LUKA: The drink? H'm.

BUBNOV: I'm a ferocious drinker. Once I go on a jag, I drink up everything but my own hide. And I'm lazy. You can't imagine how I hate to work.

(*Enter* SATIN *and the* ACTOR *having an argument.*)

SATIN: Nonsense! You're not going anywhere, do you hear?... That's all tommyrot! Old man! What twaddle have you been pouring into this fellow's ear?

ACTOR: That's a lie! Granddad, tell him he's lying. I am so going. I worked today—swept the street. And I didn't have a single drink. How's that? Here they are—my thirty kopecks, and I'm sober!

SATIN: Idiotic— that's all. Here, give it to me. I'll drink it up ... or else lose it in a card game....

ACTOR: Hands off! That goes towards buying my ticket.

LUKA (*to Satin*): Why should you be wanting to set him off the right path?

SATIN: "Tell me, oh wizard, beloved of the gods, just what is the fate that the future conceals?" I'm sold out, brother! Lost my last kopeck! But there's still hope for the world, granddad—there're cleverer sharks than me left.

LUKA: You're a gay fellow, Konstantin, and a pleasant one.

BUBNOV: Actor! Come here!

(*The* ACTOR *goes to the window and stoops down to carry on a conversation with* BUBNOV *in a low voice.*)

SATIN: I was amusing when I was young. Nice to recall those times.... A son of a gun, I was!... Danced superbly. Acted on the stage. Loved to make people laugh.... Wonderful!

LUKA: And how did you get switched off the track, eh?

SATIN: What an inquisitive creature you are, old man. You'd like to know everything.... What for?

LUKA: I'd like to understand this human business.... But when I look at you, I can't understand a thing. You're such a fine fellow, Konstantin, and so clever!... That makes it all the stranger....

SATIN: Jail, granddad! I spent four years and seven months in jail ... and nobody will have you after a jail sentence.

LUKA: Oho! And what were you put in jail for?

SATIN: For a rascal.... I killed a rascal in a burst of wrath and indignation.... I learned to play cards in jail—among other things....

LUKA: You killed him on account of a woman?

SATIN: On account of my own sister.... But don't you go prying. I don't like to be asked questions.... And that all happened long, long ago.... My sister—died.... Nine years already.... She was a lovely sister.

LUKA: You don't take life so hard. You should have heard that locksmith howl a little while back! Ai-i-i! ...

SATIN: Kleshch?

LUKA: Him it was. No work! he shouted.... No nothing!

SATIN: He'll get used to it in time.... Well, what'll I do with myself now?

LUKA (*softly*): Look! He's coming....

(KLESHCH *enters slowly, with hanging head.*)

SATIN: Hey, you widower! What've you got your nose between your knees for? What're you thinking about?

KLESHCH: I'm thinking about what I'm going to do. No tools.... They all went for the funeral.

SATIN: Take my advice. Don't do anything. Just be a burden to the world....

KLESHCH: It's all right for you to talk ... but I feel ashamed before people....

SATIN: Drop it! People aren't ashamed that you lead a dog's life.... Think it over. You stop working, I stop working... hundreds of others... thousands, everybody! Understand? We all stop working. Nobody will raise a finger to do anything! What will happen then?

KLESHCH: We'll all die of hunger.

LUKA (*to Satin*): You should join the Runaways, with such ideas.... There's a kind of people called Runaways.*

SATIN: I know. They're not such fools, granddad.

(*From the window of the* KOSTYLYOVS' *apartment can be heard the cries of Natasha: "What for? Stop!... What have I done?"*)

LUKA (*upset*): Natasha screaming? Eh? Oh, you....

(*From the* KOSTYLYOVS' *apartment comes the noise of people moving about, dishes being broken, and the shrill cries of* KOSTYLYOV: "*You little heretic!... You whore!...*)

VASSILISA: Stop!... Wait!... I'll show her!... Take that!... And that!...

NATASHA: They're beating me! They're killing me!...

SATIN (*shouting at the window*): Hey you there!

LUKA (*rushing here and there*): Vassili!... If you could get Vassili!... Oh Lord! Fellows!... Brothers!...

ACTOR (*running on*): Here I am.... I'll show him!...

BUBNOV: They've started beating her a lot lately.

SATIN: Come on, old man.... We'll be witnesses.

LUKA (*following Satin*): A poor sort of witness I make! That's not for me!... It's Vassili we need in a hurry!...

NATASHA: Sister!... Sister!... Ah-h-h!...

BUBNOV: They've gagged her.... I'll go have a look....

(*The commotion in the* KOSTYLYOVS' *apartment fades out as the people apparently go into the hall. The old man is heard to cry "Stop!" A door slams, and this chops off the noise like the blow of an axe. Silence on the stage. Spring twilight.*)

* Members of a religious sect in old Russia who taught people to run away from places where nonconformers were persecuted by the government.—*Trans.*

KLESHCH (*is sitting on the overturned sledge with an air of detachment, tensely rubbing his hands. He starts to mutter something unintelligible which later becomes the following lines.*): But how? ... You've got to live, don't you? ... (*In a loud voice.*) Shelter! It's shelter I need! ... I have no shelter! ... I haven't anything! ... A man's alone—all alone. That's where the trouble is. ... No one to help him.

(*He goes off slowly, all bent over. An ominous silence reigns for a few seconds. Then, somewhere off stage is heard an indefinite murmur which grows into chaotic sound as it draws nearer. Separate voices can be distinguished.*)

VASSILISA: I'm her sister! Let me at her! ...

KOSTYLYOV: You have no right.

VASSILISA: Jailbird! ...

SATIN: Call Vassili! ... Hurry! ... Beat him, Zob!

(*A police whistle is heard.*)

TATAR (*running on; his right arm in a sling*): What kind of law—to kill in daytime.

KRIVOI ZOB (*followed by Medvedev*): Hah! I gave him a good one!

MEDVEDEV: You—how dare you fight?

TATAR: And you? What duty you have?

MEDVEDEV (*running after the longshoreman*): Stop! Give back my whistle!

KOSTYLYOV (*running on*): Abram! Grab him! ... He killed. ...

(*From behind the corner come* KVASHNYA *and* NASTYA *supporting the dishevelled* NATASHA *between them.* SATIN *walks backward, pushing off* VASSILISA *who waves her hands about trying to strike her sister.* ALYOSHKA *jumps about her like an imp, whistling in her ear, shouting, howling. They are followed by a number of other ragged men and women.*)

SATIN (*to Vassilisa*): What's the idea, you damned slut? ...

VASSILISA: Get away, jailbird! It may cost me my life, but I'll tear her to pieces! ...

KVASHNYA (*leading Natasha away*): Enough, Vassilisa! . . . Have some shame! Why be a brute?

MEDVEDEV (*grabbing Satin*): Aha! . . . Caught you at last!

SATIN: Zob. Lam into them Zob! Vaska! . . . Vaska! . . .

(*They gather in a crowd near the passage of the brick wall.* NATASHA *is led over and seated on the pile of boards to the right.*)

PEPPEL (*appearing suddenly from the passage and silently pushing everybody aside with strong vigorous movements*): Where's Natasha? You. . . .

KOSTYLYOV (*hiding behind the corner of the house*): Abram! Catch Vaska. . . . Brothers, help catch Vaska! Thief! . . . Robber! . . .

PEPPEL: You . . . old fornicator! (*With a great sweep of his arm he strikes the old man, who falls in such a way that only his head and shoulders are seen from behind the corner of the house. Peppel rushes over to Natasha.*)

VASSILISA: Thrash Vaska, fellows! . . . Thrash the thief!

MEDVEDEV (*shouting to Satin*): Keep out. . . . This is a family affair! They're all relatives . . . but who are you?

PEPPEL: What is it? . . . What has she done—stabbed you?

KVASHNYA: Just look what the brutes have done! Scalded her legs with boiling water. . . .

NASTYA: Turned over the samovar on her. . . .

TATAR: Maybe accident. . . . Have to know for sure. . . . Mustn't make mistake. . . .

NATASHA (*almost fainting*): Vassili, take me away—hide me. . . .

VASSILISA: My God! Look here! He's dead! Killed! . . .

(*Everyone rushes to the passage where* KOSTYLYOV *is lying.* BUBNOV *separates himself from the crowd and comes over to* VASSILI.)

BUBNOV (*in a low voice*): Vassili! The old man—he's done for!

PEPPEL (*looks at him without comprehending*): Call an ambulance. . . . We'll have to take her to the hospital. . . . I'll get even with them all right!

BUBNOV: I'm saying that somebody's finished off the old man....

(The noise on the stage dies out like a fire flooded with water. Separate remarks are passed in hushed tones: "Really?" "That's bad." "H'm-m." "Let's get away from here." "What the hell!" "Watch out!" "Beat it before the police come." The crowd dwindles. BUBNOV, *the* TATAR, NASTYA *and* KVASHNYA *rush over to the body of* KOSTYLYOV.)

VASSILISA (*rising from the ground and crying triumphantly*): Murdered!... There's the one who murdered my husband! Vaska did it! I saw it myself! I saw it, friends! Well, Vaska? So it's the police for you?

PEPPEL (*leaving Natasha's side*): Let me through.... Out of my way! (*Takes a look at the old man then turns to Vassilisa.*) Well, are you satisfied? (*Touches the body with his foot.*) Done for, the cur.... So you got what you wanted.... Humph ... maybe I should bump you off too! (*Throws himself at her. Satin and Krivoi Zob quickly stop him. Vassilisa runs into the passage.*)

SATIN: Think what you're doing!

KRIVOI ZOB: Phoo! Take your time!

VASSILISA (*reappearing*): Well, friend Vaska! No escaping your fate!... The police! Abram ... blow your whistle!

MEDVEDEV: The devils snatched my whistle away....

ALYOSHKA: Here it is! (*He gives a blow, Medvedev runs after him.*)

SATIN (*leading Peppel over to Natasha*): Vaska, don't worry. You killed him in a fight—that's nothing. That won't cost you dear....

VASSILISA: Hold Vaska! He killed him!... I saw it myself!

SATIN: I also had a whack at him three or four times.... Didn't take much to finish him off. I'll be a witness, Vassili....

PEPPEL: I'm not anxious to get out of it.... I'm anxious to drag Vassilisa into it.... And I'll drag her in, so help me God! That's what she wanted.... She talked me into killing her husband... she talked me into it!

NATASHA (*suddenly, in a loud voice*): Ah!... Now I understand!... So that's how it is, Vassili! Oh, good people, they did it together!... They planned it all! All right, Vassili!... So that's why you talked to me tonight—so's she could hear? Good people,

she's his mistress.... You know that.... Everybody knows it. They did it together.... She—she talked him into killing her husband.... He stood in their way.... And I stood in their way.... That's why they've made a cripple of me....

PEPPEL: Natasha!... What are you saying!

SATIN: H'm.... The devil take it!

VASSILISA: Liar! She's lying! I... he's the one. Vaska killed him!

NATASHA: They did it together! Curse you! Both of you....

SATIN: It's a game all right!... Watch out, Vassili! They'll put a rope around your neck!

KRIVOI ZOB: Can't make head or tail out of it!... A fine business!

PEPPEL: Natasha! Do you really.... Are you serious?... How can you think that I ... with her....

SATIN: Of course, Natasha.... Think what you're saying!

VASSILISA (*at the passage*): They've murdered my husband ... Your Honour. Vaska Peppel, the thief—he did it. I saw him, Inspector.... Everybody saw him....

NATASHA (*tossing in a half-conscious state*): Good people ... it was my sister and Vaska Peppel who did it! Listen to me, Inspector.... It was my sister—she showed him how ... she talked him into it ... her lover ... there he is, damn his soul! They killed him! Take them both.... Take them to jail!... And take me too!... Put me in jail! For the love of Christ ... put me in jail!...

(CURTAIN.)

Act IV

(*The scene is the same as in Act I, except that the partition which once formed* PEPPEL'S *room has been taken down and* KLESHCH'S *anvil is gone. The* TATAR *tosses and moans on a bunk in the corner which was* PEPPEL'S *room.* KLESHCH *sits at the table repairing an accordion, sometimes trying out the keys. At the other end of the table sit* SATIN, *the* BARON *and* NASTYA, *with a bottle of vodka, three bottles of beer and some black bread in front of them. The* ACTOR *is moving about and coughing on top of the stove. It is night. The stage is lighted by a lamp standing in the centre of the table. The wind is blowing outside.*)

KLESHCH: Yes ... he disappeared in all the hubbub....

BARON: Slipped away from the police ... like smoke from a fire....

SATIN: Like the sinful from the righteous.

NASTYA: He was a good old man! ... But you—you're not humans. You're—dung!

BARON (*drinking*): To your health, my fine lady!

SATIN: A curious old geezer.... Nastya. here, she fell in love with him.

NASTYA: Yes, I fell in love with him. That's the truth. He saw everything, and understood everything.

SATIN (*laughing*): And in general ... he was like mush for the toothless....

BARON (*laughing*): Like a plaster for boils.

KLESHCH: He had pity ... but you ... you don't know what pity is....

SATIN: What good would you get out of my pity? ...

KLESHCH: But you do have the knack ... not so much of pitying people ... but at least of sparing their feelings....

TATAR (*sitting down on one of the bunks and rocking his sore arm like a baby*): He was a good old man.... He know law of soul. Who know law of soul—he good. Who lost law—he lost himself....

BARON: What law, prince?

TATAR: Different law.... You know what....

BARON: Next!

TATAR: Don't hurt person. That's law.

SATIN: That's called: "Penal Code for Criminals and Miscreants...."

BARON: And then there's that "Statutes of Penalties Imposed by Justices of the Peace...."

TATAR: Koran is law.... Your Koran also law.... Every soul must be Koran ... yes!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*): Wheezes, damn it! What the prince says is right.... People ought to live according to the law.... According to the Bible....

SATIN: Go ahead....

BARON: Just try it....

TATAR: Mohammed gave Koran, said: here—the law! Do what it say here. Then come time—Koran too little.... New time give new law.... Every new time give new law....

SATIN: Right you are.... Now the time's come for the "Penal Code...." A good strong law.... Take a lot of time to wear out that law.

NASTYA (*banging a glass on the table*): Why ... oh why should I go on living here ... with you all? I'll leave.... I'll go anywhere ... to the ends of the earth.

BARON: Barefoot, my fine lady?

NASTYA: Naked! Crawling on all fours!

BARON: A sight for sore eyes, my fine lady! ... On all fours! ...

NASTYA: That's how I'll go. I'll go anyhow, just to get rid of the sight of you.... If you only knew how sick I am of everything! Everybody and everything!

SATIN: Take the Actor along with you when you go.... He's planning the same trip.... He just learned that half a mile from the end of the earth there's a hospital for organons! ...

ACTOR (*poking his head over the edge of the stove*): Organisms, fool!

SATIN: For organons poisoned by alcohol....

ACTOR: Oh, he's going all right. He's going ... you'll see!

BARON: Just who is *he*, my good sir?

ACTOR: Me!

BARON: Merci, votary of the goddess ... what's her name? Goddess of the drama, tragedy.—What d'ye call her?

ACTOR: Muse, you dolt! She's not a goddess, but a muse!

SATIN: Lachesis? ... Hera? ... Aphrodite? ... Atropos? ... The devil only knows which. It's all the doings of that old man, Baron.... Got the Actor all stirred up.

BARON: The old man's crazy....

ACTOR: Ignoramuses! Barbarians! Mel-po-me-ne! He'll go away all right, you'll see! Heartless creatures! "Gorge yourselves, benighted minds! ..." That's from Béranger.... He'll find a place for himself where there's no ... no....

BARON: No nothing, my good sir?

ACTOR: Yes. No nothing! "That yawning hole—shall be my grave. This wasted frame, no hand can save." And why should *you* go on living? Oh, why?

BARON: Hey you—"Edmund Kean, or Genius and Dissipation." Stop shouting!

ACTOR: Liar! I'll shout if I want to!

NASTYA (*raising her head from the table and waving her hands*): Go ahead and shout. Let them listen!

BARON: What's the sense of it, my fine lady?

SATIN: Leave them alone, Baron! To hell with them! ... Let them yell! ... They'll split their heads open.... The point is: don't interfere with people, as the old man said.... It was him, like a cake of yeast, put the ferment in our fellow lodgers....

KLESHCH: Lured them off somewhere ... then slipped away without showing them the road....

BARON: The old man was a faker....

NASTYA: Liar! You're a faker yourself!

BARON: Shut up, my fine lady!

KLESHCH: As for the truth—the old man had no use for it.... Very set against the truth he was ... and that's right. When you come to think of it, what talk of truth can there be? It's stuffy enough without it..., Take the prince here ... smashed his arm

on his job and now he'll have to chop it off.... There's your truth for you.

SATIN (*pounding on the table*): Silence! You're a bunch of—cattle! Blockheads!... Shut up about the old man! (*More calmly.*) And you're the worst of them, Baron.... You don't understand a thing... and you lie! The old man wasn't a faker. What is the truth? Man! That's the truth! He understood this... but you don't. Your heads are like bricks.... But I understand the old man. Of course he lied ... but out of pity for you, devil take you! Lots of people lie out of pity for their brothers.... I know. I've read books. They lie beautifully, with inspiration, stirring you up. There are lies that console, and lies that reconcile a person to his lot.... Lies find an excuse for the weight that smashed the worker's arm ... and blame a man for starving to death.... I know your lies! Only those who are fainthearted or live at other people's expense have need of lies.... Some people are supported by lies, others hide behind them.... But the person who is his own boss—the person who is independent and doesn't suck other people's blood—what need has he of lies? Lies are the religion of slaves and bosses!... Truth is the god of the free man!

BARON: Bravo! Well said! I agree with everything! You talk like ... a respectable gentleman.

SATIN: Why shouldn't a cheat sometimes talk like a respectable gentleman, if your respectable gentlemen talk like cheats?... Yes ... there are lots of things I've forgotten, but I still remember a thing or two. That old man was a smart fellow.... He ... acted on me like acid on an old, dirty coin.... Let's drink to his health! Fill it up....

(NASTYA *fills* SATIN'S *glass with beer and hands it to him.*)

SATIN (*with a short laugh*): The old man lives by his own wits.... He looks at everything through his own eyes. One day I said to him, "Granddad, what do people live for?..." (*Imitating the voice and manners of* LUKA.) "They live for something better, my friend. Now, for instance, let's say we have some carpenters—junk, all of them. And then from among them is born one carpenter—a carpenter the likes of which the earth has never seen; outshines all the others, he does, and none can even hold a candle to him. On all carpentering he leaves his own mark, so that the craft moves forward a whole twenty

years in one jump.... The same it is with all the others—tinsmiths ... cobblers ... all your working people ... and all the peasants ... and even the gentlefolk. All of them live for something better! Each thinking it's for himself he's living, while all the time it's for something better. For a hundred years they live ... and maybe for more, to make a better man."

(NASTYA *looks intently at* SATIN. KLESHCH *stops working on the accordion and also listens. The* BARON *drops his head on his chest and softly drums upon the table. The* ACTOR *quietly lets himself down off the stove onto one of the bunks.*)

SATIN: "All of them, my good friend, every last one of them living for something better! It's considerate we should be of everybody.... For you see, it's not for us to know just who a person is, and why he was born, and what he can do.... Happen he was born for our good fortune ... for some great help to us.... And particular it's the children we must be kind to ... the little ones. It's freedom they need, the little ones. We mustn't interfere with their living ... and we must be kind to them."

(*Pause.*)

BARON (*meditatively*): H'm-m! ... For something better? That reminds me of my family.... An old family ... dating back to Catherine the Great.... Nobles.... Warriors.... Came from France.... Served the tsar and kept climbing up and up.... During the reign of Nikolai I, my grandfather Gustave Débille ... held a high position.... Wealth ... hundreds of serfs ... horses ... cooks....

NASTYA: Liar! That's all bunk!

BARON (*jumping up*): Wha-at.... What next?

NASTYA: That's all bunk!

BARON (*shouting*): Mansion in Moscow! Mansion in St. Petersburg! Carriages with our coat of arms on them!

(KLESHCH *takes up his accordion and goes over to one side, from where he observes the scene.*)

NASTYA: Bunk!

BARON: Shut up! Dozens of lackeys, I'm telling you! ...

NASTYA (*enjoying it*): Poppycock!

BARON: I'll kill you!

NASTYA (*about to run away*): You never had a carriage!

SATIN: Drop it, Nastka! Don't get him mad....

BARON: Just wait ... you scum! My grandfather....

NASTYA: You never had a grandfather! You never had anything!

(SATIN *laughs.*)

BARON (*sinks down on a bench, exhausted by anger*): Satin, tell her—that whore—or are you laughing too? Don't you believe it either? (*Shouting in despair, banging the table with his fists.*) It's all true, god damn you!

NASTYA (*triumphantly*): Aha! Howling! So now maybe you understand what it means to have nobody believe you!

KLESHCH (*returning to the table*) : I thought there'd be a fight....

TATAR: Ah, stupid people! Very bad!

BARON: I ... I won't have people making fun of me! I have ... I can prove it. I have documents, you devils!

SATIN: Forget them! And forget about your grandfather's carriages.... They won't get you very far ... bygone carriages.

BARON: But how does she dare!

NASTYA: Just think of it! How does she dare! ...

SATIN: Apparently she does. And why is she any worse than you are? Though she probably never had any carriages, or grandfathers, or even a mother and father....

BARON (*calming down*): Devil take you.... You know how to take things calmly.... I guess I have no character....

SATIN: Get one.... Come in handy.... (*Pause.*) Nastya, do you ever go the the hospital?

NASTYA: What for?

SATIN: To see Natasha.

NASTYA: A little late, aren't you? She left the hospital long ago.... Left it and—disappeared. Gone without a trace....

SATIN: That means—all gone....

KLESHCH: Interesting to see who'll give it to the other harder: Vaska—Vassilisa, or the other way round.

NASTYA: Vassilisa will wriggle out of it somehow. She's foxy. But they'll send Vaska to hard labour in Siberia....

SATIN: Oh no, he'll only get jail for killing in a fight....

NASTYA: Too bad. Better to send him away... to send all of you away... sweep you out like garbage... throw you on some dump.

SATIN (*surprised*): What's that you're saying? Have you gone clean out of your mind?

BARON: I'll give her a smack on the ear ... for her nerve.

NASTYA: Go ahead and try. Just touch me!

BARON: I'll try it all right!

SATIN: Drop it! Don't touch her.... You mustn't hurt people. I can't get that old man out of my head! (*Laughs.*) You mustn't hurt people! But what if they hurt me once to last my whole life—what then? Am I supposed to forgive them? Never! Nobody!...

BARON (*to Nastya*): Don't forget that you're not my equal! You're ... the scum of the earth!

NASTYA: Ugh, you fallen creature! You live on me ... like a worm on an apple!

(*Burst of laughter from the men.*)

KLESHCH: Ah, you little fool! An apple!

BARON: How can you get mad at her? ... The simpleton!

NASTYA: Laughing are you? Fooling yourselves. You don't really think it's funny.

ACTOR (*sullenly*): Give it to them!

NASTYA: If only I could! I'd ... I'd ... (*picks up a cup and smashes it down on the floor*) ... that's what I'd do to you!

TATAR: Why break dishes? Eh ... vixen! ...

BARON (*getting up*): Oh, no! Now I'll teach her ... some manners!

NASTYA (*running toward the door*): You can go to hell!

SATIN (*calling after her*): Hey! Enough of this! Who are you scaring? What's it all about, anyway?

NASTYA: Wolves! I hope you choke! Wolves!

ACTOR (*sullenly*): Amen!

TATAR: O-o-o! Mean woman—Russian woman. Nervy.... Too free. Tatar woman not like that. Tatar woman knows law.

KLESHCH: Needs a good shaking....

BARON: The slut!

KLESHCH (*trying out the accordion*): Fixed. Only the owner doesn't come for it.... The fellow's going to the dogs....

SATIN: Let's have a drink now.

KLESHCH: Thanks! And it's time to turn in....

SATIN: Getting used to us?

KLESHCH (*drinks, then goes over to one of the bunks in the corner*): Not so bad.... Human beings everywhere, it seems. At first you don't notice it ... then you have a better look and there they are—human beings.... Not so bad.

(*The* TATAR *spreads something or other on his bed, gets on his knees and begins to pray.*)

BARON (*pointing out the Tatar to Satin*): Look at that.

SATIN: Leave him alone. He's a good fellow.... Don't interfere. (*Laughs.*) Why should I be feeling so kindhearted today?

BARON: You always get kindhearted when you've had a drink ... kindhearted and clever....

SATIN: When I'm drunk ... everything seems wonderful.... H'm-m.... He's praying? Fine. A person can be a believer or not ... as he pleases. That's his business. A person's free to choose.... He pays for everything himself—for believing, for not believing, for loving, for being clever. A person pays for everything himself, and that's why he's free.... Man—there's your truth! What's a man? ... Not you, not me, not them ... oh no! But you and me and them and the old man, and Napoleon, and Mohammed—all in one! (*Drawing the figure of a man in the air.*) Understand? That's—tremendous! Including all beginnings and all endings.... Everything—within man; everything—for man! Only man exists; all the rest is the work of his hands and his mind! How marvellous is Man! How proud the word rings—MAN! A man should be respected. Not pitied ... pity is degrading ... but respected! Here, Baron, let's drink to Man! (*Stands.*) It's good to feel yourself a Man! Here am I—ex-convict, murderer, card shark—all of that! When I go down the street people take me for a thief.... They step aside and glance back at me. Often they call me a rascal! A faker! Work, they say! Work? What for? To fill my belly? (*Laughs.*) I've always despised people who spent

too much thought on their bellies. That's not the point, Baron. That's not the point. Man is superior to that. Man is superior to his belly!

BARON (*shaking his head*): You can think about these things.... That's good.... It must warm your heart.... As for me—I can't. I don't know how. (*Glancing about and speaking cautiously, under his breath.*) Sometimes—I'm afraid.... Understand? Scared. I keep thinking—what'll happen next?

SATIN (*walking up and down*): Nonsense! Whom should a man fear?

BARON: You know ... as long as I can remember ... there's been a sort of fog in my head. I never could understand anything. I... it's strange somehow ... it seems to me that all my life I've just been changing my clothes.... What for? Can't make it out. First I was a student—wore the uniform of the Institute for Sons of the Nobility. What did they teach me there? Can't remember.... Got married. Put on a dress suit, then a dressing gown ... but the wife I chose was a bad one. Why did I take her? Heaven only knows.... I squandered all my means—wore some kind of a grey jacket and faded pants.... How did I lose everything? Didn't notice.... Worked in a government office—uniform again, cap with a badge on it.... Embezzled government money. So they dressed me up in convict clothes.... After that I donned these things ... and that's all.... Like in a dream ... isn't it? It's even—funny....

SATIN: Not very.... More stupid than funny.

BARON: That's right.... I think it's stupid too.... After all ... I must have been born for something ... don't you think?

SATIN (*with a short laugh*): Presumably.... Man is born for something better! ... (*Nodding his head.*) That's it. That's—fine.

BARON: Drat that Nastka!... Where did she run off to? I'll go have a look. After all, she's.... (*Goes out. Pause.*)

ACTOR: Tatar! (*Pause.*) Prince!

(*The* TATAR *turns his head.*)

ACTOR: Pray ... for me!

TATAR: What?

ACTOR (*softly*): Say a prayer ... for me.

TATAR (*after a pause*): Say your own prayers....

ACTOR (*quickly climbs down from the stove, goes over to the table, pours himself a glass of vodka with shaking hands, swallows it down, then almost runs out into the passage.*) I've gone!

SATIN: Hey, you! Sikambre! Where you going?

(*Whistles after him. Enter* BUBNOV *and* MEDVEDEV, *the latter wearing a woman's quilted jacket. Both are slightly drunk. In one hand* BUBNOV *is carrying a string of pretzels, in the other a couple of smoked fish. One bottle of vodka is thrust under his arm, another sticks out of the pocket of his coat.*)

MEDVEDEV: A camel is something like a donkey, only without the ears....

BUBNOV: Drop it! You're something like a donkey yourself.

MEDVEDEV: A camel doesn't have any ears at all.... He hears with his nostrils....

BUBNOV (*to Satin*): So here you are, friend! I searched all the pubs and taverns for you. Take this bottle. All my hands are busy.

SATIN: Put those pretzels on the table and one of your hands will be free....

BUBNOV: Sure enough. Just look at him, copper! Smart fellow, ain't he?

MEDVEDEV: All thieves are smart.... I know! They couldn't get along if they weren't. A good person now—he's good even if he's stupid. But a bad fellow—he's got to be smart. But about that camel, you're all wrong. It's a beast of burden.... No horns ... no teeth....

BUBNOV: Where's everybody? How is it nobody's here? Hey, crawl out!... I'm treating! Who's that in the corner?

SATIN: How long will it take you to drink up your last kopeck, you old scarecrow?

BUBNOV: Not long! This time the capital I saved wasn't so big.... Zob! Where's Zob?

KLESHCH (*coming over to the table*): He's gone....

BUBNOV: Gr-r-r-r! You bulldog, you! Grrr! Woof! Woof! No barking! No grumbling! Drink, you dunce. Don't stand there hanging your head!... I'm treating tonight! And how I love it! If I was rich ... I'd open up a pub ... free to everybody! Honest to God!

With music, and a chorus for sure.... Come on in, everybody, eat, drink, listen to the songs ... ease your souls! No money? Here you are—a free pub for you! As for you, Satin, I'd ... for you ... here, half my money ... take it! That's what I'd do!

SATIN: Give me all of it—right now!

BUBNOV: My whole capital? Right now? Hah! Here you are—a ruble ... another ... twenty kopecks ... chicken feed....

SATIN: That's enough! It'll be safer with me. I'll gamble with it.

MEDVEDEV: I'm a witness that the money was given out for safe keeping. How much?

BUBNOV: You? You're a camel.... We don't need any witnesses....

ALYOSHKA (*enters barefoot*): Fellows! I got my feet wet!

BUBNOV: Come on and get your throat wet!... That's all you need! Your singing and playing is all very good, my lad. But your drinking—that's no good. That's harmful, brother.... Drinking's harmful....

ALYOSHKA: You're a good example. The only time you're anything like a human being is when you're drunk.... Kleshch! Have you fixed my accordion? (*Sings and dances.*)

Oh, if I had a mug,
As ugly as a bug,
My lady fair,
Would give me the air!

I'm cold, brothers. I'm fro-o-zen!

MEDVEDEV: H'm.... May I ask just who is your lady fair?

BUBNOV: Leave him alone! Nowadays, mister, it's mind your own business! You're not a cop any more.... Not a cop and not an uncle!...

ALYOSHKA: Just—the lady's husband.

BUBNOV: One of your nieces in jail ... the other dying....

MEDVEDEV (*proudly*): That's a lie. She's not dying. She simply disappeared.

(SATIN *laughs.*)

BUBNOV: What difference does it make? Once you've lost your nieces, you're no longer an uncle.

ALYOSHKA: Your Excellency! Retired drummerboy to the goat!

The dame—she's got money,
And me—I'm dead broke
But still I am jolly—
A marvellous bloke!

It's cold.

(*Enter* KRIVOI ZOB. *Throughout the rest of the act other figures of men and women drift in. They take their things off and lie down grumbling on the bunks.*)

KRIVOI ZOB: Bubnov! What did you run away for?

BUBNOV: Come here! Sit down and let's have a song! My favourite . . . eh?

TATAR: Must sleep nighttime. Sing songs daytime.

SATIN: That's all right, prince. Come on over.

TATAR: What you mean, that's all right? Make noise. . . . Make big noise when you sing songs. . . .

BUBNOV (*going over to him*): How's the arm, prince? Did they cut it off?

TATAR: What for? Wait. . . . Maybe don't have to cut it off. . . . Arm isn't iron. Easy enough cut it off when time come. . . .

KRIVOI ZOB: You're done for, prince. No good for anything with one arm. People like us are worth as much as our arms and our backs, brother. . . . No arm, no man. Done for. . . . Come on, have a drink . . . and forget it!

KVASHNYA (*entering*): Hello, my dearies! The weather, the weather! Cold! Slushy! . . . Is my copper here?

MEDVEDEV: Here I am!

KVASHNYA: You've gone and taken my jacket again! And looks as if you'd had a nip or two, eh? What's the idea?

MEDVEDEV: On the occasion of Bubnov's birthday . . . and the cold, and the slush. . . .

KVASHNYA: You watch out! . . . The slush! None of your monkey business! . . . Come on to bed! . . .

MEDVEDEV (*going into the kitchen*): I could sleep all right. I'm ready. . . . High time.

SATIN: Aren't you . . . pretty strict with him?

KVASHNYA: That's the only way, friend. Got to keep a tight hold on men like that. When I took him in to live with me, I thinks to myself: I may get some benefit out of him, seeing as he's in the military and you're all such a bunch of rowdies ... me being just a poor woman.... But right away he starts drinking. I can't be having a thing like that!

SATIN: Picked a poor helpmate....

KVASHNYA: There aren't any better ones.... You wouldn't live with me—such a swell you are! And even if you did, it wouldn't last more than a week.... And you'd gamble me away in no time—me and all my claptrap.

SATIN (*laughing*): Right you are, woman. I'd gamble you away all right....

KVASHNYA: You see? Alyoshka!

ALYOSHKA: Here—it's me!

KVASHNYA: What's this gossip you've been spreading about me?

ALYOSHKA: Only the truth. There's a woman for you, I says. Simply a marvel. Fat, bones, flesh—ten poods of it, but as for brains—not an ounce!

KVASHNYA: That's a lie now. I've got a very lot of brains.... But why did you say I beat that copper of mine?

ALYOSHKA: I thought you gave him a beating that time you dragged him off by the hair....

KVASHNYA (*laughing*): Fool! As though you couldn't see. But why hang out your dirty clothes? ... And besides, you've hurt his feelings.... He's took to drink because of your gossip....

ALYOSHKA: So it must be the truth what they say—that even a chicken drinks.

(SATIN *and* KLESHCH *laugh.*)

KVASHNYA: Ooh, what a tongue you've got! What kind of a person do you call yourself, Alyoshka?

ALYOSHKA: The best in the world! Try my hand at anything, and follow my nose wherever it goes!

BUBNOV (*alongside the Tatar's bunk*): Come on! We won't give you a chance to sleep anyway! We're going to sing ... all night long! Zob!

KRIVOI ZOB: Sing? Why not? ...

ALYOSHKA: And I'll accompany.

SATIN: We'll see how.

TATAR (*smiling*): Well, shaitan Bubno ... give wine. We drink. We have good time. We die, once upon time.

BUBNOV: Fill up his glass, Satin! Sit down, Zob! It's not much a fellow needs, friends. Here I am with a drink in me and happy as a lord! Zob ... start the song—my favourite! I'm going to sing and cry!

KRIVOI ZOB (*singing*):

Every morn the sun is rising....

BUBNOV (*joining in*):

Still my cell is filled with gloom....

(*Suddenly the door bursts open.*)

BARON (*shouting from the threshold*): Hey ... folks! Come here! ... Out in the lot ... the Actor has ... hung himself!

(*Silence. All look at the* BARON. NASTYA *appears from behind him and walks slowly, with wide eyes, towards the table.*)

SATIN (*softly*): Tsck! ... Spoiled the song ... the fool!

(CURTAIN.)

ENEMIES

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

CHARACTERS

ZAKHAR BARDIN, *aged 45*
PAULINA, *his wife, age about 40*
YAKOV BARDIN, *aged 40*
TATYANA, *his wife, aged 28, an actress*
NADYA, *Paulina's niece, aged 18*
PECHENEGOV, *a retired general, uncle of the Bardins*
MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV, *aged 40, a merchant, partner of the Bardins*
CLEOPATRA, *his wife, aged 30*
NIKOLAI SKROBOTOV, *his brother, aged 35, prosecuting attorney*
SINTZOV, *a clerk*
POLOGI, *a clerk*
KON, *an ex-soldier*
GREKOV, LEVSHIN, YAGODIN, RYABTZOV, AKIMOV — *Workmen*
AGRAFENA, *the housekeeper*
BOBOYEDOV, *a captain of police*
KVACH, *a corporal*
A LIEUTENANT
CHIEF OF POLICE
A POLICEMAN

Gendarmes, soldiers, workmen, clerks, servants

Act I

(A garden shaded by large, ancient limes. In the depths of the garden stands a white military tent. Under the trees to the right is a wide seat made of turf, before which stands a table. A long table set for breakfast stands under the trees to the left. A small samovar is boiling. Wicker chairs are placed about the table. AGRAFENA *is making coffee.* KON *is standing under a tree smoking a pipe and talking to* POLOGI.*)*

POLOGI (*speaking with clumsy gestures*): Of course, you know better. I'm a person of no importance; my life is insignificant enough. But every cucumber was raised with my own hand, and no one shall steal them without answering to me for it.

KON (*sullenly*): Nobody's asking your permission.

POLOGI (*pressing his hand to his breast*): But listen! If somebody takes your property, haven't you a right to ask protection from the law?

KON: Go ahead and ask it. Today they steal your cucumbers, tomorrow they'll be stealing your heads.... There's your law for you!

POLOGI: But ... that's a strange thing to hear you say, and even dangerous. How can you, a retired soldier and a bearer of the Order of St. George, allow yourself to speak so contemptuously of the law?

KON: There is no law. There's only a command. L-e-ft face! Forwar-r-rd march! And off you go. When they say—Halt!—it means, halt.

AGRAFENA: It might be a good idea to stop smoking that makhorka. Kon, it's making the leaves curl up.

POLOGI: If they stole because they were hungry, I might be able to excuse them. Hunger justifies lots of things; you might say that all villainy was done for the sake of satisfying hunger. When a man wants to eat, then of course....

KON: The angels don't eat, but Satan went against God just the same.

POLOGI (*happily*): Exactly. That's what I call pure mischief! . . .

(*Enter* YAKOV BARDIN. *He speaks quietly, and as though he were listening to his own words.* POLOGI *bows to him.* KON *gives a careless salute.*)

YAKOV: Hello. What are you doing?

POLOGI: I've come to Zakhar Ivanovich with a modest request.

AGRAFENA: He's come to complain. Last night some fellows from the factory stole his cucumbers.

YAKOV: You don't say. You'll have to report that to my brother.

POLOGI: Exactly. It's to him that I'm going.

KON (*glumly*): Can't notice that you're going anywhere. Just standing here and grumbling.

POLOGI: I'm not interfering with you any, am I? If you were reading the paper or something, then of course you might say I was interfering.

YAKOV: Kon, come here a minute.

KON (*crossing over*): You're a stingy son of a gun, Pologi, An old pettifogger.

POLOGI: Your words are quite unnecessary. Man was given a tongue for the making of complaints.

AGRAFENA: Oh, enough of it, Pologi. You're more like a mosquito than a human being.

YAKOV (*to Kon*): What's he doing here anyway? Why doesn't he go away?

POLOGI (*to Agrafena*): If my words offend your ear and fail to touch your heart—I shall be silent. (*He leaves, meandering along the path and feeling the trees as he passes.*)

YAKOV (*embarrassed*): Well, Kon, seems that yesterday . . . again . . . I hurt somebody's feelings?

KON: Yes. I'm afraid you did.

YAKOV (*walking up and down*): Humph! It's wonderful. Why is it that I always insult people when I'm drunk, Kon?

KON: Sometimes it happens that people are better when they're drunk than when they're sober. Have more courage. Not afraid of anybody, and don't even spare themselves. We used to have a non-com in our company who was a tattle-tale and a fighter and a toady when he was sober. When he was drunk he would cry like a baby. "Brothers," he would say, "I'm a man like the rest of you. Spit in my eye, brothers," he would say. And some of them did it all right.

YAKOV: Who was it I spoke to yesterday?

KON: The public prosecutor. You told him that he had a wooden head. Then you told the prosecutor that the director's wife had a string of lovers.

YAKOV: Imagine! What business is that of mine?

KON: I don't know. And then....

YAKOV: All right, Kon. That's enough, or I'll be thinking I said something nasty to everybody.... It's all that accursed vodka! (*Goes over to the table and stares at the bottles; then he pours himself a tall glass of wine and starts sipping it. Agrafena glances at him out of the corner of her eye and sighs.*) You feel just a little bit sorry for me, don't you?

AGRAFENA: It's such a pity. You're so plain and simple with everybody. Not at all like most gentlefolk.

YAKOV: But Kon here doesn't pity anybody. He only philosophizes. You have to offend a person plenty to make him start thinking, isn't that right, Kon? (*From the tent comes the voice of the General crying, "Hey, Kon!"*) I guess they treated you pretty rough, and that's what makes you so smart.

KON (*leaving*): The very sight of that general is enough to turn me into an idiot.

GENERAL (*emerging from the tent*): Kon! To the river! Lively! (*They disappear in the garden.*)

YAKOV (*sitting and rocking back and forth on a chair*): Is my wife still sleeping?

AGRAFENA: No, she's up and had a swim already.

YAKOV: So you pity me!

AGRAFENA: You ought to take treatments.

YAKOV: Well, pour me out a drop of cognac.

AGRAFENA: Maybe it would be better not to, Yakov Ivanovich.

YAKOV: Why not? Refusing one drink won't help me any.

(*With a sigh,* AGRAFENA *pours him a large glass of cognac.* MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV *enters quickly, obviously upset. He pulls nervously at his pointed black beard and plays with the hat he carries in his hand.*)

MIKHAIL: Zakhar Ivanovich up? Not yet? Might have expected as much! Give me ... is there any cold milk? Thanks. Good morning. Yakov Ivanovich! Have you heard the news? Those rascals demand that I fire foreman Dichkov. Threaten to stop working if I don't, devil take them.

YAKOV: Go ahead and fire him.

MIKHAIL: That would be easy enough ... but you see ... that's not the point. The point is that concessions demoralize them. Today they demand that I fire the foreman, tomorrow they'll want me to hang myself for their amusement.

YAKOV (*gently*): You think they'll wait for tomorrow to want that?

MIKHAIL: You seem to think this is funny! I'd like to see you try to handle those grimy gentlemen ... about a thousand of them with their heads turned by all kinds of people ... including your dear brother with his liberalism and other idiots with various leaflets.... (*Looks at his watch.*) Almost ten o'clock, and they threaten to begin the fun after lunch. Oh yes, Yakov Ivanovich, your brother certainly made a nice mess of things at the factory while I was away on vacation. He completely demoralized the people with his lack of firmness.

(SINTZOV *enters at right. He is about thirty years old. There is something calm and impressive in his face and figure.*)

SINTZOV: Mikhail Vassilievich! Representatives from the workers have come to the office and demand to see the owner.

MIKHAIL: Demand? Be good enough to send them to the devil! (*Paulina enters left.*) Forgive me, Paulina Dmitrievna.

PAULINA (*graciously*): You have a habit of swearing. But what is the occasion this time?

MIKHAIL: It's all this "proletariat!" They "demand!" Formerly they came to me with dutiful "requests."

PAULINA: You're very harsh with people, I assure you.

MIKHAIL (*making a futile gesture with his hands*): There you are!

SINTZOV: What shall I tell the representatives?

MIKHAIL: Let them wait. Go on back.

(SINTZOV *leaves unhurriedly.*)

PAULINA: That man has an interesting face. Has he been working for us long?

MIKHAIL: About a year it seems.

PAULINA: He gives the impression of being a well-bred fellow. Who is he?

MIKHAIL (*shrugging his shoulders*): Gets forty rubles a month. (*Looks at his watch, sighs and glances about, catching sight of Pologi under one of the trees.*) What are you doing here? Have you come to see me?

POLOGI: No, Mikhail Vassilievich. I came to see Zakhar Ivanovich.

MIKHAIL: What for?

POLOGI: In respect to a violation of property rights.

MIKHAIL (*to Paulina*): Let me introduce another one of our new employees! A person with a taste for gardening. He is absolutely convinced that everything on earth was created for the sole purpose of injuring his interests. Everything annoys him—the sun, England, new machinery, the frogs. . . .

POLOGI (*smiling*): Allow me to observe that the frogs annoy everyone when they begin croaking.

MIKHAIL: Go back to the office! What's this habit you have of dropping everything and coming to complain? I don't like it at all. Get along with you.

(POLOGI *bows and leaves.* PAULINA *smiles and stands watching him through her lorgnette.*)

PAULINA: How strict you are! He's an amusing type. It seems to me that people in Russia are more original than they are abroad.

MIKHAIL: If you said more aboriginal I'd agree with you. I've been managing people for fifteen years. I have an excellent idea of the noble Russian people as painted by our clerical writers.

PAULINA: Clerical?

MIKHAIL: Of course. All your Chernyshevskys, Dobrolyubovs, Zlatovratskys, Uspenskys. (*Looks at his watch*). What a long time Zakhar Ivanovich is in coming!

PAULINA: Do you know what's keeping him? He's finishing last night's chess game with your brother.

MIKHAIL: You don't say! And down at the factory they're threatening to quit work after lunch! You can be sure that nothing good will ever come of Russia, and that's a fact. A land of anarchy! An organic disgust for any kind of work and complete inability to maintain order! Not the slightest respect for law....

PAULINA: But that's only natural. How can there be respect for law in a country where there is no law? Between you and me, our government....

MIKHAIL: Oh, yes! I'm not justifying anybody. The government too. Take the Anglo-Saxons. (*Enter Zakhar Bardin and Nikolai Skrobotov.*) There could be no better material from which to build a state. An Englishman prances before the law on his hind legs, like a circus horse. He has a feeling for law in his bones, in his very muscles. Good morning, Zakhar Ivanovich! Hello, Nikolai! Allow me to inform you of the latest result of your liberal policy with the workers: they demand that I immediately fire Dichkov, threatening to quit work after lunch if I do not.... Well, how do you like that?

ZAKHAR (*rubbing his forehead*): Me? H'm-m-m. Dichkov? The fellow who's always using his fists? And something or other with the girls? Of course we'll have to fire him. It's only just.

MIKHAIL (*aggravated*): Good Lord, let's talk seriously about this matter, respected partner! It's not a question of justice, but of business.... Justice is Nikolai's affair. And, begging your pardon, I am obliged once more to point out that your conception of justice is ruinous to business.

ZAKHAR: Excuse me, but that's a paradox!

PAULINA: Talking business in my presence all morning!

MIKHAIL: A thousand pardons, but I shall continue. I consider this conversation decisive. Before I left for my vacation, I held the factory in my hand like this (*indicates a tight fist*), and nobody dared to let out so much as a peep! As you know, I never saw anything beneficial in all those Sunday amusements—reading circles and such nonsense—under our conditions.... The raw Russian mind does not

flare up with the light of reason when a spark of knowledge falls upon it. It only smokes and smoulders.

NIKOLAI: One should always speak calmly.

MIKHAIL (*restraining himself with difficulty*): Thank you for your advice. It's perfectly sound, but unfortunately I cannot accept it. In six months, Zakhar Ivanovich, your attitude toward the workers has shaken and undermined the firm structure which it took me eight years to build up. I had won the respect of the workers. They looked upon me as their master. Now it is clear to everyone that there are two masters, a kind one and a mean one. You, of course, are the kind one.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*): But dear me ... why should you talk like that?

PAULINA: That's a very strange thing to say, Mikhail Vassilievich.

MIKHAIL: I have reasons for speaking this way. You have placed me in an idiotic position. The last time this question came up I informed the workers that I would close down the factory sooner than fire Dichkov. They realized that I meant what I said and they calmed down. On Friday, Zakhar Ivanovich, you told that fellow Grekov that Dichkov was a roughneck and you meant to fire him.

ZAKHAR (*conciliatingly*): But my dear fellow, if he goes around punching people in the jaw and that sort of thing? You must agree that we can't allow such things. We're Europeans. We're civilized people.

MIKHAIL: First of all, we're factory owners. On every holiday the workers beat each other up; what business is that of ours? But you'll have to postpone teaching the workers good manners for the present. Right now their representatives are waiting for you in the office and they will demand that you fire Dichkov. What do you intend to do?

ZAKHAR: Do you find that Dichkov is so indispensable?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): As far as I understand, this is not a question of an individual, but of a principle.

MIKHAIL: Exactly! It's a question of who is master at the factory—you and I or the workers?

ZAKHAR (*at a loss*): Yes, I understand, but....

MIKHAIL: If we give in to them now, there's no knowing what they'll demand next. They're a brazen bunch. Six months of these Sunday schools and things have done their work. They look at me

like a pack of wolves, and they've already put out some leaflets. It savours of socialism. Yes it does.

PAULINA: Socialism in an out-of-the-way place like this! It sounds almost funny, doesn't it?

MIKHAIL: You think so? My dear Paulina Dmitrievna, as long as children are small, they are amusing. But gradually they grow up, and all of a sudden you find yourself face to face with grown-up rascals.

ZAKHAR: What do you intend doing?

MIKHAIL: Closing down the factory. Let them go hungry for a while and they'll cool off. (*Yakov gets up, goes over to the table and has a drink, then he goes slowly off.*) As soon as we shut down, the women will begin to interfere. They'll begin to cry, and women's tears act like a whiff of smelling salts on those who are dizzy with dreams. They immediately bring them to their senses.

PAULINA: That's a harsh thing to say.

MIKHAIL: Yes, it's harsh. Life demands such harshness.

ZAKHAR: But ... such a measure ... do you think it's absolutely necessary? It seems to me ... isn't it a little bit too? ...

MIKHAIL: Can you suggest anything else?

ZAKHAR: What if I go and speak to them?

MIKHAIL: Of course you will give in to them, and then my position will become intolerable. I beg your pardon, but I must say that your wavering is almost an insult to me! To say nothing of the harm it does.

ZAKHAR (*impetuously*): But, my dear fellow, I do not object, I am just trying to think it out. You must understand that I am more of a country gentleman than an industrialist. This is all so new to me, and so complicated. I should like to see justice done. The peasants are more gentle and good-natured than the workers. I get along with them excellently. It seems to me that there are some very interesting figures among the workers, but on the whole ... I agree with you ... they are too presumptuous.

MIKHAIL: Especially since you have made them so many promises.

ZAKHAR: But you see, as soon as you left I began to notice a sort of restlessness ... there were even disturbances. Perhaps I was not very cautious ... but the workers had to be quieted down. Things have been written about us in the papers ... and very sharp things, I must say.

MIKHAIL (*impatiently*): It is now seventeen minutes after ten. It is necessary to come to some decision. As the matter stands, either I close down the factory or I resign. If the factory is closed down, we shall not suffer any loss. I have already taken the necessary measures. All our rush orders are ready and we have reserve stocks in the warehouses.

ZAKHAR: H'm-m-m. I see. It has to be decided right now. What do you think, Nikolai Vassilievich?

NIKOLAI: I think that my brother is right. If we value civilization, it is necessary to hold strictly to principles.

ZAKHAR: That is, you also think we should close down? What a pity! My dear Mikhail Vassilievich, please don't be offended with me. I shall give you my answer in, let's say, ten minutes.... Will that do?

MIKHAIL: Quite.

ZAKHAR (*quickly going off left*): Paulina, please come with me ...

PAULINA (*following her husband*): Goodness, how unpleasant all this is!

ZAKHAR: Through the generations, the peasant has developed an inherent sense of respect for the nobility. (*They go out.*)

MIKHAIL (*through his teeth*): The milksop! He can say that after the agrarian massacres in the South! Fool!

NIKOLAI: Easy, Mikhail! Why should you let yourself go like that?

MIKHAIL: My nerves are shot to pieces, can't you understand? I'm going to the factory, and ... look! (*Takes a revolver from his pocket.*) They hate me, thanks to that idiot. But I can't drop everything. You would be the first one to blame me if I did. All our capital is in that factory.... If I leave, that bald-headed fool will ruin everything.

NIKOLAI (*calmly*): That's bad, if you're not exaggerating.

SINTZOV (*entering*): The workers are asking for you.

MIKHAIL: For me? What's up?

SINTZOV: There are rumours that the factory will be closed down after lunch.

MIKHAIL (*to his brother*): Hear that? How did they find out?

NIKOLAI: Probably Yakov Ivanovich told them.

MIKHAIL: Damn it all! (*Looking at Sintzov with an irritation he cannot disguise.*) Why is it that you are so concerned, Mr. Sintzov? Coming here, asking questions.... What's the idea?

SINTZOV: The bookkeeper asked me to come for you.

MIKHAIL: You don't say! Where did you get that habit of scowling and giving that devilish twist to your lips? Dare I ask what it is that pleases you so?

SINTZOV: It seems to me that that is my business.

MIKHAIL: I think differently. I advise you to be more respectful toward me in the future. do you hear?

(SINTZOV *fixes him with his gaze.*)

MIKHAIL: Well, what are you waiting for?

TATYANA (*entering from right*): Oh, here's the director. Are you in a hurry? (*Calling to Sintzov.*) Hello. Matvei Nikolaevich!

SINTZOV (*warmly*): Good morning. How do you feel? Aren't you tired?

TATYANA: No. I'm not. Only my arms ache from rowing. Are you going to work? I'll go with you as far as the gate. Do you know what I want to tell you?

SINTZOV: Naturally I don't.

TATYANA (*walking alongside of Sintzov*): There was much that was clever about what you said yesterday, but even more that was somehow too emotional and preconceived. There are speeches which are the more convincing the less emotional they are.... (*Conversation becomes inaudible.*)

MIKHAIL: There's a nice situation for you! Before your very eyes the employee whom you just called to account for his impudence, makes a show of familiarity with the wife of your partner's brother. The brother is a drunkard, his wife an actress. Why they ever came here the devil only knows.

NIKOLAI: She's a strange woman—good looking, knows how to dress, and at the same time carries on an affair with a pauper. Eccentric, but stupid.

MIKHAIL (*ironically*): Democratic. She's the daughter of a rural teacher, you know, and she says she is always drawn to the common people.... Why the devil I should ever have gotten myself mixed up with these country gentlemen!

NIKOLAI: Well, I can't say it's so bad. You're the boss of this business.

MIKHAIL: I *shall* be. I'm not yet.

NIKOLAI: I have an idea that she's easy to get. Very sensual, it seems.

MIKHAIL: Where can that liberal be? Must have gone back to bed. No, I tell you, Russia isn't capable of making good. People are all mixed up, nobody knows his place, everybody wanders about dreaming, talking. The government is made up of a bunch of half-wits—stupid, mean, understanding nothing, incapable of doing anything.

TATYANA (*returning*): Why are you shouting? For some reason everyone has begun to shout.

AGRAFENA: Mikhail Vassilievich, Zakhar Ivanovich is asking for you.

MIKHAIL: At last!

TATYANA (*sitting at the table*): Why is he so upset?

NIKOLAI: I don't think you would find it of any interest.

TATYANA (*calmly*): He reminds me of a policeman I once knew. This policeman often used to be on duty in our theatre in Kostroma long and thin with bulging eyes.

NIKOLAI: I fail to see the resemblance to my brother.

TATYANA: I'm not speaking of a physical resemblance. This policeman was also always hurrying somewhere. He didn't walk, but ran; he didn't smoke, but devoured cigarettes; it seemed as though he didn't live, but simply kept jumping and turning somersaults in his rush to get somewhere—but where, he had no idea.

NIKOLAI: You think he really didn't know?

TATYANA: I'm convinced of it. When a person has a clear purpose, he pursues it calmly. That fellow was always rushing. And it was a special kind of a rush. Something kept lashing him inside, and he ran on and on, getting in his own way and everybody else's. He wasn't greedy—not in the narrow sense. He was only greedily eager to do all that had to be done, to rid himself of all his duties, including the duty to take bribes. He didn't take bribes—he grabbed them. And he grabbed them in such haste that he even forgot to say thank you. Finally he was run over by some horses and killed.

NIKOLAI: Do you wish to imply that my brother's energy is directed to no purpose?

TATYANA: Is that the way it turned out? No, it isn't what I wanted to say. Your brother simply reminds me of that policeman.

NIKOLAI: Not very complimentary to my brother, I should say.

TATYANA: I had no intention of paying him compliments.

NIKOLAI: You have an original manner of flirting.

TATYANA: Really?

NIKOLAI: Yes, but not a very cheerful one.

TATYANA (*calmly*): Is it possible for a woman to be gay with you?

NIKOLAI: Oho!

PAULINA (*entering*): Nothing seems to go right today. Nobody is having breakfast, everybody is irritated, as though they hadn't had enough sleep. Early this morning Nadya went to the woods for mushrooms with Cleopatra Petrovna.... Yesterday I asked her not to do that. Heavens, how difficult life has become!

TATYANA: You eat too much.

PAULINA: Why that tone, Tanya? Your attitude toward people is simply abnormal.

TATYANA: Really?

PAULINA: It's easy enough to take things calmly when you have nothing, and so are free of all responsibility. But when thousands of people depend upon you for their food ... that's no joke.

TATYANA: Stop feeding them, let them live as they like. Turn over everything to them—the factory, the land, and live in peace.

NIKOLAI (*lighting a smoke*): From what play did you get that?

PAULINA: I can't understand why you say such things, Tanya. You should see how upset Zakhar is. We have decided to close the factory for a while, until the workers calm down. But just imagine how hard that is! Hundreds of people will be thrown out of work. And they have children ... it's horrible!

TATYANA: Don't close down if it's so horrible! Why torture yourselves?

PAULINA: Oh, Tanya! How irritating you are! If we don't close down, the workers will go on strike, and that will be even worse.

TATYANA: What will be worse?

PAULINA: Everything in general. We certainly can't concede all their demands. And actually they aren't their demands. They've simply started yelling the way a bunch of socialists have taught them to. (*Fervently.*) I can't understand it! Abroad, socialism is in its proper place and its leaders conduct activities quite openly. But with us, here in Russia, they get the workers off in corners and whisper to them, completely ignoring the fact that socialism is quite out of place in

a monarchy! It's a constitution we need, and not socialism. What do you think, Nikolai Vassilievich?

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*): Something quite different. Socialism is a very dangerous phenomenon. And it is bound to find fertile soil in a country which has no independent, so to speak, race philosophy; in a country where everything is grabbed on the side and on the run. We are extremists. That is our weakness.

PAULINA: Oh, that's true enough! We are extremists.

TATYANA (*getting up*): Especially you and your husband. And the prosecutor here.

PAULINA: What do you know about it, Tanya! Zakhar is considered to be one of the reds in our gubernia.

TATYANA (*walking up and down*): I think he turns red only from shame, and that not too often.

PAULINA: Tanya! What in the world has happened to you?

TATYANA: Why, is that offensive? I didn't know. It seems to me that your life is like an amateur performance. The roles have been wrongly assigned, nobody has any talent, everyone acts abominably. The play doesn't make any sense.

NIKOLAI: There is some truth in what you say. And everyone complains about how boring the play is.

TATYANA: Yes, we ruin the play. And it seems to me that the extras and the stage hands are beginning to realize it. Some day they'll chase us off the boards.

(*Enter* GENERAL *and* KON.)

NIKOLAI: Aren't you carrying it a little too far?

GENERAL (*calling*): Paulina! Some milk for the General! Ho, ho! Some cold milk! ... (*To Nikolai.*) Hello, you old coffin of laws! ... Your hand, my charming niece! Kon, answer your lesson: what is a soldier?

KON (*bored*): Whatever his superior wishes, Your Excellency.

GENERAL: Could a soldier be a fish, eh?

KON: A soldier must be able to be anything.

TATYANA: My dear uncle, you amused us with this scene yesterday. Must we have it every day?

PAULINA (*with a sigh*): Every day after his swim.

GENERAL: Yes, indeed, every day. And always something different. That old joker should make up the questions and answers himself.

TATYANA: Do you enjoy it, Kon?

KON: His Excellency enjoys it.

TATYANA: But you?

GENERAL: He likes it too.

KON: I'm too old for the circus, but once you've got to eat, you've got to grin and bear it.

GENERAL: You sly old rascal, you. Right about face! Forwar-r-d march!

TATYANA: Don't you ever get tired of making fun of this old man?

GENERAL: I'm an old man myself. But I get tired of you all right. An actress should be amusing, but you certainly are not.

PAULINA: Uncle, you know. . . .

GENERAL: I don't know anything. . . .

PAULINA: We're closing down the factory. . . .

GENERAL: What? Excellent! No more whistles! Early in the morning, right in the middle of a sound sleep—o-o-O-O! Close it down!

MIKHAIL (*entering quickly*): Nikolai, just a minute! (*Aside.*) Well, the factory's closed, but we better take measures, just in case. . . . Send a telegram to the Vice-Governor; tell him briefly the situation and demand that he send soldiers. Sign my name.

NIKOLAI: He's my friend as well.

MIKHAIL: I'm off to send those representatives to the devil. Don't tell anyone about the telegram. I'll tell them myself when the time comes. All right?

NIKOLAI: All right.

MIKHAIL: It's a wonderful feeling to force things your own way! I'm older than you in years, but younger in spirit, don't you think?

NIKOLAI: That's not youth, but nervousness, if you ask me.

MIKHAIL: Well, I'll show you whether it's nervousness or not. You'll see! (*Goes out laughing.*)

PAULINA: Have they decided to do it, Nikolai Vassilievich?

NIKOLAI (*leaving*): Apparently.

PAULINA: Good heavens!

GENERAL: What have they decided to do?

PAULINA: To close down the factory.

GENERAL: Oh, that ... Kon!

KON: Here I am.

GENERAL: Get the fishing rods and the boat.

KON: All ready.

GENERAL: I'm off to be amused by the fish. That's more sensible than sitting around and being abused by people. (*Laughing.*) Well put, eh what? (*Nadya runs in.*) Ah, my pretty butterfly! What's up?

NADYA (*happily*): Adventure! (*Turning back, she calls.*) Please come here! Grekov! Don't let him go, Cleopatra Petrovna! Just as we were coming out of the woods, auntie, we suddenly came upon three drunken workers....

PAULINA: There now! I always told you....

CLEOPATRA (*followed by Grekov*): Can you imagine anything more disgusting!

NADYA: Why disgusting? It was so funny! Three workers, auntie, all of them smiling and saying, "Our dear little ladies!"

CLEOPATRA: I shall certainly ask my husband to dismiss them.

GREKOV (*smiling*): What for?

GENERAL (*to Nadya*): Who is that ... er ... chimney sweep?

NADYA: That's the one who saved us, grandfather, do you understand?

GENERAL: No, I don't understand a thing.

CLEOPATRA (*to Nadya*): As though anyone *could* understand, the way you tell it.

NADYA: I tell it just the way it was.

PAULINA: Well nobody can understand anything, Nadya.

NADYA: Because you keep interrupting me! ... They came up to us and said, "Ladies, why not join us in singing a song...."

PAULINA: Gracious, such impertinence!

NADYA: Nothing of the kind! "We heard that you sang very well," they said. "Of course," they said, "we're a little bit tipsy, but we're better that way." And that's the truth, auntie. When they're drunk they aren't sullen like they usually are.

CLEOPATRA: Fortunately for us, this young man....

NADYA: I tell it better than you! Cleopatra Petrovna began scolding them ... and you needn't have, I'm sure you needn't ... and then one of them, the tall thin one....

CLEOPATRA (*menacingly*): I know who he is!

NADYA: Took her by the hand and said, so sadly, "You're such a pretty, refined lady, it's a pleasure just to look at you. And still you scold. Have we really offended you?" He said it so nicely, from his very heart. But then another one—he really was gruff—he said, "What's the big idea, talking to them? As though they could understand anything! They're not people, they're beasts!" That's us—beasts. She and I. (*Laughs.*)

TATYANA: (*laughing*): You seem to be very pleased with that title.

PAULINA: What did I tell you, Nadya? If you insist on running off to all sorts of places....

GREKOV (*to Nadya*): May I go now?

NADYA: Oh, no. Please don't. Won't you have some tea? ... Or milk? Please do! (*The General laughs, Cleopatra shrugs her shoulders. Tatyana watches Grekov and hums something quietly. Paulina drops her head and concentrates on the spoons she is wiping on a towel.*)

GREKOV (*smiling*): No, thank you, I don't care for anything.

NADYA (*insisting*): Please don't be bashful.... These are all very nice people, really.

PAULINA (*protestingly*): Oh, Nadya!

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Don't go yet. I haven't finished telling about it.

CLEOPATRA (*displeased*): In a word, this young man made a timely appearance and talked his drunken friends into leaving us in peace. I asked him to see us home, and that's all.

NADYA: Oh, the way you tell it! If it had been that way ... we'd have died of boredom.

GENERAL: Well, now, what shall we make of this?

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Sit down! Auntie, why don't you invite him to sit down? And what are you all so glum about?

PAULINA (*to Grekov, from where she is sitting*): I am very grateful to you, young man.

GREKOV: Please don't mention it.

PAULINA (*more dryly*): It was very good of you to defend these young women.

GREKOV (*calmly*): There was no need to defend them. No one did them any harm.

NADYA: But auntie! How can you say such a thing!

PAULINA: I must ask you not to try to teach me.

NADYA: But don't you see—nobody defended anybody. He simply said to them, "Leave them alone, comrades. That isn't nice." They were glad to see him. "Grekov!" they cried. "Come along with us! You're a clever chap!" And really, auntie, he is clever.... Forgive me, Grekov, but that's the truth.

GREKOV (*smiling*): You have placed me in a very embarrassing position.

NADYA: Really? But I didn't mean to! It isn't me, it's them. Grekov.

PAULINA: Nadya! You know that I can't endure your exuberances. You make yourself appear simply funny. But enough of this!

NADYA (*excitedly*): Then go ahead and laugh! Why are you sitting here like owls? Go ahead and laugh!

CLEOPATRA: Nadya has a talent for making a great show out of trifles—with a lot of noise and enthusiasm. And that's particularly pleasant now, in front of a stranger who, as you see, is laughing at her.

NADYA (*to Grekov*): Are you laughing at me? Why?

GREKOV (*simply*): I am admiring you, and not laughing at you.

PAULINA (*overwhelmed*): What? Uncle....

CLEOPATRA (*with a short laugh*): There you are!

GENERAL: Well, enough! Good things in little doses. Here, young man, take this and be off.

GREKOV (*turning away*): Thank you.... That's unnecessary.

NADYA (*covering her face with her hands*): Oh! How could you!

GENERAL (*stopping Grekov*): Wait a minute! This is ten rubles!

GREKOV (*calmly*): Well, what of it?

(*For a second, all are silent.*)

GENERAL (*confused*): Er ... a ... who are you anyway?

GREKOV: One of the workers.

GENERAL: A smith?

GREKOV: No, a fitter.

GENERAL (*sternly*): That's all the same. Why don't you take this money, eh?

GREKOV: Because I don't want it.

GENERAL (*irritated*): Nonsense, I call it. What is it you want?

GREKOV: Nothing.

GENERAL: Maybe you'd like to ask the hand of the young lady, eh?

(*He laughs—everyone is embarrassed by his joke.*)

NADYA: Oh! . . . What are you saying?

PAULINA: Please, uncle. . . .

GREKOV (*calmly, to the General*): How old are you?

GENERAL (*amazed*): What? Me? . . . How old?

GREKOV (*in the same tone*): How old are you?

GENERAL (*glancing about*): What's this? Sixty-one. . . . What of it?

GREKOV (*leaving*): You should have more sense at your age.

GENERAL: What? . . . I should have more sense . . . *I*?

NADYA (*running after Grekov*): Please . . . please don't be angry. He's just an old man. They're really nice people. Honestly!

GENERAL: What the devil is this anyway?

GREKOV: Don't worry yourself. . . . This is all perfectly natural.

NADYA: It's just because of the heat. . . . They're in a bad mood. . . . And I made such a mess of telling that story.

GREKOV (*smiling*): No matter how you told it, you can be sure they'd never understand you.

(*They disappear.*)

GENERAL (*overwhelmed*): He dared to say such a thing to me . . . eh?

TATYANA: You had no business handing him that money.

PAULINA: Oh Nadya! That Nadya!

CLEOPATRA: The nerve of him! There's a proud Spaniard for you! I'll certainly ask my husband to. . . .

GENERAL: That puppy?

PAULINA: But Nadya's impossible! Walking off with him like that! She upsets me so!

CLEOPATRA: These socialists of yours keep getting more impudent every day. . . .

PAULINA: What makes you think he's a socialist?

CLEOPATRA: I can see it. All the decent workers are socialists.

GENERAL: I shall report this to Zakhar. Today we'll throw that young upstart out of the factory on his ear.

TATYANA: The factory is closed.

GENERAL: It doesn't matter ... on his ear!

PAULINA: Tanya, go call Nadya. Please do. Tell her that I'm simply overwhelmed.

(*Tanya goes off.*)

GENERAL: The scum! How old, eh?

CLEOPATRA: Those drunkards whistled after us ... and you go pampering them about ... reading circles and the like. What's the sense in it?

PAULINA: Yes, yes, it's the truth. Just imagine, on Thursday I had to go to the village, and all of a sudden heard whistling! They even whistled after me! Why, they might have frightened the horses, to say nothing about its being indecent!

CLEOPATRA (*instructively*): Zakhar Ivanovich is much to blame! He doesn't place the proper distance between himself and those people, just as my husband says.

PAULINA: He is too soft-hearted. He wants to be kind to everyone. He is convinced that being kind to the people is to the advantage of both sides. The peasants justify this point of view. They lease the land, pay rent, and everything is fine. But these ... (*enter Tatyana and Nadya*). Nadya! Darling, you understand how indecent....

NADYA (*angrily*): It's you who were indecent! ... You! The heat has gone to your heads. You're mean and sick and you don't understand anything! And you, grandfather, how stupid you are!

GENERAL (*infuriated*): Me! Stupid! Just say that again!

NADYA: Why did you say that—about my hand? Aren't you ashamed?

GENERAL: Ashamed? Well, that's the limit! I've had just about enough for one day! (*Leaves, yelling at the top of his lungs.*) Kon! The devil take the likes of you! Where under the sun have you gotten to, you dolt, you dunderhead!

NADYA: But you, auntie, you! ... You've even been abroad, and you make fine speeches about politics! ... Not to have invited him to sit down, not to have offered him a cup of tea!

PAULINA (*jumping up and throwing down a spoon*): This is impossible! Do you realize what you're saying?

NADYA: And you too, Cleopatra Petrovna! ... On the way back you were so sweet and polite to him! But as soon as we got here....

CLEOPATRA: What was I supposed to do, kiss him? Excuse me, but his face was dirty. And furthermore, I have no intention of listening to your reprimands! You see, Paulina Dmitrievna? Here is your democracy for you, or what do they call it—humanism? And my poor husband is the one who has to answer for it all. But you'll have to answer for it too, you'll see!

PAULINA: I must apologize to you, Cleopatra Petrovna, for Nadya's behaviour....

CLEOPATRA (*leaving*): That's quite unnecessary. It isn't a question of only Nadya.... You're all to blame!

PAULINA: Listen here, Nadya, when your mother was dying and entrusted me with your upbringing....

NADYA: Don't speak of my mother! You never say the right things about her!

PAULINA (*in amazement*): Nadya! Are you ill? Think of what you're saying. Your mother was my sister. I knew her a bit better than you.

NADYA (*unable to restrain her tears*): You don't know anything. Poor people and rich people have nothing in common.... My mother was poor, and she was good!... You can't understand poor people! You don't even understand Aunt Tanya!

PAULINA: Nadezhda, I must ask you to leave. Go at once!

NADYA (*leaving*): I'm going.... But I'm right just the same. Not you, but me!

PAULINA: Heavens! A strong, healthy girl having a fit like this all of a sudden! Almost hysterics! Forgive me, Tanya, but I'm afraid you've been having a bad influence on her. You talk to her about everything as though she were a grown-up. You take her among our employees—those people from the office—those queer workers. That's absurd, you know. Even going boating with them.

TATYANA: Calm yourself. Maybe you better have a drink of something or other. There's no denying that you behaved rather stupidly toward that worker. Nothing would have happened to the chair if you'd asked him to sit on it.

PAULINA: You're all wrong. Certainly nobody can accuse me of having a wrong attitude toward the workers. But everything within limits, my dear!

TATYANA: And then, I don't take her among anybody, in spite of your claims. She goes herself . . . and I don't consider it necessary to stop her.

PAULINA: She goes herself! As though she understood where!

(YAKOV *enters slowly, slightly drunk.*)

YAKOV (*sitting down*): There's going to be trouble at the factory.

PAULINA (*long-sufferingly*): Oh, stop it, Yakov Ivanovich!

YAKOV: Yes there is. There's going to be trouble. They're going to burn down the factory and roast us all in the fire—like rabbits.

TATYANA (*with vexation*): You've been drinking already!

YAKOV: I've always been drinking by this hour. I just saw Cleopatra.... that's a mean baby for you! Not because she's got so many lovers. But because there's a nasty old dog sitting where her heart ought to be.

PAULINA (*rising*): Heavens! Everything was going along so nicely, and then all of a sudden.... (*Begins walking aimlessly through the garden.*)

YAKOV: A mangy dog—not very big, but very greedy. There it sits baring its teeth. It's eaten everything up, but still it wants more. Only it doesn't know what, and that worries it....

TATYANA: Be still, Yakov! Here comes your brother.

YAKOV: What do I care about my brother! Tanya, I realize that you cannot love me any more, and that hurts. It hurts, but it doesn't stop me from loving you....

TATYANA: You better freshen yourself up a bit. Go have a swim.

ZAKHAR (*entering*): Have they already announced that the factory is being closed down?

TATYANA: I don't know.

YAKOV: No, they haven't announced it, but the workers know it anyway.

ZAKHAR: How? Who told them?

YAKOV: I did. I went and told them.

PAULINA (*coming up*): Why did you do that?

YAKOV (*shrugging his shoulders*): Just for the fun of it. They found it interesting. I tell them everything—if they listen. I think they like me. It's pleasant for them to see that their boss' brother is a drunkard. That impresses them with the idea of the equality of all men.

ZAKHAR: *H'm-m-m.* You often go to the factory, Yakov, and of course I have nothing against it. But Mikhail Vassilievich says that sometimes when you are talking with the workers you criticize the management.

YAKOV: That's a lie. I don't understand anything about management. And mismanagement.

ZAKHAR: He also says that sometimes you bring vodka with you.

YAKOV: That's a lie. I don't bring it; I send for it, and not sometimes but every time. Can't you understand that they're not interested in me if I don't have vodka?

ZAKHAR: But, Yakov, judge for yourself—after all, you're the brother of the owner.

YAKOV: That's not my only shortcoming.

ZAKHAR (*offended*): All right, I shall say nothing more. Nothing. I am surrounded by a hostile atmosphere which I cannot understand at all.

PAULINA: That's the truth. You should have heard what Nadezhda just said!

POLOGI (*running in*): Allow me ... Just now.... Just now they killed the director....

ZAKHAR: What!

PAULINA: You ... what did you say?

POLOGI: Killed him ... outright ... he fell down....

ZAKHAR: Who?... Who shot him?

POLOGI: The workers....

PAULINA: Did they catch them?

ZAKHAR: Is there a doctor there?

POLOGI: I don't know....

PAULINA: Yakov Ivanovich! Go immediately.

YAKOV (*with a helpless gesture*): Where?

PAULINA: How did it happen?

POLOGI: The director was agitated ... his boot landed in the stomach of one of the workers....

YAKOV: They're coming here....

(*Confusion.* MIKHAIL SKROBOTOV *is led in by* NIKOLAI *on one side and* LEVSHIN, *a bald, middle-aged worker, on the other. Several workers and employees accompany them.*)

MIKHAIL (*in a tired voice*): Leave me alone.... Put me down.

NIKOLAI: Did you see who did the shooting?

MIKHAIL: I'm tired ... tired....

NIKOLAI (*insistently*): Did you notice who did the shooting?

MIKHAIL: You're hurting me.... Some red-headed fellow.... Put me down.... A red-headed fellow....

(*They place him on the turf seat.*)

NIKOLAI (*to a Police Sergeant*): Do you hear? A red-headed fellow....

POLICEMAN: Yes, Your Honour.

MIKHAIL: Ah! But it's all the same now.

LEVSHIN (*to Nikolai*): Wouldn't it be better not to trouble him for the present?

NIKOLAI: Silence! Where's the doctor? ... I'm asking you where the doctor is!

(*Everyone starts whispering and moving around to no purpose.*)

MIKHAIL: Don't yell.... The pain.... Let me rest.

LEVSHIN: That's right, rest a bit, Mikhail Vassilievich. This human business is all kopeck business. It's the kopeck as will ruin a person. Born for a kopeck, buried for a kopeck!

NIKOLAI: Sergeant! Ask everyone who doesn't belong here to leave.

POLICEMAN (*in a low voice*): Get going, fellows. Nothing to watch here.

ZAKHAR (*quietly*): Where's the doctor?

NIKOLAI: Misha! Misha! (*Bends over his brother and everyone does likewise.*) I'm afraid—it's all over.

ZAKHAR: Impossible! He's fainted!

NIKOLAI (*slowly and quietly*): No, he's dead. Do you understand what that means, Zakhar Ivanovich?

ZAKHAR: But ... maybe you are mistaken.

NIKOLAI: No, I'm not. It's you who caused him to be shot—*you*!

ZAKHAR (*overwhelmed*): I?

TATYANA: How cruel... and stupid!

NIKOLAI (*attacking Zakhar*): Yes, you!

CHIEF OF POLICE (*running in*): Where's the director? Is he seriously wounded?

LEVSHIN: He's dead. Kept hurrying everybody else—rushing, rushing, and now look at him.

NIKOLAI: (*to the Chief of Police*): He just had time to say that the fellow who killed him was a redhead.

CHIEF OF POLICE: A redhead?

NIKOLAI: Yes. You must immediately take the proper measures.

CHIEF OF POLICE (*to the Police Sergeant*): Immediately arrest all redheads!

POLICEMAN: Yes, Your Honour.

CHIEF OF POLICE: All of them!

(POLICEMAN *goes out.*)

CLEOPATRA (*running in*): Where is he? Misha! What's the matter, has he fainted? Nikolai Vassilievich, has he fainted? (*Nikolai turns away.*) Is he dead? Is he?

LEVSHIN: He's calmed down now. He threatened them with his pistol, but the pistol turned against himself.

NIKOLAI (*angrily, under his breath*): You get out! (*To the Chief of Police*): Take this fellow away!

CLEOPATRA: The doctor—what does the doctor say?

CHIEF OF POLICE (*quietly to Levshin*): Clear out, you!

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): I'm leaving. No need to shove.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*): They killed him?

PAULINA (*to Cleopatra*): Darling!

CLEOPATRA (*quietly but vengefully*): Get away from me! This is your work . . . yours!

ZAKHAR (*despondent*): I understand . . . that this is a dreadful blow to you . . . but why . . . why say such a thing?

PAULINA (*tearfully*): Oh, my dear, think what an awful thing you're saying!

TATYANA (*to Paulina*): You go away. Where's the doctor?

CLEOPATRA: It's your accursed wishy-washyness that killed him!

NIKOLAI: Calm yourself, Cleopatra. Zakhar Ivanovich cannot help recognizing his guilt.

ZAKHAR (*despondent*): Gentlemen. . . . I don't understand anything. What are you saying? How can you make such an accusation?

PAULINA: But this is horrible! Heavens, such lack of feeling!

CLEOPATRA: Lack of feeling? You poisoned the workers against him, you destroyed his influence over them.... They used to be afraid of him. They used to tremble at the very sight of him. And now they've killed him. And it's you ... you who are to blame. His blood is on your hands!

NIKOLAI: Enough, enough. You mustn't shout.

CLEOPATRA (*to Paulina*): So you're crying, are you? That's right! Cry! Cry all his blood out of your eyes!

POLICEMAN (*entering*): Your Honour....

CHIEF OF POLICE: Hush, you!

POLICEMAN: All the redheads are arrested!

(*Through the garden in the background comes the* GENERAL *pushing* KON *in front of him and laughing loudly.*)

NIKOLAI: Sh-h-h!

CLEOPATRA: Who is it—the murderers?

(CURTAIN.)

Act II

(A bright moon throws thick, heavy shadows in the garden. The table is littered with bread, cucumbers, eggs, beer bottles. Candles are burning in lanterns, AGRAFENA *is washing the dishes.* YAGODIN *is sitting on a chair with a stick in his hand and smoking. To the left stand* TATYANA, NADYA, LEVSHIN. *Everyone speaks in lowered voices, as though listening for something. The general atmosphere is one of tense anticipation.)*

LEVSHIN (*to Nadya*): Everything human has been tainted by copper, my dear miss. That's why your young heart is heavy. All people are chained to a copper kopeck, but you are still free, and so you don't fit in. To every man on this earth the kopeck jingles its message: Love me as you love yourself.... But that doesn't concern you. A bird neither sows nor reaps.

YAGODIN (*to Agrafena*): Yefimich has started teaching his betters ... the old simpleton!

AGRAFENA: Why not? He tells them the truth. A little truth won't do our betters any harm either.

NADYA: Is life very difficult for you, Yefimich?

LEVSHIN: Not very. Not for me. I have no children. I have a woman—a wife, that is. But our children all died.

NADYA: Aunt Tanya! Why is it that when there is a dead body in the house everyone speaks in a whisper?

TATYANA: I don't know.

LEVSHIN (*smiling*): That's because we're all guilty before the dead, my young lady. Everybody's guilty.

NADYA: But it isn't always like this ... that somebody has been ... killed. But people speak in whispers no matter who's dead.

LEVSHIN: Oh, my dear! We kill them all! Some of them with bullets, some with words. We kill everybody with our doings. We chase people from the sun into the soil without realizing it, without seeing it.... But when we finally throw a man into the arms of death,

then we begin to understand a bit of our guilt. We begin to feel sorry for the dead one, to feel ashamed of ourselves, and a great fear grows in us. Because, don't you see, we ourselves are being chased the same way; we ourselves are headed for the grave.

NADYA: Yes. That's a dreadful thought.

LEVSHIN: Don't let it worry you. Today it seems dreadful, but tomorrow it's forgotten. And people begin shoving each other about again. One of them falls down and for a minute everybody is quiet and embarrassed. Then they give a sigh and begin everything all over again. Everything just like it was. Ignorance! But you don't feel any guilt, young lady. Dead people don't disturb you. You can talk out loud in front of them.

TATYANA: How can we change our way of living? Do you know?

LEVSHIN (*mysteriously*): We've got to wipe out the kopeck. We've got to bury it. Once the kopeck's gone, why shove each other about? Why be enemies?

TATYANA: And that's ... all?

LEVSHIN: It's enough to begin with.

TATYANA: Would you like to take a walk in the garden, Nadya?

NADYA (*pensively*): All right.

(*They disappear in the depths of the garden;* LEVSHIN *crosses to the table. The* GENERAL, KON *and* POLOGI *appear at the entrance of the tent.*)

YAGODIN: You're sowing your seeds on rocky soil, Yefimich, you old simpleton!

LEVSHIN: Why?

YAGODIN: No sense trying to teach them anything. As though they could understand. What you say would reach the soul of a working man, but it won't help what's ailing the gentlefolk.

LEVSHIN: The young girl's a nice little thing. Grekov told me about her.

AGRAFENA: Maybe you'd like another glass of tea?

LEVSHIN: If you don't mind.

(*Silence—then the* GENERAL'S *voice is heard; the white dresses of* NADYA *and* TATYANA *glance through the trees.*)

GENERAL: Or if you take a piece of string and stretch it across the road ... like this ... so's nobody can see it. Somebody comes along and all of a sudden—flop!

POLOGI: It's so pleasant to see somebody fall, Your Excellency.

YAGODIN: Hear that?

LEVSHIN: I hear it all right.

KON: We can't do anything like that today, with a dead man lying in the house. You don't play jokes with a dead man in the house.

GENERAL: Don't teach me! When you die I'm going to dance a jig.

(TATYANA *and* NADYA *come up to the table.*)

LEVSHIN: The man's in his dotage.

AGRAFENA (*going to the house*): The way he likes to play tricks!

TATYANA (*sitting at the table*): Tell me, Yefimich, are you a socialist?

LEVSHIN (*simply*): Me? No. Me and Timofei—we're weavers. That's what we are—weavers.

TATYANA: Do you know any socialists? Have you heard of them?

LEVSHIN: Yes, we've heard of them.... We don't know any, but we've heard about them.

TATYANA: Do you know Sintzov, in the office?

LEVSHIN: Sure, we know him. We know all the men in the office.

TATYANA: Have you ever spoken to him?

YAGODIN (*uneasy*): What should we speak to him about? He works upstairs. We're downstairs. If we have to go to the office, he tells us what the director wants and that's all. That's the beginning and the end of our knowing him.

NADYA: You seem to be afraid of us, Yefimich. Don't be afraid. We're very much interested....

LEVSHIN: Why should we be afraid? We haven't done anything wrong. They asked us to come here and keep order, so we came. Down there the people are mad. They swear they'll burn down the factory and everything else—won't leave anything but a pile of cinders. Well, we don't approve of such mischief. You don't have to go burning things down. Why burn them down? We built them ourselves, and our fathers and our grandfathers.... And then, all of a sudden—burn them down!

TATYANA: I hope you don't think we're questioning you for some bad purpose!

YAGODIN: Why should you? We don't wish anybody any harm.

LEVSHIN: We think like this: whatever people have built is sacred. You have to value human labour, and not go burning things down. But the people are dark-minded. They love a fire. And they're mad. It's true the deceased was hard with us. But no sense in holding a grudge against a dead man. He waved his pistol about . . . threatening us.

NADYA: Is my uncle any better?

YAGODIN: Zakhar Ivanovich?

NADYA: Yes. Is he—kind? Or . . . is he mean to you too?

LEVSHIN: We wouldn't say that.

YAGODIN (*sullenly*): So far as we're concerned, they're all the same. The strict ones and the kind ones. . . .

LEVSHIN (*gently*): The strict one's a boss and the kind one's a boss. A cancer don't care whose flesh it eats.

YAGODIN (*bored*): Of course, Zakhar Ivanovich is a man with a good heart. . . .

NADYA: You mean he's better than Skrobotov?

YAGODIN (*softly*): But the director's no longer among the living.

LEVSHIN: Your uncle's a good man all right, miss. Only—that doesn't make it any easier for us.

TATYANA (*irritated*): Let's go, Nadya. Can't you see that they don't want to understand us?

NADYA (*softly*): Yes. . . .

(*They go out in silence.* LEVSHIN *watches them go, then looks at* YAGODIN; *they both smile.*)

YAGODIN: Get on your nerves, don't they?

LEVSHIN: Didn't you hear? They're very much interested.

YAGODIN: Maybe they think we'll spill something.

LEVSHIN: The young lady there's a nice little thing. Too bad she's rich.

YAGODIN: We better tell Matvei Nikolaevich about this—that the lady was trying to pump us.

LEVSHIN: We'll tell him. And we'll tell Grekov.

YAGODIN: How are things going? They ought to give in to us....

LEVSHIN: They'll give in. Then in a little while they'll start squeezing us to the wall again.

YAGODIN: Squeezing our guts out.

LEVSHIN: That's right.

YAGODIN: H'm. Oh, to have a good sleep!

LEVSHIN: Wait a while. Here comes the General.

(*Enter the* GENERAL. POLOGI *walks beside him deferentially. Behind them comes* KON. *Suddenly* POLOGI *grabs the* GENERAL'S *arm.*)

GENERAL: What's that?

POLOGI: A hole in the ground.

GENERAL: Oh. What's all this on the table? Such a mess. You been eating here?

YAGODIN: Yes, sir ... along with the young lady.

GENERAL: So you're guarding the place for us?

YAGODIN: Yes, sir.... We're on duty.

GENERAL: Good for you! I'll speak to the Governor about you. How many of you are there here?

LEVSHIN: Two of us.

GENERAL: Fool! I can count to two. How many all together?

YAGODIN: Thirty.

GENERAL: Are you armed?

LEVSHIN (*to Yagodin*): Where's that pistol you had, Timofei?

YAGODIN: Here it is.

GENERAL: Don't hold it by the muzzle! The devil! Kon, teach these blockheads how to hold a gun in their hands! (*To Levshin.*) Have you got a revolver?

LEVSHIN: No-o. Not me.

GENERAL: If the rebels come do you intend to shoot?

LEVSHIN: They won't come, Your Excellency. They didn't mean anything ... just flared up for a minute.

GENERAL: But if they do come?

LEVSHIN: They were sore, you see ... about closing down the factory.... Some of them have children....

GENERAL: What are you raving about? I asked you if you're going to shoot?

LEVSHIN: Well, we're ready to, Your Excellency. Why shouldn't we shoot? Only we don't know how. And besides, there's nothing for us to shoot from. If this was a rifle, now ... or a cannon.

GENERAL: Kon! Come here and teach them.... Go on off there to the river....

KON (*sullenly*): Allow me to report that it's night already, Your Excellency. And people will get excited if we start shooting. They'll all be coming here to see what's up. But just as you say. It's all the same to me.

GENERAL: Postponed until tomorrow!

LEVSHIN: Tomorrow everything will be quiet. They'll open up the factory.

GENERAL: Who'll open it up?

LEVSHIN: Zakhar Ivanovich. He's talking to the workers about that now.

GENERAL: Damn it all! If I had my way, they'd close down the factory forever. No more of those pesky whistles early in the morning!

YAGODIN: We'd like it ourselves if they blew them a little later.

GENERAL: And I'd starve you good and proper. No more of your riots!

LEVSHIN: What riots are we making?

GENERAL: Silence! What are you hanging around here for? You should be making your rounds along the fence and if anybody comes crawling up shoot! I'll be responsible!

LEVSHIN: Come on, Timofei. Bring your pistol.

GENERAL (*muttering after them*): Pistol! The stupid asses! Can't even call a gun by the right name!

POLOGI: Allow me to inform Your Excellency that in general the common people are coarse and bestial. Take my case for instance: I have a garden and go to the trouble of cultivating vegetables with my own hands....

GENERAL: That's commendable.

POLOGI: I engage in this work according to the free time at my disposal.

GENERAL: Everyone is expected to work!

(*Enter* TATYANA *and* NADYA.)

TATYANA (*from a distance*): Why are you shouting so?

GENERAL: They get on my nerves. (*To Pologi.*) Well?

POLOGI: But almost every night the workers plunder the fruits of my labours....

GENERAL: Steal?

POLOGI: Exactly. I have sought the protection of the law, but the law is represented in these parts by the honourable police inspector, an individual who displays the greatest indifference to the needs of the population....

TATYANA (*to Pologi*): Why in the world do you use such high-falutin language?

POLOGI (*embarrassed*): Do I? I beg your pardon, but for three years I studied at the gymnasium and I read the paper daily.

TATYANA (*smiling*): Oh, so that explains it!

NADYA: You're very funny, Pologi.

POLOGI: I am happy if that pleases you! An individual should strive to make himself pleasant.

GENERAL: Do you like to fish?

POLOGI: I have never tried it, Your Excellency.

GENERAL (*shrugging his shoulders*): A strange answer!

TATYANA: What haven't you tried—fishing or liking?

POLOGI (*embarrassed*): The first.

TATYANA: And the second?

POLOGI: I've tried the second.

TATYANA: Are you married?

POLOGI: I only dream of such bliss. But since I receive only twenty-five rubles a month (*Nikolai and Cleopatra enter quickly*) I cannot decide upon such a step.

NIKOLAI (*angrily*): Simply amazing! Utter chaos!

CLEOPATRA: How could he! How does he dare!...

GENERAL: What's the trouble?

CLEOPATRA (*shouting*): Your nephew is a dishrag! He has granted all the demands of the rebels—the murderers of my husband!

NADYA (*softly*): But all of them aren't murderers.

CLEOPATRA: He is making a mockery of his dead body! And of me! Just to think of it! Opening up the factory before the man is buried whom those rascals killed for the very reason that he closed down the factory!

NADYA: But uncle is afraid that they will burn down everything!

CLEOPATRA: You're a child and should hold your tongue!

NIKOLAI: The speech of that young boy! The most obvious socialist propaganda!

CLEOPATRA: There's some clerk who is at the head of them, and gives them advice. He had the nerve to say that the crime was provoked by the deceased himself!

NIKOLAI (*writing something in his notebook*): That fellow rouses my suspicions. He's too smart for a mere clerk....

TATYANA: Are you speaking of Sintzov?

NIKOLAI: Yes, I am.

CLEOPATRA: I feel as though someone had spit in my face.

POLOGI (*to Nikolai*): Allow me to remark, that when reading the newspaper, Mr. Sintzov always comments extensively on politics and is most prejudiced against the authorities.

TATYANA (*to Nikolai*): Are you interested in hearing that?

NIKOLAI (*challengingly*): Extremely interested!... Are you trying to embarrass me?

TATYANA: It seems to me that Mr. Pologi does not belong here.

POLOGI (*confused*): I beg your pardon.... I shall leave. (*Hurries out.*)

CLEOPATRA: Here he comes.... I don't want to see him. I can't bear him! (*Hurries out left.*)

NADYA: What's going on?

GENERAL: I'm too old for such excitement. Killings. Uprisings.... Zakhar should have foreseen all this when he invited me to come here for a rest. (*Enter Zakhar, excited but pleased. On seeing Nikolai he stops in embarrassment and adjusts his glasses.*) Listen, my dear nephew ... do you realize what you've done?

ZAKHAR: Just a minute, uncle ... Nikolai Vassilievich....

NIKOLAI: Ye-e-s.

ZAKHAR: The workers were in such a state of excitement that ... I was afraid they would destroy the entire factory ... and so I conceded their demand not to close down. Also about Dichkov. Only I agreed on condition that they hand over the criminal, and they have already undertaken to find him.

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): They needn't trouble themselves. We'll find the murderer without their aid.

ZAKHAR: It seems preferable to me that they find him themselves. . . . That will be better. . . . We agreed to open the factory after lunch tomorrow. . . .

NIKOLAI: Whom do you mean by—we?

ZAKHAR: I. . . .

NIKOLAI: Aha! Thank you for the information. However, it seems to me that after the death of my brother, his place should be taken by me and by his wife, and if I am not mistaken, you should have consulted us in this matter and not made the decision yourself.

ZAKHAR: But I asked you to come! Sintzov came for you. You refused to come.

NIKOLAI: You must admit that it would be difficult for me to think of business matters on the day of my brother's death.

ZAKHAR: But you went to the factory anyway.

NIKOLAI: Yes. I did. I listened to their speeches. What of it?

ZAKHAR: But don't you understand? It seems that the deceased sent a telegram to the city asking for troops. A reply was received saying that the soldiers would arrive tomorrow morning. . . .

GENERAL: Aha! Soldiers? That's talking! No fooling around with soldiers on the scene!

NIKOLAI: A very wise measure!

ZAKHAR: I'm not sure. When the soldiers come the workers will grow more excited than ever. . . . The lord only knows what they may do if we don't open up the factory! It seems to me that I did the right thing. At least there will be no bloody conflict.

NIKOLAI: I take a different view of the question. You should not have conceded everything to those . . . people, if only out of respect for the memory of the deceased.

ZAKHAR: But for goodness' sake, you don't say a word about the possibility of this ending in further tragedy!

NIKOLAI: That has nothing to do with me.

ZAKHAR: True enough, but what about me? It's me who has to live with the workers! And if their blood is shed. . . . They might have destroyed the entire factory!

NIKOLAI: I don't believe that.

GENERAL: Neither do I!

ZAKHAR (*despondent*): And so you blame me for what I've done?

NIKOLAI: Yes I do.

ZAKHAR (*sincerely*): Why ... why should there be this hostility? I want only one thing—to avoid the horror that is only too possible. I don't want bloodshed. Is it really impossible to achieve a peaceful, reasonable way of life! You look upon me with hate, the workers with distrust.... I want to do what's right. Only what's right!

GENERAL: Who knows what's right? It isn't even a word. Just a collection of letters. R for rat, T for tat. But business is business. Isn't that how it goes?

NADYA (*tearfully*): Be still, grandfather. Uncle ... calm yourself.... He doesn't understand.... Oh, Nikolai Vassilievich, why don't you understand? You're so clever.... Why don't you trust uncle?

NIKOLAI: Pardon me, Zakhar Ivanovich, but I am leaving. I am not accustomed to having children interfere when I am talking business. (*Exit.*)

ZAKHAR: See, Nadya? ...

NADYA (*taking his hand*): That's nothing. The most important thing is that the workers be satisfied.... There are so many of them, lots more than us.

ZAKHAR: Wait a minute.... I must tell you that I am very much displeased with you, Nadya. Very.

GENERAL: So am I.

ZAKHAR: You sympathize with the workers. That's only natural at your age, but you mustn't lose your sense of proportion, my dear. This morning, now, you brought that fellow Grekov to the table. I know him. He's an intelligent chap. But you had no right to cause a scene with your aunt on his account.

GENERAL: That's right! Give it to her!

NADYA: But you don't know how it all happened....

ZAKHAR: You can be sure that I know more than you do. Our people are coarse and uncultivated. If you give them a finger they grab the whole hand.

TATYANA (*quietly*): Like a drowning man grabs a straw.

ZAKHAR: They are as greedy as animals, and they mustn't be spoiled, but cultivated. That's it. Be so good as to think this over.

GENERAL: And now I'll have my say. The devil only knows how you behave toward me, you little vixen. Let me remind you of the fact that it will take you forty years to catch up to me in age. You'll

have to wait that long before I'll let you talk to me like an equal. Understand? Kon!

KON (*from among the trees*): Here I am.

GENERAL: Where is that ... what do you call him ... that corkscrew?

KON: What corkscrew?

GENERAL: That ... what's his name? The thin, slippery one....

KON: Oh, Pologi. I don't know.

GENERAL (*going toward the tent*): Find him!

(ZAKHAR *walks up and down with bent head, wiping his glasses on his pocket handkerchief.* NADYA *sits deep in thought.* TATYANA *is standing and watching them.*)

TATYANA: Is it known who killed him?

ZAKHAR: They say that they don't know, but they'll find him. Of course they know. (*He glances about and lowers his voice.*) They've agreed to this among themselves. It's a conspiracy. To tell the truth, he exasperated them. He didn't care what he did to them. Love of power was a kind of disease with him. So they ... of course it's awful, awful in its very simplicity ... they just killed him. And still they look at you with such clear, frank eyes, as though they don't realize they have committed a crime. It's all so shockingly simple!

TATYANA: They say that Skrobotov was about to shoot, but somebody snatched the revolver out of his hand and....

ZAKHAR: That isn't important. It was they who did the killing ... not him.

NADYA: Why don't you sit down?

ZAKHAR: Why did he send for the troops? They found it out as they find out everything, and that hastened his death. Of course I had to open up the factory. If I hadn't, my relations with them would have been spoiled for a long time to come. This is a time when you have to show them more attention and consideration.... Who knows how it may end? At such a time a sensible person must see that he has friends among the common people. (*Levshin appears upstage.*) Who's coming?

LEVSHIN: It's us ... on guard.

ZAKHAR: Well, Yefimich, you've killed a man, so now you've become meek and peaceable, eh?

LEVSHIN: We're always that way, Zakhar Ivanich ... peaceable.

ZAKHAR (*reprovingly*): Oh, yes. And you kill people peaceably, eh? Incidentally, you're spreading some kind of ideas, Levshin. Some kind of new teachings about not needing money and bosses and such things any more. That's forgivable ... that is, understandable ... in Leo Tolstoy ... but you'd better stop it, my friend. Nothing good will come of such talk.

(TATYANA *and* NADYA *enter right, from where the voices of* SINTZOV *and* YAKOV *are heard.* YAGODIN *appears from behind the trees.*)

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): What talk? I've lived my life, thought a bit, and say what I think.

ZAKHAR: Bosses aren't beasts. You've got to understand that. You know I'm not a mean person. I'm always ready to help you. I want to do what is right.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*): Is there anybody who wants to do himself wrong?

ZAKHAR: But can't you understand I want to do what is right for *you*!

LEVSHIN: We understand, of course....

ZAKHAR (*looking closely at him*): No, you're mistaken. You don't understand. What strange people you are—sometimes you're like beasts, sometimes like little children. (*Exit. Levshin stands leaning on his stick watching him go.*)

YAGODIN: Reading you a sermon again?

LEVSHIN: He's a Chinaman. A real Chinaman. What is he trying to say? He can't understand anybody but himself.

YAGODIN: He says he wants to do what's right.

LEVSHIN: That's it.

YAGODIN: Let's go. Here they come. (*Levshin and Yagodin withdraw into the depths of the garden. Tatyana, Nadya, Yakov, Sintzov enter upstage right.*)

NADYA: We keep walking 'round and 'round in circles like in a dream.

TATYANA: Would you like a bite to eat, Matvei Nikolaevich?

SINTZOV: I'd prefer a glass of tea. I've talked so much today that I have a sore throat.

NADYA: Aren't you afraid of anything?

SINTZOV (*sitting down at the table*): Me? Not of anything.

NADYA: I'm afraid. All of a sudden everything has become all tangled up and now I can't make out which people are right and which are wrong.

SINTZOV (*smiling*): It'll get untangled. Just don't be afraid to think. Think fearlessly, right through to the end. In general, there's nothing to be afraid of.

TATYANA: You think that everything has quieted down?

SINTZOV: Yes. The workers rarely win, and even a little victory brings them great satisfaction.

NADYA: Are you fond of them?

SINTZOV: That's hardly the word. I've lived with them for a long time; I know them and recognize their strength. I believe in their intelligence.

TATYANA: And that the future belongs to them?

SINTZOV: Yes. I believe that too.

NADYA: The future.... That's something I can't imagine.

TATYANA (*smiling*): They're a sly bunch, your proletarians! Nadya and I tried to talk to them, but nothing came of it.

NADYA: It wasn't very nice. The old man talked to us as though we were both ... something bad ... spies or something. But there's another one, Grekov ... he looks at people differently. The old man keeps smiling as though he pitied us, as though we were sick.

TATYANA: Stop drinking so much, Yakov. It's unpleasant to watch you.

YAKOV: What am I supposed to do?

SINTZOV: Isn't there anything else to do?

YAKOV: I feel a revulsion, an unconquerable revulsion for business and business matters. You see, I belong to the third category....

SINTZOV: To what?

YAKOV: The third category. People are divided into three categories: the first consists of people who work all their lives, the second of people who accumulate money, the third of those who don't want to earn their bread because there's no sense in it, and who can't accumulate money because that's stupid and—well, somehow it doesn't seem right. So that's me—the third category. To this category belong all the lazy people, the tramps, monks, beggars, and other parasites of this world.

NADYA: It's boring to listen to you, uncle. And you're not at all like that. You're simply ... kind and soft-hearted.

YAKOV: In other words, good-for-nothing. I realized that when I was still in school. People get into these three categories before they even grow up.

TATYANA: Nadya was right when she said you were boring. Yakov.

YAKOV: I agree. Matvei Nikolaevich. do you think that life has a face?

SINTZOV: Maybe.

YAKOV: It has. And its face is always young. Not long ago life looked at me indifferently, but now it looks at me sternly and keeps asking: "Who are you? Where are you going?" (*He seems to be frightened by something, and when he tries to smile, his teeth chatter and his face is distorted into a pitiful grimace.*)

TATYANA: Oh, drop it, Yakov.... Here comes the prosecutor ... I shouldn't like you to say such things in front of him.

YAKOV: All right.

NADYA (*softly*): Everybody's expecting something and is afraid. Why won't they let me make friends with the workers? That's stupid.

NIKOLAI (*coming up*): Could I have a glass of tea?

TATYANA: Of course.

(*For a few seconds everyone sits in silence.* NIKOLAI *is standing, stirring his tea.*)

NADYA: I should like to know why the workers don't trust uncle, and in general....

NIKOLAI (*sullenly*): They only trust those who make speeches on the theme: "Workers of the World, Unite!" They trust them, all right.

NADYA (*quietly and with a shrug of her shoulders*): Whenever I hear these words ... this world-wide challenge ... it seems to me that people like us are superfluous....

NIKOLAI (*aroused*): Yes, of course! Every cultured person should feel like that, and then I'm sure another challenge would soon be heard: "Cultured People of the World, Unite!" It's high time to cry that. High time! The barbarians are coming to trample in the dust the fruits of thousands of years of civilization. They are coming, impelled by their greed!

YAKOV: They wear their souls in their bellies, in their empty bellies, and that's a picture to make your tongue hang out.

(*Pours himself a glass of beer.*)

NIKOLAI: The mob is coming, impelled by greed, snapped into unity by their one desire—to guzzle!

TATYANA (*pensively*): The mob.... Everywhere the mob. In the theatres. In the churches....

NIKOLAI: What can these people contribute? Nothing but destruction. And note that the destruction will be more fearful here, among us, than anywhere else.

TATYANA: It always seems strange to me when I hear them refer to the workers as advanced people. That's far from my understanding of them.

NIKOLAI: And you, Mr. Sintzov?... Of course you don't agree with us?

SINTZOV (*calmly*): No, I don't.

NADYA: Aunt Tanya, do you remember what the old man said about the kopeck? It was so very simple.

NIKOLAI: Why don't you agree with us, Mr. Sintzov?

SINTZOV: Because I think differently.

NIKOLAI: A most reasonable answer. But maybe you would share your views with us?

SINTZOV: No, I don't care to.

NIKOLAI: I most sincerely regret it. I am only consoled by the hope that when we next meet, your attitude will have changed. Yakov Ivanovich, if it is not asking too much, I should like you to accompany me. My nerves are shot to pieces.

YAKOV (*rising with difficulty*): With pleasure, with pleasure.

(*Exit.*)

TATYANA: That prosecutor is a horrid person. It's always hard for me to agree with him.

NADYA (*rising*): Then why do you agree with him?

SINTZOV (*laughing*): Yes, why, Tatyana Pavlovna?

TATYANA: Because I feel the same way....

SINTZOV (*to Tatyana*): You think as he does, but you feel differently. You want to understand, but he doesn't care about that.... He doesn't have to understand!

TATYANA: I suppose he's very cruel.

SINTZOV: Yes, he is. In the city he handles the political cases, and his attitude towards those who are arrested is disgusting.

TATYANA: Incidentally, he wrote down something about you in his notebook.

SINTZOV (*with a smile*): I don't doubt it. He had a talk with Pologi. In general, he's right on his toes.... Tatyana Pavlovna, I have a request to make of you.

TATYANA: I shall be glad to do anything possible.

SINTZOV: Thank you. Most likely the gendarmes have been called....

TATYANA: They have.

SINTZOV: That means they will search the houses.... Could you hide something for me?

TATYANA: Do you think they will search your house?

SINTZOV: Certainly.

TATYANA: And they may arrest you?

SINTZOV: I don't think so. What for? Because I make speeches? But Zakhar Ivanovich knows that in all my speeches I call the workers to order.

TATYANA: And is there nothing in your past?

SINTZOV: I have no past.... Will you help me? I wouldn't trouble you if I didn't think that the houses of all those who might hide these things will be searched tomorrow. (*Laughs quietly.*)

TATYANA (*embarrassed*): I shall speak frankly.... My situation in this house does not allow me to use the room I have been given as though it were my own.

SINTZOV: In other words you cannot? Well, then....

TATYANA: Please don't be offended with me.

SINTZOV: Of course not. Your refusal is quite understandable....

TATYANA: But wait. I shall speak to Nadya.

(*Exit.* SINTZOV *drums with his fingers on the table as he watches her go away. Careful steps are heard.*)

SINTZOV (*softly*): Who's there?

GREKOV: It's me. Are you alone?

SINTZOV: Yes, but there are people walking about. What's new at the factory?

GREKOV (*with a short laugh*): You know that they agreed to find the one who did the shooting. Now they're carrying on an investigation. Some shout "It's the socialists who killed him!" In general, the nasty tune of saving one's skin has begun.

SINTZOV: Do you know who?

GREKOV: Akimov.

SINTZOV: Not really! Humph ... I didn't expect that. He's such a nice, sensible fellow....

GREKOV: He has a hot temper. Wants to give himself up.... He has a wife and child, with another coming.... I just spoke to Levshin. He, of course, talks nonsense ... says we ought to substitute somebody less important for Akimov.

SINTZOV: Queer duck! But what a nuisance it all is! (*Pause.*) Listen, Grekov, you'll have to bury everything in the ground.... There's no other place to hide it.

GREKOV: I found a place. The telegraph operator agreed to take everything. But you better get away from here, Matvei Nikolaevich.

SINTZOV: No, I'm not going anywhere.

GREKOV: They'll arrest you.

SINTZOV: What of it? It will make a bad impression on the workers if I leave.

GREKOV: That's true enough. But it's too bad for you.

SINTZOV: Nonsense. It's Akimov that I feel sorry for.

GREKOV: Yes, and there's nothing we can do to help. Wants to give himself up. Funny to see you in the role of guardian of the bosses' property.

SINTZOV (*smiling*): Can't be helped. I suppose my fellows are asleep?

GREKOV: No, they've gotten together to talk things over. It's a grand night.

SINTZOV: I'd be glad to go along with you, but I have to wait. They'll probably arrest you too.

GREKOV: So we'll serve our sentence together. I'm off.

(*Exit.*)

SINTZOV: Good-bye. (*Enter Tatyana.*) Don't bother. Tatyana Pavlovna, I've arranged everything. Good-bye.

TATYANA: I'm awfully sorry.

SINTZOV: Good-night.

(*Exit.* TATYANA *walks quietly up and down, studying the toes of her shoes. Enter* YAKOV.)

YAKOV: Why don't you go to bed?

TATYANA: I don't want to. I'm thinking of going away from here.

YAKOV: H'm-m-m. As for me, there's nowhere for me to go. I've passed all the continents and islands.

TATYANA: It's depressing here. Everything keeps swaying until my head gets dizzy. I'm forced to lie, and I can't stand lying.

YAKOV: H'm. You can't stand lying. Unfortunately for me. Unfortunately.

TATYANA (*to herself*): But just now—I lied. Naturally Nadya would have agreed to hide those things. But I have no right to start her along that road.

YAKOV: What are you speaking about?

TATYANA: I? Nothing in particular. How strange it all is. Only recently life was clear. I knew what I wanted. . . .

YAKOV (*quietly*): Alas! Talented drunkards, handsome loafers, and other members of the jolly professions have ceased to attract attention. As long as we stood beyond the humdrum of life, people found us amusing. But the humdrum is becoming more and more dramatic. Someone shouts, "Hey, you clowns and comedians! Off the stage!" But the stage is your field, Tanya.

TATYANA (*uneasily*): My field? Yes, I once thought that I stood firmly on the stage, and that there I could attain to great heights. (*Forcefully, and painfully.*) I feel unhappy and embarrassed before these people who watch me with cold, silent eyes which seem to say, "We know all that. It's old and boring." I feel weak and disarmed before them. . . . I can't capture them and rouse their emotions. I want to tremble with joy and fear, I want to speak words full of fire, passion, hate . . . words sharp as a knife, fiery as a torch . . . I want to pour them lavishly before people. Let my audience flare up, shout, run away. . . . But there are no such words. I would stop them, and again toss them beautiful words, like flowers, full of hope and

love and joy! They would weep and so would I. I would weep such lovely tears! They would give me an ovation, drown me in flowers, lift me on their hands. For a moment I should have held them in my power, and that would have been a moment of life. All of life in that one moment! But there are no such living words.

YAKOV: We all know how to live only for a moment.

TATYANA: The best things in life occur only in a moment. How I should like to see people different—more responsive! And life different—less vain. A life in which art would be indispensable—for everyone and always. So that I would have a place in life.... (*Yakov is gazing into the darkness with wide eyes.*) Why do you drink so much? You have killed yourself. Once you were handsome.

YAKOV: Forget it.

TATYANA: Can't you understand how hard it is for me?

YAKOV (*with horror*): No matter how drunk I am, I understand everything. That's my misfortune. My mind keeps going on and on with accursed persistence. All the time. And all the time I see a leering face, broad and unwashed, with enormous eyes that keep asking, "Well?" Just that one word, "Well?"

PAULINA (*running in*): Tanya! Please come here, Tanya. It's Cleopatra.... She's lost her mind. She's insulting everybody.... Maybe you can calm her down.

TATYANA (*miserably*): Leave me alone with your squabbles. Hurry and gobble each other up, but don't keep running around under everybody's feet.

PAULINA (*startled*): Tanya! What's the matter with you? What are you saying?

TATYANA: What do you need? What do you want?

PAULINA: Just look at her. Here she comes now.

ZAKHAR (*off stage*): Be quiet, I beg you!

CLEOPATRA (*also off stage*): It's you who should be quiet in my presence!

PAULINA: She'll start shouting here, with these muzhiks around. It's awful, Tanya, I beg you....

ZAKHAR (*entering*): Listen ... I'm afraid I'm going crazy.

CLEOPATRA (*following him*): You can't run away from me. I'll make you listen to me.... You played up to the workers because you needed their respect. You threw them a human life as you would

toss a piece of meat to the dogs. You're a humanist at other people's expense, at the price of other people's blood!

ZAKHAR: What is she saying?

YAKOV (*to Tatyana*): You'd better leave. (*Exit.*)

PAULINA: Look here, my fine lady, we're decent people and we won't have a woman of your reputation shouting at us....

ZAKHAR (*startled*): Keep quiet, Paulina, for heaven's sake!

CLEOPATRA: What makes you think you're decent people? Because you babble about politics? About the misery of the masses? About progress and humanity? Is that why?

TATYANA: Cleopatra Petrovna! Enough of this!

CLEOPATRA: I'm not talking to you. You don't belong here. This is none of your business.... My husband was an honest person—frank and honest. He knew the common people better than you. He didn't go around babbling like you. And you betrayed him. You murdered him with your vicious stupidity.

TATYANA (*to Paulina and Zakhar*): Go away, you two.

CLEOPATRA: I'll go away myself. You're loathesome to me.... All of you are loathesome! (*Exit.*)

ZAKHAR: There's a crazy woman for you!

PAULINA (*tearfully*): We must drop everything and go away.... To insult people like that!

ZAKHAR: What makes her like that? ... If she had loved her husband, or lived contentedly with him.... But to have taken on at least two lovers a year and then to go around shouting like that....

PAULINA: We must sell the factory!

ZAKHAR (*in vexation*): Nonsense ... sell it! That's not the thing. We have to think things over, and think them over well. I was just speaking to Nikolai Vassilievich when that woman tore in and interrupted us.

PAULINA: He hates us—Nikolai Vassilievich. He's mean.

ZAKHAR (*calming down*): He's angered and shocked, but he's a clever person and he has no reason for hating us. There are very practical considerations binding him with us since the death of Mikhail.

PAULINA: I'm afraid of him, and I don't trust him. He'll fool you.

ZAKHAR: Oh, Paulina, that's all nonsense. He has very good judgment ... yes, he has. The fact of the matter is, that I really did

assume a dubious position in my relations with the workers. I must confess that. When I spoke to them that evening—oh, Paulina, those people are too hostile!

PAULINA: I told you so. That's just what I said. They'll always be our enemies! (*Tatyana laughs quietly and goes out. Paulina looks at her and purposely raises her voice as she continues.*) Everyone is our enemy! They all envy us, and that's why they're all against us.

ZAKHAR (*walking quickly up and down*): Yes. You're partly right, of course. Nikolai Vassilievich says it isn't a struggle between the classes, but a struggle between the races—black and white.... Of course, that's putting it a bit crudely. It's an exaggeration.... But if you stop to think that we are cultured people, that it is we who have created science and art and so forth—equality, physiological equality, h'm ... well, all right. But first let them become human, let them become civilized, and then we shall speak about equality.

PAULINA (*alert*): This is something new for you....

ZAKHAR: It's all schematic as yet. I haven't thought it through. The important thing is that we must learn to understand ourselves.

PAULINA (*taking him by the arm*): You're too softhearted, my dear. That's what makes it so hard for you.

ZAKHAR: We know very little and are often surprised. Take that Sintzov, for example. He surprised me and made me like him—such a simple person with such clear logic behind his ideas. It turns out that he's a socialist, and that's where he gets his logic and simplicity.

PAULINA: Oh yes. He attracts attention all right. Such an unpleasant face! But you need some rest. Don't you think we better go?

ZAKHAR (*following her*): And then there's another worker—Grekov. An insolent fellow. Nikolai Vassilievich and I were just recalling his speech. He's no more than a boy, but he speaks with such arrogance....

(*They go out. Silence. A song is heard off stage, then soft voices. Enter* YAGODIN, LEVSHIN *and* RYABTZOV, *a young chap who frequently tosses back his head. His face is round and good-natured. The three of them stop under the trees.*)

LEVSHIN (*quietly and secretively*): It's for the common cause, Pashok.

RYABTZOV: I know....

LEVSHIN: For the common cause, the human cause. There's a high price on every great soul these days, brother. The people are pulling themselves up with their minds. They're listening and reading and thinking. And those of them who have come to understand a thing or two are priceless....

YAGODIN: That's true, Pashok.

RYABTZOV: I know it. What's the idea? I'll do it.

LEVSHIN: You mustn't do anything just for the fun of it. You've got to understand why. You're young and this means penal servitude.

RYABTZOV: That's all right. I'll escape.

YAGODIN: Maybe it won't mean that. You're too young to be sentenced to penal servitude, Pashok.

LEVSHIN: Let's call it that. The worse we make it, the better. If a fellow's willing to suffer the worst, that means he's made up his mind once and for all.

RYABTZOV: I've made up my mind.

YAGODIN: Don't hurry. Think it over....

RYABTZOV: What's there to think over? He's been killed, so somebody's got to answer for it....

LEVSHIN: That's right. Somebody's got to. And if one person don't give himself up, then many will be called to account. They'll call our best people to account, Pashok, those who are more valuable to the cause than you are, Pashok.

RYABTZOV: I'm not saying anything. I may be young, but I understand. We have to keep a strong grip on each other ... like the links of a chain.

LEVSHIN (*sighing*): That's right.

YAGODIN (*smiling*): We'll join hands, encircle them, close in tight, and there you are!

RYABTZOV: All right. I've decided. I have no one depending on me, so I'm the one to go. Only it's too bad that for such rotten blood....

LEVSHIN: Not for that blood, but for the sake of your comrades.

RYABTZOV: Yes, but I mean he was hateful ... as mean as they come.

LEVSHIN: He got killed because he was mean. Good people die a natural death. They're not in anybody's way.

RYABTZOV: Well, is that all?

YAGODIN: That's all, Pashok. So you'll tell them tomorrow morning?

RYABTZOV: Why wait until tomorrow?

LEVSHIN: No, you better wait until tomorrow. The night's as good a counsellor as a mother.

RYABTZOV: Just as you say.... May I go now?

LEVSHIN: God be with you!

YAGODIN: Go ahead, brother. Be firm....

(RYABTZOV *goes out unhurriedly.* YAGODIN *regards the stick he is turning in his hands.* LEVSHIN *stares at the sky.*)

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): A lot of fine people growing up these days. Timofei.

YAGODIN: Good weather, good crops.

LEVSHIN: If things go on this way, we'll probably pull ourselves out of this mess.

YAGODIN (*unhappily*): Too bad about the lad.

LEVSHIN (*quietly*): Yes, it's too bad. I pity him. Here ... off you go to jail. And for a nasty business. Only one consolation—he did it for his comrades.

YAGODIN: Ye-es.

LEVSHIN: But you better hold your tongue. Tchk! Tchk! Why did Andrei have to go and pull that trigger? What good is a killing? No good at all. Kill one dog and the boss buys another, and there's an end to the tale.

YAGODIN (*sadly*): How many of our people are sacrificed!

LEVSHIN: Come on, sentry! We've got to guard the bosses' property! (*They go off.*) Oh, Lord.—

YAGODIN: What's the matter?

LEVSHIN: It's a hard life! If only we could untangle it faster!

(CURTAIN.)

Act III

(A large room in the BARDIN *home. In the back wall are four windows and a door opening onto a porch. Through the glass windows can be seen soldiers, gendarmes, and a group of workers, among whom are* LEVSHIN *and* GREKOV. *The room seems to be uninhabited: the little furniture it contains consists of worn, odd pieces; the wall paper is peeling off. A large table has been placed to the right. When the curtain rises,* KON *is angrily placing chairs about this table and* AGRAFENA *is sweeping the floor. There are large, double doors in both the left and right walls.)*

AGRAFENA: Well you needn't get angry with me!

KON: I'm not angry. They can all go to the devil for all I care.... Thank goodness I'll be dying soon.... My heart's running down already....

AGRAFENA: We'll all be dying, so you needn't boast about it.

KON: I'm fed up ... disgusted with everything. When you've reached the age of sixty-five, you're not equal to their filth any more. Like trying to crack walnuts with toothless gums.... Imagine rounding up all these people and drenching them out there in the rain!

(CAPTAIN BOBOYEDOV *and* NIKOLAI *enter through the doors to the left.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*): So this will be the courtroom? Splendid! I suppose you are acting in a professional capacity?

NIKOLAI: Yes. Kon, call the Corporal!

BOBOYEDOV: Now here's how we'll serve up this dish: in the centre that ... what's his name?

NIKOLAI: Sintzov.

BOBOYEDOV: Sintzov ... very touching. And all around him, the united workers of the world, eh? That'll be a sight to warm the heart! The owner of this place is a very charming person, very. I had quite

a different impression of him. I know his sister-in-law from the theatre in Voronezh. Wonderful actress. (*Kvach enters from the porch.*) Well, Kvach?

KVACH: Everyone's been searched, Your Honour.

BOBOYEDOV: Well, and what did you find?

KVACH: We didn't find anything. Allow me to report that the police inspector is in such a hurry that he isn't sufficiently thorough, Your Honour.

BOBOYEDOV: Might have expected it. The police are always like that. Did you find anything on those who have been arrested?

KVACH: We found things behind the icons in Levshin's place.

BOBOYEDOV: Bring everything to my room.

KVACH: Yes, Your Honour. That young gendarme, Your Honour, who just came from the dragoons....

BOBOYEDOV: What about him?

KVACH: He isn't thorough either.

BOBOYEDOV: Well you'll have to see to that yourself. Be off with you now. (*Kvach leaves.*) He's a queer bird, that Kvach. Not much to look at, and seems a bit stupid, but he's got a nose like a bloodhound!

NIKOLAI: I advise you to pay special attention to that clerk, Bogdan Denissovich....

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, yes indeed. We'll make it hot for him, all right.

NIKOLAI: I'm not speaking of Sintzov, but of Pologi. It seems to me that he can be of use to us.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, that fellow we were talking to? Yes, of course. We'll draw him into it.

(NIKOLAI *goes to the table and carefully arranges some documents.*)

CLEOPATRA (*at the door to the right*): Captain, would you care for a glass of tea?

BOBOYEDOV: Yes, thank you. If it isn't too much trouble. Beautiful country here; a lovely place.... And it turns out that I am acquainted with Madame Lugovoi. Didn't she used to act in the Voronezh Theatre?

CLEOPATRA: It seems so.... Did you find anything when you made your searches?

BOBOYEDOV (*graciously*): Everything. We found everything. Don't worry, you can be sure that we will always find things. Even if there's nothing to find, we'll find it.

CLEOPATRA: My late husband did not take these leaflets seriously. He always said that papers didn't make a revolution.

BOBOYEDOV: H'm. That, of course, is not entirely correct.

CLEOPATRA: He claimed that leaflets were secret orders issued to fools by idiots.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*): Very clever—though also incorrect.

CLEOPATRA: And now you see they have advanced from issuing papers to taking action.

BOBOYEDOV: You can rest assured that they will be punished severely—most severely.

CLEOPATRA: That's a great comfort. As soon as you came I felt relieved.

BOBOYEDOV: It's our job to keep people feeling cheerful.

CLEOPATRA: I can't tell you what a pleasure it is to find a wholesome, satisfied person. They have become a rarity these days.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, in our corps of the gendarmes, the men are all hand-picked!

CLEOPATRA: Let's go to the table.

BOBOYEDOV (*going*): With pleasure! H'm, perhaps you can tell me where Madame Lugovoi will be acting this season?

CLEOPATRA: No, I don't know.

(*Enter* TATYANA *and* NADYA *from the porch.*)

NADYA (*agitated*): Did you notice how that old man Levshin looked at us?

TATYANA: Yes.

NADYA: I don't know ... somehow it all seems so dreadful ... so shameful. Nikolai Vassilievich, why must you do it? Why were these people arrested?

NIKOLAI (*dryly*): There were more than sufficient grounds for their arrest.... And I must request you not to use the porch as long as those....

NADYA: Oh, we won't!

TATYANA (*looking at Nikolai*): Has Sintzov also been arrested?

NIKOLAI: Sintzov has also been arrested.

NADYA (*walking about the room*): Seventeen people! Their wives are standing at the gates crying . . . and the soldiers shove them about and laugh at them. Tell the soldiers that they should at least behave themselves decently.

NIKOLAI: That's none of my business. Lieutenant Strepetov is in charge of the soldiers.

NADYA: I'll go and ask him.

(*Goes out right.* TATYANA *smiles and crosses to table.*)

TATYANA: Listen, you graveyard of laws, as the General calls you. . . .

NIKOLAI: I don't find that the General is particularly witty. I shouldn't repeat his jokes.

TATYANA: Oh, no. I made a mistake. A coffin of laws—that's what he calls you. Don't you like it?

NIKOLAI: It's just that I'm not in a mood for joking.

TATYANA: You mean you're such a serious person?

NIKOLAI: Let me remind you that they killed my brother yesterday.

TATYANA: What's that to you?

NIKOLAI: I beg your pardon, but. . . .

TATYANA (*smiling*): Don't pretend. You aren't sorry for your brother. . . . You never feel sorry for anybody . . . like me, for example. Death—that is, a sudden death, has a bad effect on anybody. But I assure you that not for one moment have you felt genuinely, humanly sorry for your brother. . . . It isn't in you.

NIKOLAI (*constrained*): This is interesting. What are you getting at?

TATYANA: Haven't you observed that you and I are kindred spirits? No? That's a pity. I'm an actress—a cold-blooded creature, possessed of one desire—to play a good role. You too are hard-hearted, and anxious to play a good role. Tell me the truth, do you really want to be a prosecutor?

NIKOLAI (*quietly*): I want you to stop this.

TATYANA (*laughing, after a brief pause*): I'm a bad diplomat. I came to you with the purpose of . . . I intended to be pleasant and

charming.... But as soon as I saw you I began to be insulting. You always make me want to hurt you ... whether you're taking a walk or having a rest, talking or silently passing judgment on people.... But I intended to ask you....

NIKOLAI (*with a short laugh*): I can guess what.

TATYANA: Perhaps. But I suppose it's already too late?

NIKOLAI: Whenever you asked, it would be too late. M. Sintzov is too deeply entangled.

TATYANA: I think it gives you a certain satisfaction to tell me that, doesn't it?

NIKOLAI: I don't conceal it.

TATYANA (*sighing*): That just shows how much we resemble each other. I too am very petty and mean. Tell me—is Sintzov completely in your power ... I mean particularly in *yours*?

NIKOLAI: Of course.

TATYANA: And if I should ask you to leave him alone?

NIKOLAI: Nothing would come of it.

TATYANA: Even if I asked you very earnestly?

NIKOLAI: It would make no difference.... You amaze me.

TATYANA: Really? Why?

NIKOLAI: You are a beautiful woman who undoubtedly has an original mind. You are a personality. There are innumerable chances for you to secure an easy, luxurious life ... and yet you interest yourself in this nobody. Eccentricity is a disease, and any cultivated person would feel indignant at your conduct.... No one who admires women and prizes beauty could forgive you for it.

TATYANA (*looking at him curiously*): So that's the judgment you pass on me! ... Alas! And Sintzov?

NIKOLAI: Tonight that gentleman goes to jail.

TATYANA: Is that final?

NIKOLAI: Yes.

TATYANA: With no concessions as a favour to a lady? I don't believe it! If I wanted it badly enough, you would release Sintzov.

NIKOLAI (*thickly*): Try wanting it badly—just try.

TATYANA: I can't ... I don't know how.... But tell me the truth—it shouldn't be so hard to tell the truth once in your life—would you release him?

NIKOLAI (*after a pause*): I don't know....

TATYANA: I know! (*A pause, a sigh.*) What rotters we both are! . . .

NIKOLAI: However, there are things which are unforgivable even in a woman.

TATYANA (*carelessly*): Oh, what of it? We're alone. . . . No one can hear us. I have a right to tell you and myself that we're both. . . .

NIKOLAI: Please . . . I don't want to hear any more. . . .

TATYANA (*calmly and persistently*): The fact remains that you place a lower price on your principles than on the kiss of a woman.

NIKOLAI: I have already said that I don't care to listen to you.

TATYANA (*calmly*): Then go away. I'm sure I'm not keeping you.

(*He goes out quickly.* TATYANA *wraps herself in her shawl, stands in the middle of the room and looks out on the porch.* NADYA *and the* LIEUTENANT *enter right.*)

LIEUTENANT: I give you my word that a soldier would never insult a woman. For him a woman is sacred. . . .

NADYA: Well, you'll see.

LIEUTENANT: That is impossible. Only in the army has a chivalrous attitude to women been preserved.

(*They cross over to door at left. Enter* PAULINA, ZAKHAR *and* YAKOV.)

ZAKHAR: You see, Yakov. . . .

PAULINA: But how could it be otherwise?

ZAKHAR: We are up against reality, inevitability.

TATYANA: What are you talking about?

YAKOV: They are singing a dirge to me. . . .

PAULINA: So amazingly unfeeling! Everyone is blaming us, even Yakov Ivanovich, who is always so meek. . . . As though it were our fault that the soldiers came! And nobody invited the gendarmes either. They always come of themselves.

ZAKHAR: Blaming me for those arrests. . . .

YAKOV: I'm not blaming you.

ZAKHAR: Not in so many words, but I feel. . . .

YAKOV (*to Tatyana*): I was sitting there when he came up and said, "Well, brother?" and I answered, "Rotten, brother." That's all.

ZAKHAR: But can't you understand that to preach socialism in the form it is presented here would be impossible anywhere else? It simply couldn't happen!

PAULINA: Everyone should be interested in politics, but what has socialism to do with politics? That's what Zakhar says, and he's right.

YAKOV (*sullenly*): What kind of socialist is old man Levshin? He's simply delirious from overwork ... from sheer exhaustion.

ZAKHAR: They're all delirious.

PAULINA: You must have some pity, gentlemen. We have gone through so much!

ZAKHAR: Do you think I don't mind having my house turned into a law court? It's all the fault of Nikolai Vassilievich, but you can't argue with him after such a drama.

CLEOPATRA (*entering quickly*): Have you heard? The murderer has been found.... They're bringing him here.

YAKOV (*mumbling*): Oh, for goodness' sake....

TATYANA: Who is it?

CLEOPATRA: Some young boy ... and I'm glad.... Perhaps that doesn't sound very humane, but I'm glad. And if he's just a boy, I'd have them give him a good thrashing every day until the trial.... Where is Nikolai Vassilievich? ... Have you seen him? (*Goes to door left, where she is met by the General.*)

GENERAL (*sullenly*): Here you are, standing around like a bunch of wet hens.

ZAKHAR: It's very unpleasant, uncle....

GENERAL: The gendarmes? Yes, that Captain's a nervy chap. I'd like to play a trick on him.... Are they spending the night here?

PAULINA: I don't think so.... Why should they?

GENERAL: Too bad! If they stayed, I'd see that he got a pail of cold water dumped over him when he crawled into bed. That's the way I had faint-hearted cadets treated in my corps. Nothing funnier than to see somebody all wet and naked hopping around and shouting.

CLEOPATRA (*standing in the doorway*): Heaven only knows why you should say such a thing, General. The Captain is a very respectable person and extremely energetic. As soon as he arrived he began rounding up the offenders. That should be appreciated.

GENERAL: H'm.... For her, any man with big moustachios is respectable. But people should know their place. That's the thing. That's the secret of respectability. (*Goes to door left.*) Hey, Kon!

PAULINA (*quietly*): You'd think she ran everything around here. Just see how she behaves! So rude and impolite!

ZAKHAR: If only they'd hurry and get it over with! How I long for peace and quiet!

NADYA (*running in*): Aunt Tanya, that Lieutenant is simply stupid! I think he beats his soldiers ... the way he goes around yelling and making such awful faces.... They certainly ought to allow those who have been arrested to see their wives, uncle.... Five of those men are married.... You go out and tell that gendarme ... he's the one in charge.

ZAKHAR: But you see, Nadya....

NADYA: I see that you're not moving.... Go on. Go out and tell him.... They're crying.... Go on, I tell you.

ZAKHAR (*leaving*): I'm afraid it won't do any good....

PAULINA: You're always upsetting everybody, Nadya.

NADYA: It's you that's always upsetting everybody.

PAULINA: Us? Just think what....

NADYA (*agitated*): All of us—you and me and uncle.... It's us who keep upsetting people. We don't do anything, but it's because of us that the soldiers and the gendarmes have come and all this business has started. And those people have been arrested, and the women are crying ... all because of us!

TATYANA: Come here, Nadya.

NADYA (*going up to her*): Well, here I am.... What do you want?

TATYANA: Sit down and calm yourself.... You don't understand anything and there's nothing you can do....

NADYA: You see, you don't even have anything to say. I don't want to calm down. I don't want to.

PAULINA: Your poor mother was right when she said you were a difficult child.

NADYA: Yes, she was right.... She earned the bread she ate, but you—what do you do? Whose bread do you eat?

PAULINA: There she goes again! I must ask you to change your tone, Nadezhda. How dare you shout at your elders?

NADYA: You're not my elders. What kind of elders are you? ... You're simply old, that's all.

PAULINA: Tanya, it's all your influence, and you ought to tell her that she's just a stupid little girl....

TATYANA: Do you hear? You're a stupid little girl.... (*Pats her on the shoulder.*)

NADYA: And there's nothing else you can say? Nothing! You can't even defend yourself.... Such people! You really are good for nothing, not even here in your own home. Simply good for nothing.

PAULINA (*severely*): Do you understand what you're saying?

NADYA: All these people have come here—gendarmes, soldiers, fools with long moustaches and all they do is give orders, drink tea, bang their swords, clink their spurs, go around laughing ... and grabbing people up, shouting at them, threatening them, making the women cry.... And you? What good are you here? They've shoved you off in the corner....

PAULINA: Can't you understand that you're talking nonsense? These people have come to protect us.

NADYA (*bitterly*): Oh, Aunt Paulina! Soldiers can't protect anybody from stupidity!

PAULINA (*indignant*): Wha-at?

NADYA (*stretching out her arms*): Don't be angry. That refers to everybody. (*Paulina quickly goes out.*) Oh dear, she's run away. She'll tell uncle that I'm rude and unmanageable and uncle will read me such a long lecture that even the flies will drop dead of boredom.

TATYANA (*thoughtfully*): How you are ever going to live in this world I can't imagine!

NADYA (*gesturing widely with her arms*): Not like this! I wouldn't live like this for anything! I don't know what I am going to do ... but I won't do anything the way you do it. Just now I passed the porch with that officer, and there was Grekov watching us, smoking, and his eyes were laughing. And yet he knows that they are sending him to jail. Don't you see? Those who live the way they want to live aren't afraid of anything. They're always cheerful. I'm ashamed to look at Levshin and Grekov.... I don't know the others, but those two ... I'll never forget them. Oh, here comes that idiot with the moustache.... O-o-o-oh!

BOBOYEDOV (*entering*): How terrifying! Who is it you're trying to scare?

NADYA: I'm afraid of you.... Will you let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV: No, I won't. I'm—a villain!

NADYA: Naturally, once you're a gendarme. Why don't you want to let the women go to their husbands?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*): For the present that is impossible. Later, when the men are led away, I shall allow them to say good-bye.

NADYA: But why is it impossible? It all depends upon you, doesn't it?

BOBOYEDOV: Upon me ... that is, upon the law.

NADYA: Oh, what has the law to do with it? Let them go, I beg you to.

BOBOYEDOV: What do you mean—what has the law to do with it? You too are defying the law? Now, now!

NADYA: Don't talk to me like that. I'm not a child.

BOBOYEDOV: I don't believe it. Only children and revolutionaries defy the law.

NADYA: Then I'm a revolutionary.

BOBOYEDOV (*laughing*): Oho! So it's up to me to put you in jail ... arrest you and put you in jail!

NADYA (*unhappily*): Don't make a joke of it. Let them go.

BOBOYEDOV: I cannot. It's the law.

NADYA: The crazy law.

BOBOYEDOV (*seriously*): H'm ... You shouldn't say that. If, as you claim, you are not a child, you must realize that laws are made by those in power, and without them there could be no state.

NADYA (*hotly*): Laws, power, the state.... But for goodness' sake, weren't all these things created for the sake of the people?

BOBOYEDOV: H'm ... of course. That is, first of all for the sake of order.

NADYA: Then none of them are any good, if they only make people cry. We don't need your power and the state if they make people cry! The state!... How stupid! What do I want with it? (*Goes to the door.*) The state! Why do people rave about things they don't know anything about?

(*Exit.* BOBOYEDOV *is somewhat confounded.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*to Tatyana*): A most unusual young lady. But with dangerous tendencies in her thinking.... Her uncle, it seems, is a man of liberal views. Am I correct?

TATYANA: You should know better than I. I don't know what is meant by liberal views.

BOBOYEDOV: What do you mean? Everybody knows that. Contempt for those in power—that's what liberalism is.... But the fact is, I have seen you in Voronezh, Madame Lugovoi. Yes indeed, I was enchanted by your extraordinary acting. Simply superb! You may even have noticed me—I always sat alongside of the Vice-Governor. At that time I was an Adjutant in the local administration!

TATYANA: No, I don't remember.... Perhaps. There are gendarmes in every city, I believe.

BOBOYEDOV: Oh, yes indeed. In every city without exception! And let me tell you that it's us, the officials, who are the true lovers of art. Well, maybe the merchants too. Take, for example, contributions to buying a gift for a favourite actress on the occasion of her benefit performance ... you'll find the names of all the officers from the gendarmerie on every list. That is, so to say, a tradition with us. May I ask where you intend to act during the coming season?

TATYANA: I haven't yet decided.... Naturally in a city where there are sure to be true lovers of art. That, I think, is unavoidable.

BOBOYEDOV (*missing the point*): Oh, yes indeed. You'll find them in every city. After all, people are becoming more cultivated.

KVACH (*from the porch*): Your Excellency! Here they come with that fellow—the one who did the shooting! Where shall they bring him?

BOBOYEDOV: In here.... Bring them all in here. Call the prosecutor. (*To Tatyana.*) I beg your pardon, but I must tend to business for a little while.

TATYANA: Are you going to examine them?

BOBOYEDOV (*politely*): Just a wee bit. Quite superficially—only to make their acquaintance.... A sort of roll-call, so to speak.

TATYANA: May I be present?

BOBOYEDOV: H'm.... In general, that isn't usual ... in political cases. But since this is a criminal case, and we are not on our own premises, and I should like to afford you this pleasure....

TATYANA: No one will see me.... I shall watch from over here.

BOBOYEDOV: Excellent! I am happy to be able to repay you in some measure for the delight your acting has afforded me. I must just go and fetch certain papers.

(*He goes out. From the porch enter two middle-aged workers leading* RYABTZOV *by the arm. Alongside of them walks* KON, *stealing glances into the prisoner's face. They are followed by* LEVSHIN, YAGODIN, GREKOV, *and several other workers. Gendarmes.*)

RYABTZOV (*angrily*): What did you tie my hands for? Untie them! Come on!

LEVSHIN: Unite his hands, fellows.... Why should you offend him?

YAGODIN: He won't run away.

ONE OF THE WORKERS: We're supposed to. The law demands that we tie his hands.

RYABTZOV: I won't have it! Untie them!

ANOTHER WORKER (*to Kvach*): May we, sir? The fellow is quiet enough.... We can't make out how he could have been the one....

KVACH: All right. Go ahead and untie them.

KON (*suddenly*): You've got the wrong fellow! ... This one was on the river when the shooting took place.... I saw him and so did the General! (*To Ryabtzov.*) Speak up, you fool. Go ahead and tell them it wasn't you.... What are you silent about?

RYABTZOV (*firmly*): It was so me!

LEVSHIN: I guess he knows best, soldier....

RYABTZOV: It was me.

KON (*shouting*): You're lying! Troublemaker! (*Enter Boboyedov and Nikolai Skrobotov.*) When that happened you were rowing on the river and singing.... Can you deny it?

RYABTZOV (*calmly*): That was later.

BOBOYEDOV: This one?

KVACH: Yes, Your Honour.

KON: No, not him.

BOBOYEDOV: What? Kvach, take out the old man. How did that old man get in here?

KVACH: He's attendant to the General, Your Honour.

NIKOLAI (*scrutinizing Ryabtzov*): Just a minute, Bogdan Denissovich.... Leave him alone, Kvach.

KON: Keep your hands off. I'm a soldier myself.

BOBOYEDOV: Enough, Kvach!

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtzov*): Are you the one who killed my brother?

RYABTZOV: Yes I am.

NIKOLAI: Why did you do it?

RYABTZOV: He treated us bad.

NIKOLAI: What's your name?

RYABTZOV: Pavel Ryabtzov.

NIKOLAI: I see. . . . What is it you were saying, Kon?

KON (*greatly disturbed*): He didn't kill him! He was on the river when that happened! . . . I'm ready to swear to it. The General and I both saw him. . . . The General even said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we could upset his boat and give him a ducking?" . . . That's what he said. Do you hear me, you whipper-snapper? What is it you're up to?

NIKOLAI: Why are you so sure that he was on the river just at the time of the murder, Kon?

KON: It's a good hour's walk from the factory to the place where he was.

RYABTZOV: I ran.

KON: He was rowing a boat and singing. You don't sing when you've just killed a man.

NIKOLAI (*to Ryabtzov*): Do you realize that the law is very severe towards anyone giving false evidence and attempting to shield a criminal?. . . Do you realize that?

RYABTZOV: I don't care.

NIKOLAI: Very well. So you are the one who killed the director?

RYABTZOV: Yes, I am.

BOBOYEDOV: What a little brute! . . .

KON: He's lying!

LEVSHIN: You don't belong here, soldier!

NIKOLAI: What's that?

LEVSHIN: I say he doesn't belong here and keeps interfering. . . .

NIKOLAI: What makes you think *you* belong here? Perhaps you're implicated in the murder?

LEVSHIN (*laughs*): Me? Once I killed a rabbit with a stick and couldn't get over it for a week.

NIKOLAI: Then keep your mouth shut. (*To Ryabtzov.*) Where's the revolver you used?

RYABTZOV: I don't know.

NIKOLAI: What kind was it? Describe it.

RYABTZOV (*uneasy*): What kind? ... The usual kind.

KON (*rejoicing*): The son of a gun! He never saw a revolver!

NIKOLAI: How big was it? (*Indicating a half a yard with his hands.*) About this long?

RYABTZOV: Yes ... oh no, less.

NIKOLAI: Bogdan Denissovich, just a second.... (*Leads Boboyedov to one side and lowers his voice.*) There's some dirty work here. We'll have to be more severe with this boy. Let's leave him alone until the examining judge arrives.

BOBOYEDOV: But why should we? ... He confesses everything.

NIKOLAI (*impressively*): You and I suspect that this boy is not the murderer, but merely a shield for the true culprit, understand?

(YAKOV, *obviously drunk, carefully enters the door near* TATYANA *and stands silently looking on. From time to time his head drops on his chest as though he were drowsing off, then, jerking it up suddenly, he glances about with a frightened look on his face.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*without understanding*): Ah-h-h.... H'm-m. Yes, yes. Just imagine!

NIKOLAI: It's a frame-up. Collective crime....

BOBOYEDOV: The rascal!

NIKOLAI: Let the Corporal take him out now, and see that he is kept in strict solitary confinement. I'm going out for a minute.... Come along, Kon. Where's the General?

KON: Digging worms....

(*Exit both.*)

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach, take this fellow out, and keep your eye on him! A careful eye, now!

KVACH: Yes, Your Honour. Come on, youngster!

LEVSHIN (*affectionately*): Good-bye, Pashok. Good-bye, friend....

YACODIN (*unhappily*): Good-bye, Pashok....

RYABTZOV: Good-bye.... It's all right....

(*They lead* RYABTZOV *out.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*to Levshin*): Do you know him, old man?

LEVSHIN: Naturally. We work together.

BOBOYEDOV: What's your name?

LEVSHIN: Yefim Yefimov Levshin.

BOBOYEDOV (*quietly to Tatyana*): Just watch developments now. Tell me the truth, Levshin; you're an old, sensible person. You should always tell your superiors the truth....

LEVSHIN: Why should I lie....

BOBOYEDOV (*gloating*): Good. Well, then, tell me honestly, what's hidden behind the icons in your house, eh? The truth, remember!

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV: Is that the truth?

LEVSHIN: Yes, it is.

BOBOYEDOV: Shame on you, Levshin! Here you are, bald and grey, lying like a little boy.... Your superiors even know what you think, let alone what you do. This is bad, Levshin. What are these things I'm holding in my hands?

LEVSHIN: I can't see.... My eyesight's bad.

BOBOYEDOV: I'll tell you what they are. They're books which have been prohibited by our government, books challenging the people to rise up against their tsar. These books were found behind the icons in your house!... Now what have you to say?

LEVSHIN (*calmly*): Nothing.

BOBOYEDOV: Do you admit that they belong to you?

LEVSHIN: Maybe they're mine.... They all look alike.

BOBOYEDOV: Then what do you go lying for, in your old age?

LEVSHIN: I told you the honest truth, Your Honour. You asked me what was behind the icons in my house, and once you asked me such a question, I knew there couldn't be anything there any more because you'd have taken them. So that's what I said—nothing. Why are you trying to make me ashamed? I haven't done anything to be ashamed of.

BOBOYEDOV (*confused*): So that's the way you look at it! But I must ask you to do less talking.... I'm not a person to be fooled with. Who gave you these books?

LEVSHIN: Now why should you want to know that? I can't tell you, because I've already forgotten where I got them.... Don't let it worry you.

BOBOYEDOV: What? ... All right ... very well! Alexei Grekov! Which of you is Grekov?

GREKOV: I am.

BOBOYEDOV: Were you cross-examined in Smolensk in connection with spreading revolutionary propaganda among the craftsmen?

GREKOV: Yes, I was.

BOBOYEDOV: Such a young person, and so talented! A great pleasure to make your acquaintance.... Gendarmes, take these people out on the porch! ... It's getting stuffy in here. Viripayev, Yakov? Good.... Svistov, Andrei? ...

(*The gendarmes lead them all out on the porch and Boboyedov follows with the list in his hand.*)

YAKOV (*softly*): I like those people.

TATYANA: I understand, but why is everything so simple with them? ... Why do they speak so simply and look at you so simply? Why? Have they no passions? No heroism?

YAKOV: They have a calm faith in the justice of their cause.

TATYANA: It can't be that they have no passions—and heroes. But aren't you aware of their contempt for everybody here?

YAKOV: That Yefimich is splendid.... What sad, affectionate, understanding eyes he has! He seems to be saying, "What's the sense in all this? If you'd only get out of the way and give us our freedom! ... If you'd only get out of our way!"

ZAKHAR (*looking in through the door*): The stupidity of these gentlemen who represent the law is simply amazing. A fine trial they've cooked up! ... Nikolai Vassilievich acts like a world conqueror....

YAKOV: The only objection you have, Zakhar, is that all this business is being carried on under your nose.

ZAKHAR: Well, they might have spared me this pleasure! ... Nadya has gone completely mad.... She was insolent to Paulina and me, called Cleopatra a wildcat, and now she is sprawling on the divan in my room crying her eyes out.... Heaven only knows what is going on! ...

YAKOV (*thoughtfully*): And I become more and more disgusted by the very idea of what is happening, Zakhar.

ZAKHAR: I can appreciate that . . . but what should be done? When you're attacked, you have to defend yourself. There's not a corner of the house that seems like home any more . . . as though everything were standing on its head. And the rain makes everything so cold and damp. . . . Such an early autumn!

(*Enter* NIKOLAI *and* CLEOPATRA, *both of them excited.*)

NIKOLAI: Now I am convinced that they bribed him! . . .

CLEOPATRA: They couldn't have thought that up themselves. . . . There's some one with a good head on his shoulders involved here.

NIKOLAI: You suspect—Sintzov?

CLEOPATRA: Who else? Ah, here is Captain Boboyedov. . . .

BOBOYEDOV (*entering from the porch*): At your service!

NIKOLAI: I am thoroughly convinced that that young boy has been bribed. . . . (*Speaks in a whisper.*)

BOBOYEDOV (*softly*): Oh-h! H'm-m-m. . . .

CLEOPATRA (*to Boboyedov*): Do you understand?

BOBOYEDOV: H'm-m-m. . . . Can you imagine! The rascals!

(NIKOLAI *and the* CAPTAIN *disappear through the double doors in animated conversation.* CLEOPATRA *glances about and spies* TATYANA.)

CLEOPATRA: Oh . . . so here you are!

TATYANA: Has anything else happened?

CLEOPATRA: I don't suppose it makes any difference to you. . . . Have you heard about Sintzov?

TATYANA: Yes.

CLEOPATRA (*challengingly*): Yes, he's been arrested. I'm very happy that at last they've weeded out all those bad elements at the factory. . . . Aren't you?

TATYANA: I don't suppose that makes any difference to you. . . .

CLEOPATRA (*with malicious pleasure*): You were in sympathy with that Sintzov. (*Her face softens as she watches Tatyana.*) How strange you look . . . as though you had really suffered. . . . Why?

TATYANA: The weather, I suppose.

CLEOPATRA (*coming up to her*): Listen . . . perhaps this is stupid, but . . . I'm a frank person . . . I've seen a lot of life . . . suffered a

lot, and become embittered. I know that only a woman can be a woman's friend.

TATYANA: You want to ask me something?

CLEOPATRA: Tell you something, not ask you. I like you.... You're always so free in your manners, so well dressed... and you know how to handle men. I envy you... the way you speak and the way you walk.... But sometimes I don't like you ... I even hate you.

TATYANA: That's interesting. Why?

CLEOPATRA (*strangely*): Who are you?

TATYANA: That is....

CLEOPATRA: I can't make out who you are. I like to have a clear picture of people and to know what they want. It seems to me that people who aren't sure of what they want are dangerous. They can't be trusted.

TATYANA: That's a strange thing to say. Why should you impose your views on me?

CLEOPATRA (*impetuously and with alarm*): People should be friendly, and close to each other, so that they could trust each other! Can't you see that they are beginning to kill us off; that they want to rob us? Haven't you noticed the thievish faces on those men who have been arrested? They know what they want, all right! And they live close to each other and trust each other.... I hate them and I'm afraid of them! We live at enmity, not believing in anything, not bound by anything, every man for himself.... We depend on soldiers and gendarmes—they depend only on themselves ... and they're stronger than we are!

TATYANA: I too should like to ask you a frank question.... Were you happy with your husband?

CLEOPATRA: Why do you ask that?

TATYANA: Just out of curiosity.

CLEOPATRA (*after a moment's consideration*): No. He was always too busy with other matters to think of me....

PAULINA (*entering*): Have you heard? It turns out that that clerk Sintzov is a socialist. And Zakhar always told him everything and even wanted to make him assistant bookkeeper! Of course that isn't of any great importance, but just think how complicated life has become. Your born enemies can live right alongside of you without your ever suspecting it!

TATYANA: Thank goodness I'm not rich!

PAULINA: You won't say that when you're old. (*Gently, to Cleopatra.*) Cleopatra Petrovna, they're expecting you for a fitting.... And they've sent the crepe....

CLEOPATRA: All right. Something's wrong—my heart is beating so! I hate being sick!

PAULINA: If you wish, I can give you some drops for your heart. They're very good.

CLEOPATRA (*leaving*): Thank you.

PAULINA: I'll be with you in a second. (*To Tatyana.*) It's necessary to be gentle with her, then she calms down. I'm glad you spoke with her.... And in general, I envy you, Tanya.... You have the knack of always finding a comfortable, neutral position.... I'll go and give her some drops. (*When she is left to herself, Tatyana looks out onto the porch where the soldiers have lined up the men who have been arrested. Yakov looks in through the door.*)

YAKOV (*teasingly*): And all the time I was standing here eavesdropping.

TATYANA (*absent-mindedly*): They say it isn't nice to eavesdrop.

YAKOV: In general, it's unpleasant to overhear what people say... somehow it makes you pity them. Well, anyway, Tanya.... I'm leaving.

TATYANA: Where are you going?

YAKOV: Somewhere ... I don't know yet.... Good-bye.

TATYANA (*affectionately*): Good-bye.... Write to me.

YAKOV: This place has become detestable.

TATYANA: When are you leaving?

YAKOV (*with an odd smile*): Today.... Maybe you'll leave too?

TATYANA: Yes. I intend to leave. Why are you smiling?

YAKOV: For no reason in particular.... We may never see each other again....

TATYANA: Nonsense!

YAKOV: Forgive me. (*Tatyana kisses his forehead. He laughs lightly as he pushes her away.*) You kissed me exactly as though I were a corpse.

(*He goes out slowly. As* TATYANA *watches him, she is impelled to follow him, but she checks the impulse with a weak gesture of her hand.* NADYA *enters carrying an umbrella.*)

NADYA: Come out into the garden with me . . . please do. I have a headache . . . from crying and crying . . . like a fool. If I go by myself I'll start all over again.

TATYANA: Why should you cry, child? There's nothing to cry about.

NADYA: It's all so vexing—I can't make head or tail out of anything. Who's right? Uncle says he is . . . but it doesn't seem so to me. Is he a kind person—uncle? I always thought he was . . . but now I'm not sure. When he talks to me it seems that I myself am mean and stupid. . . . And when I begin to think about him . . . and question myself about everything . . . I don't understand a thing!

TATYANA (*sadly*): If you begin questioning yourself, you'll become a revolutionary . . . and you'll perish in that chaos, my darling. . . .

NADYA: Well I have to become something, don't I? (*Tatyana laughs softly.*) What are you laughing at? Of course I have to. You can't go on living and just blinking your eyes without understanding anything!

TATYANA: I'm laughing because everybody is saying that today—everybody, all of a sudden.

(*They go out, and are met on the way by the* GENERAL *and* LIEUTENANT. *The latter nimbly steps out of their way.*)

GENERAL: Mobilization is essential, Lieutenant! It serves a double purpose. . . . (*To Nadya and Tatyana.*) And where might you be going?

TATYANA: For a walk.

GENERAL: If you meet that clerk . . . what's his name? Lieutenant, what was the name of that fellow you introduced me to a while ago?

LIEUTENANT: Pokati, Your Excellency.

GENERAL (*to Tatyana*): Send him to me. I'll be in the dining room having tea with cognac and the Lieutenant . . . ha-ha-ha! (*Glances about, covering his mouth with his hand.*) Thank you, Lieutenant! You have an excellent memory. That is to be commended. An officer should remember the name and face of every soldier in his regiment. When a soldier is a fresh recruit, he's a sly brute—sly and stupid and lazy. The officer crawls inside of him and rearranges everything so as to make a man out of the brute—a man who is sensible and knows his duty. . . .

(*Enter* ZAKHAR, *looking worried.*)

ZAKHAR: Uncle, have you seen Yakov?

GENERAL: No, I haven't.... Are they serving tea in there?

ZAKHAR: Yes. (*The General and the Lieutenant go out. Kon, angry and dishevelled, enters from the porch.*) Kon, have you seen my brother?

KON (*sullenly*): No. I'm keeping my mouth shut from now on. Even if I see a person, I won't say so.... I'll just shut up.... I've had my say in this world....

PAULINA (*entering*): Those muzhiks have come again to ask you to postpone the payment of their rent.

ZAKHAR: They've chosen a fine time!

PAULINA: They complain that there was a bad harvest and they can't pay.

ZAKHAR: They're always complaining! ... You didn't happen to see Yakov anywhere, did you?

PAULINA: No. What shall I tell them?

ZAKHAR: The muzhiks? Let them go to the office.... I don't intend talking to them.

PAULINA: But there's nobody in the office. You know yourself that everything's in a state of complete anarchy. It's almost dinner-time, but that corporal keeps asking for tea.... The samovar hasn't been removed from the dining room since morning, and in general it's as though we were living in a madhouse!

ZAKHAR: Did you know that Yakov has suddenly taken it into his head to go away somewhere?

PAULINA: Forgive me for saying so, but it's really a good thing he's going.

ZAKHAR: You're right, of course. He's become so irritable of late - always talking nonsense. Just now he kept asking me if it was possible to kill a crow with my revolver. He handed me a couple of insults and finally went out with the revolver.... He's always drunk....

(SINTZOV *enters from the porch accompanied by two gendarmes and* KVACH. PAULINA *looks at him in silence through her lorgnette, then goes out.* ZAKHAR *adjusts his glasses in some embarrassment, and moves away as he speaks.*)

ZAKHAR (*reproachfully*): How unfortunate this all is, M. Sintzov. I am extremely sorry for you.... Extremely.

SINTZOV (*smiling*): I wouldn't let it worry you.... It isn't worth it.

ZAKHAR: Yes it is! People should sympathize with each other.... Even if a person whom I trusted has proved unworthy of my trust, I nevertheless consider it my duty to sympathize with him when he is overtaken by misfortune. That's the way I feel about it. Good-bye, M. Sintzov.

SINTZOV: Good-bye.

ZAKHAR: You have no ... claims against me?

SINTZOV: Absolutely none.

ZAKHAR (*embarrassed*): Excellent. Well, good-bye. Your salary will be forwarded to you.... (*Leaving.*) This is intolerable. My house has been turned into a kind of headquarters for the gendarmes.

(SINTZOV *chuckles.* KVACH *keeps studying him intently, especially his hands. On noticing this,* SINTZOV *also stares him in the eye for a couple of seconds, until* KVACH *smiles.*)

SINTZOV: Well, what's tickling you?

KVACH (*happily*): Nothing.... Nothing at all.

BOBOYEDOV (*entering*): M. Sintzov, you are being sent into town.

KVACH (*happily*): Your Honour, he isn't M. Sintzov at all but somebody quite different....

BOBOYEDOV: What? Be more explicit.

KVACH: I know him. He used to work at the Bryansk factory, and there his name was Maxim Markov! ... We arrested him there two years ago, Your Honour.... He has no nail on his left thumb—I know! He must have escaped from somewhere if he's living under a false passport.

BOBOYEDOV (*pleasantly surprised*): Is that the truth, M. Sintsov?

KVACH: It's the honest truth, Your Honour.

BOBOYEDOV: So you aren't Sintzov at all! Well, well, well!

SINTZOV: Whoever I am, you're obliged to be decent with me.... Don't forget that.

BOBOYEDOV: Oho! It's easy to see that you're not a person to be fooled with! You yourself will escort him, Kvach.... Keep your eyes open!

KVACH: Yes, Your Honour!

BOBOYEDOV (*happily*): Well then, M. Sintzov, or whatever your name is, we're sending you into town. (*To Kvach.*) As soon as you get there, tell the authorities all that you know about him and immediately demand his police record ... on the other hand, I better see to that myself. Just a minute, Kvach.... (*Hurries out.*)

KVACH (*amiably*): So here we meet again!

SINTZOV (*smiling*): Are you glad?

KVACH: Why not? An old acquaintance.

SINTZOV (*with disgust*): I should think you'd have had enough of this by now. Grey hair already, and still you go on tracking people down like a dog.... Don't you find it degrading?

KVACH (*amiably*): Oh, I'm used to it—been at it for twenty-three years. And not at all like a dog! The higher-ups have a good opinion of me—promise me a decoration—the Order of St. Anna. They'll give it to me now, all right.

SINTZOV: Because of me?

KVACH: Sure. Where did you run away from?

SINTZOV: You'll find out in due time.

KVACH: Sure we'll find out. Remember that dark-haired fellow in glasses at the Bryansk factory? He was a teacher, I think—Savitsky. We arrested him again too ... not long ago. But he died in jail ... very sick, he was. After all, there aren't many of you.

SINTZOV (*thoughtfully*): There will be lots of us ... just wait a bit.

KVACH: Oho! That's fine. The more politicals, the better for us!

SINTZOV: More awards?

(BOBOYEDOV, *the* GENERAL, *the* LIEUTENANT, CLEOPATRA *and* NIKOLAI *appear in the doorway.*)

NIKOLAI (*looking at Sintzov*): I had a feeling that it would turn out like this. (*Disappears.*)

GENERAL: A fine chap he turned out to be!

CLEOPATRA: Now it's clear who was the instigator.

SINTZOV (*ironically*): Listen, Captain, can't you see that you're acting very stupidly?

BOBOYEDOV: Don't ... don't try to teach me!

SINTZOV (*stubbornly*): Yes I will! Put an end to this crazy show!

GENERAL: Just listen to him!

BOBOYEDOV (*shouting*): Kvach! Take him away!

KVACH: Yes, Your Honour. (*Leads Sintzov away.*)

GENERAL: Must be a real tiger, eh? Does he roar, eh?

CLEOPATRA: I'm certain that he started everything.

BOBOYEDOV: That's probable ... highly probable.

LIEUTENANT: Going to take him to court?

BOBOYEDOV (*smiling*): We gobble them up without any sauce ... just as good without it.

GENERAL: Very witty. Like an oyster ... smack!

BOBOYEDOV: Ah-h! Well, Your Excellency, we'll make quick work of dividing up the game now, and relieving you of all this nuisance. Nikolai Vassilievich! Where are you? (*Everyone disappears through the doors. The Police Officer enters from the porch.*)

POLICE OFFICER (*to Kon*): Will the examination be held in here?

KON (*sullenly*): I don't know.... I don't know anything.

POLICE OFFICER: A table, papers ... apparently in here. (*Addressing someone out on the porch.*) Bring them all in here! (*To Kon.*) The deceased made a mistake. He said it was a redhead who shot him, but it turns out he was a brunette.

KON (*muttering*): Even the living make mistakes....

(*Again they bring in the men who have been arrested.*)

POLICE OFFICER: Line them up over there. You stand at the end, old man. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you old devil?

GREKOV: Why use such language?

LEVSHIN: Drop it. Alyosha: It doesn't matter.

POLICE OFFICER (*threateningly*): Now then, none of your gab!

LEVSHIN: That's his job—to insult people.

(NIKOLAI *and* BOBOYEDOV *enter and sit down behind the table. The* GENERAL *takes his place in an armchair in the corner with the* LIEUTENANT *standing behind him. In the doorway stand* CLEOPATRA *and* PAULINA *who are later joined by* TATYANA *and* NADYA. ZAKHAR *looks with dissatisfaction over their shoulders. From somewhere or other appears* POLOGI, *who hitches in cautiously, bowing to those sitting at the table and finally halting in confusion in the centre of the room. The* GENERAL *beckons to him. He goes over on tiptoe, and stands by the* GENERAL'S *armchair. They bring in* RYABTZOV.)

NIKOLAI: We shall begin. Pavel Ryabtzov. . . .

RYABTZOV: Well?

BOBOYEDOV: Not "well," you fool, but "Yes. Your Honour?"

NIKOLAI: So you insist that it was you who killed the director?

RYABTZOV (*annoyed*): I've already told you so. . . . What else do you want?

NIKOLAI: Do you know Alexei Grekov?

RYABTZOV: Who's he?

NIKOLAI: The chap standing next to you.

RYABTZOV: He works at our place.

NIKOLAI: So you are acquainted with him?

RYABTZOV: We're all acquainted.

NIKOLAI: Naturally. But have you visited him in his home, and spent your free time with him? . . . In other words, do you know him well? Are you his friend?

RYABTZOV: I spend my free time with all of them, and we're all friends. . . .

NIKOLAI: Really? I'm afraid you're not telling the truth. M. Pologi, be so good as to tell us—just what is the relationship between Ryabtzov and Grekov?

POLOGI: A relationship of close friendship. . . . There are two groups represented here. The younger one is headed by Grekov, a young man who is most insolent in his attitude toward people incomparably his superiors. The elder group is headed by Yefim Levshin . . . a person of fantastic speech and foxy manners.

NADYA: The wretch!

(POLOGI *looks around at her, and then turns enquiringly to* NIKOLAI. NIKOLAI *also glances at* NADYA.)

NIKOLAI: Well, go on.

POLOGI (*sighing*): They are linked by M. Sintzov, who is on good terms with all of them. This individual does not resemble the average person with a normal mind. He peruses all kinds of books and has his own views on everything. In his apartment, which I might add is just across the hall from mine and consists of three rooms. . . .

NIKOLAI: You may omit the details.

POLOGI: I beg your pardon, but truth requires completeness of form. All types of people visit his apartment, including a gentleman who happens to be present here—one Grekov.

NIKOLAI: Grekov, is that true?

GREKOV: Don't ask me any questions, I refuse to answer them.

NIKOLAI: To no good purpose....

NADYA (*loudly*): Good for you!

CLEOPATRA: What tomfoolery is this!

ZAKHAR: Nadya, my dear....

BOBOYEDOV: Sh-h-h!

(*Confusion out on the porch.*)

NIKOLAI: I see no reason why we should tolerate the presence of those who do not belong here....

GENERAL: H'm-m. Just what do you mean by those who do not belong here?

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach, go see what all that noise is about.

KVACH: Someone is trying to force the door, Your Honour. Swearing and trying to force the door, Your Honour.

NIKOLAI: What does he want? Who is he?

BOBOYEDOV: Find out!

POLOGI: Is it your desire that I go on, or shall I discontinue my testimony?

NADYA: Loathesome creature!

NIKOLAI: Discontinue.... I must ask those who do not belong here to leave!

GENERAL: Allow me—just how am I to take that?

NADYA (*shouting energetically*): You are the ones who don't belong here! Not me, but you! You don't belong anywhere!... This is my house! I have a right to demand that you get out....

ZAKHAR (*to Nadya in exasperation*): Leave at once, do you hear me?... At once!

NADYA: Do you mean it?... All right. That means—I really don't belong here. I'll go away, but first let me tell you....

PAULINA: Take her in hand, or she'll say something dreadful!

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*): Tell the gendarmes to close the doors.

NADYA: You have no conscience . . . no heart! You're all miserable and contemptible. . . .

KVACH (*entering joyfully*): Your Honour, we've unearthed another one!

BOBOYEDOV: What?

KVACH: Another murderer has given himself up!

(AKIMOV, *a young chap with reddish hair and a long moustache, walks unhurriedly over to the table.*)

NIKOLAI (*involuntarily starting up*): What do you want?

AKIMOV: I'm the one who killed the director.

NIKOLAI: You!

AKIMOV: Yes, me.

CLEOPATRA (*quietly*): You wretch! . . . So you've got a conscience! . . .

PAULINA: Good heavens! What horrible people!

TATYANA (*calmly*): These people will win out.

AKIMOV (*sullenly*): Well, here I am. Are you happy?

(*General embarrassment.* NIKOLAI *quickly whispers something to* BOBOYEDOV, *who smiles in confusion. Those who have been arrested stand silent and motionless. From the door* NADYA *stands looking at* AKIMOV *and crying.* PAULINA *and* ZAKHAR *whisper together. The quiet voice of* TATYANA *is distinctly heard in the silence.*)

TATYANA (*to Nadya*): Don't cry; these people will win out in the end. . . .

NIKOLAI: Well, M. Ryabtzov! How do you take this?

RYABTZOV (*embarrassed*): I don't . . . I didn't. . . .

AKIMOV: Shut up, Pasha. Keep your mouth shut.

LEVSHIN (*happily*): Ah, brothers! These are real people for you!

NIKOLAI (*striking the table with his fist*): Silence!

AKIMOV (*calmly*): Stop shouting. We don't shout.

NADYA (*loudly, to Akimov*): Listen, do you think you're the one who killed him? *They're* the ones who kill everybody. . . . They kill life itself with their greed and cowardice! . . . (*Addressing everybody.*) It's you, you who are the criminals!

LEVSHIN (*warmly*): You're right, miss. It's not the one who strikes the blow who does the killing, but the one who causes the hatred! ... You're quite right, my dear!... (*General noise and confusion.*) But it's too bad you did this, Akimov....

BOBOYEDOV: Silence!

NADYA (*to Akimov*): Why did you do it? Why?

LEVSHIN: Don't shout, Your Honour. I'm older than you are.

AKIMOV (*to Nadya*): You can't understand any of this. You'd do well to clear out of here.

CLEOPATRA: And what a saint that wretched old man pretended to be!

BOBOYEDOV: Kvach!

LEVSHIN: Well, what are you waiting for, Akimov? Speak up. Tell them that he stuck a pistol in your chest, and only then....

BOBOYEDOV (*to Nikolai*): Do you hear what he's teaching them, the old liar?

LEVSHIN: I am *not* a liar!...

NIKOLAI: Well, how do you feel now, Ryabtzov?

RYABTZOV: I don't....

LEVSHIN: Shut up! You keep your mouth shut. They're sly. They can use words better than we can....

NIKOLAI (*to Boboyedov*): Throw him out!

LEVSHIN: Oh, no you don't! There's no throwing us out! But don't worry, somebody'll get thrown out all right! We've been kept in the dark—without any rights—long enough. Now we've caught fire ourselves, and none of your threats can put us out. You'll never put us out! Never!

(CURTAIN)

YEGOR BULYCHOV AND OTHERS

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

41—830

CHARACTERS

YEGOR BULYCHOV

XENIYA, *his wife*

VARVARA, *his daugter by Xeniya*

ALEXANDRA, *his illegitimate daughter*

MELANIYA, *an abbess, his wife's sister*

ZVONTZOV, *Varvara's husband*

TYATIN, *Zvontzov's cousin*

MOKEI BASHKIN

VASSILI DOSTIGAYEV

ELIZAVETA, *Dostigayev's wife*

ANTONINA, ALEXEI } *Dostigayev's children by his first wife*

PAVLIN, *a priest*

A DOCTOR

A TRUMPETÈR

ZOBUNOVA, *a sorceress*

PROPOTTEI, *a half-wit*

GLAPHIRA, *a housemaid*

TAISSYA, *Melaniya's servant, a novice*

MOKROUSSOV, *a policeman*

YAKOV LAPTEV, *Bulychov's godson*

DONAT, *a forester*

Act I

(The dining room of a rich merchant's house. The furniture is heavy and cumbersome. Beside a broad couch upholstered in leather, a staircase leads up to the second floor. In the corner on the right is a large bay window opening on to the garden. It is a bright wintry day. XENIYA *is seated at the table washing some cups and saucers.* GLAPHIRA *is at the bay window, arranging flowers.* ALEXANDRA [SHURA *for short*] *comes in. She is in a dressing gown, her stockingless feet thrust into slippers. Her hair is uncombed, and is red, like* YEGOR BULYCHOV'S)

XENIYA: Oh, Shura, you do sleep....

SHURA: Stop hissing at me, it won't help. Glasha—some coffee! Where's the newspaper?

GLAPHIRA: I've taken it up to Varvara Yegorovna.

SHURA: Bring it down, then. The devils, they order only one paper for the whole house.

XENIYA: Who're you calling devils?

SHURA: Is father at home?

XENIYA: No, he's gone to visit the wounded. Who are the devils—the Zvontzovs?

SHURA: Yes. (*At the telephone.*) 17-63.

XENIYA: Now, I'll tell the Zvontzovs what names you call them!

SHURA (*over the telephone*): Call Tonya to the 'phone!

XENIYA: What will you come to, I wonder?

SHURA: Is that you, Antonina? Shall we go skiing? No? Why? You've got to go to the theatre? Say you can't go! Oh, you—illegitimate widow, you!—Well, all right, then.

XENIYA: How can you call the girl a widow?

SHURA: Isn't her fiancé dead?

XENIYA: Still, she's a girl.

SHURA: How do you know?

XENIYA: Oh, you shameless creature!

GLAPHIRA (*serving coffee*): Varvara Yegorovna will bring the paper down herself.

XENIYA: You know too much for your age. Take care—the less you know, the better you'll sleep. At your age I didn't know anything.

SHURA: As much as you do now....

XENIYA: Oh, you!

SHURA: Here comes sister, marching solemnly down. *Bonjour, madame! Comment ça va?*

VARVARA: It's eleven o'clock and you're still not dressed and your hair's not done....

SHURA: Nagging again!

VARVARA: You're taking ever more brazen advantage of the fact that father spoils you ... and that he's sick....

SHURA: Going to keep this up for long?

XENIYA: What does she care about her father's health?

VARVARA: I'll have to tell him about your behaviour....

SHURA: Thanks in advance. Finished?

VARVARA: You're a fool!

SHURA: Don't you believe it. It's not me that's the fool.

VARVARA: You carroty-haired idiot!

SHURA: Varvara Yegorovna, you're simply wasting your breath.

XENIYA: No use trying to teach her!

SHURA: You're getting bad-tempered too.

VARVARA: Oh, all right, all right, my dear! Mother, let's go to the kitchen, the cook is going into tantrums....

XENIYA: He's not quite himself, his son's been killed.

VARVARA: Well, that's no reason for him to go into tantrums. There are so many people being killed these days....

(*They go out.*)

SHURA: Why, she'd raise the devil if her lovely Andryusha were to be bumped off!

GLAPHIRA: What's the sense in teasing 'em the way you do? Drink your coffee quick. I've got to tidy up here. (*Goes out, carrying the samovar.*)

(SHURA *sits leaning back in the chair, with her eyes closed and her hands clasped at the back of her tousled red head.*)

ZVONTZOV (*comes downstairs softly in his slippers, steals up unnoticed and embraces her from behind*): What were you dreaming of, ginger?

SHURA (*without opening her eyes or stirring*): Don't touch me.

ZVONTZOV: Why not? You like it, don't you? Say yes. You like it?

SHURA: No.

ZVONTZOV: Why don't you?

SHURA: Drop it. You're only pretending. You don't like me.

ZVONTZOV: But you want me to like you, don't you?

(VARVARA *appears on the stairs.*)

SHURA: If Varvara finds out....

ZVONTZOV: Ssch! (*Moves away and speaks in a didactic tone.*) M—yes—you ought to take yourself in hand. You must study.

VARVARA: She prefers to be impertinent and blow soap bubbles with Antonina.

SHURA: Well, why shouldn't I? I like blowing bubbles. You don't grudge the soap, do you?

VARVARA: I'm sorry for you, that's all. I really don't know how you're going to live. You were practically expelled from high school.

SHURA: It's not true.

VARVARA: Your girl-friend is half-crazy.

ZVONTZOV: She wants to study music.

VARVARA: Who?

ZVONTZOV: Shura.

SHURA: It's not true. I don't want to study music at all.

VARVARA: Where did you get that notion?

ZVONTZOV: Didn't you tell me, Shura, that you wanted to?

SHURA (*going out*): No. I never said such a thing.

ZVONTZOV: H'm ... strange. I couldn't have made it up myself. Varya, you're too cross with her....

VARVARA: And you're too amiable.

ZVONTZOV: What do you mean by "too amiable?" You know what my plan is.

VARVARA: I don't mind the plan, but it seems to me you're a little too amiable.

ZVONTZOV: What silly things get into your head....

VARVARA: Silly, are they?

ZVONTZOV: Well, can't you see it yourself: is this the moment for jealous scenes—in these grave times?

VARVARA: Why did you come downstairs?

ZVONTZOV: I? Here... there's an advertisement in the paper. And the forester's come, he says the peasants have rounded up a bear.

VARVARA: Donat is in the kitchen. What's the advertisement about?

ZVONTZOV: This is the limit! How can you speak to me like this? What am I—a baby? Damn it all....

VARVARA: Now, don't get excited! I believe father's come home. And look what a sight you are!

(ZVONTZOV *hurries upstairs.* VARVARA *goes out to meet her father.* SHURA *runs in to telephone. She now wears a warm green woollen sweater and cap.* BULYCHOV, *coming in, intercepts her and presses her to him in silence.* FATHER PAVLIN, *wearing a mauve cassock, follows* BULYCHOV *into the room.*)

BULYCHOV (*sits down at the table with his arm around Shura's waist. She strokes his coppery hair, which is going grey*): So many people maimed and broken, it's a terrible sight....

FATHER PAVLIN: How are you, Shura—blooming, I see? Excuse me for not greeting you as I came in....

SHURA: I should have done that, Father Pavlin, but father got hold of me and hugged me like a bear....

BULYCHOV: Stop! Shurka, listen! What will those people do now? We had plenty of useless folk, as it was, before the war. We shouldn't have got mixed up in this war....

FATHER PAVLIN (*with a sigh*): Reasons of high policy....

BULYCHOV: The policy ended pretty badly when we fought the Japanese, too, and we disgraced ourselves before the whole world.

FATHER PAVLIN: But then, war does not merely cause havoc, it also enriches a man—both in experience and in....

BULYCHOV: Some fight, while others loot....

FATHER PAVLIN: Besides nothing in the world happens without God's will—and of what significance are our murmurings?

BULYCHOV: Now, look here, Pavlin Savelyev, stop this preaching.... Shurka, were you going—skiing?

SHURA: Yes, I'm waiting for Antonina.

BULYCHOV: All right! ... If you're still here—I'll call you in about five minutes. (*Shura runs out.*)

FATHER PAVLIN: How the maiden has grown....

BULYCHOV: Yes, she's all right bodily, pretty nimble, but her face is a bit of a failure. Her mother was ugly. As clever as the devil, but ugly.

FATHER PAVLIN: Alexandra Yegorovna's face is ... er ... original ... and ... not without its charm. Where was her mother from?

BULYCHOV: She was a Siberian. You talk about high policy ... the will of God ... and all the rest of it. Well, and what about the Duma? Where does that come from?

FATHER PAVLIN: The Duma is ... well, it's as you might say ... the self-diminution of authority.... Many people even regard it as a fatal mistake, but it is not seemly for a servant of the Holy Church to judge of such matters. Inasmuch as it is encumbent on the clergy of our day to kindle the spirit of fortitude ... and enhance love for the throne and the fatherland....

BULYCHOV: You've kindled the spirit and put your foot in it!

FATHER PAVLIN: As you are aware, I have persuaded the elder of the temple of God wherein I serve to enlarge the choir, and I have also had a talk with General Bettling about a donation towards a bell for the new church being built to the glory of your patron saint, the Blessed Yegor....

BULYCHOV: He gave you nothing towards the bell, I suppose?

FATHER PAVLIN: No, he refused and even made a disagreeable joke: "I can't stand brass," he said, "even in the regimental band." Now how would it be if you subscribed something towards the bell, in view of your ill-health?

BULYCHOV (*rising*): Illness is not cured by bell ringing.

FATHER PAVLIN: Who can tell? The causes of illness are not known to science. In some sanatoria abroad cures are effected by music, so I've heard. And we have a fireman—he ministers to the sick by playing the trumpet....

BULYCHOV (*chuckling*): What kind of trumpet?

FATHER PAVLIN: A brass one. Quite a large one, they say.

BULYCHOV: Well, of course, if it's a large one.... Does it cure people?

FATHER PAVLIN: They say it does. Everything's possible, my dear Yegor Vassilievich! Everything's possible! We dwell among mysteries, in the murk of countless, inscrutable mysteries. We believe we see light, and this same light proceeds from our reason, but only to our physical sight is it light, our spirit may, perhaps, be even darkened by our reason, if not entirely extinguished.

BULYCHOV (*sighing*): Aye, what a lot of words you know....

FATHER PAVLIN (*with increasing animation*): Take, for instance, the blessed Prokopii; in what joy liveth this man, whom the ignorant call a witling.

BULYCHOV: Ah, at it again— preaching! Good-bye, then. I'm tired.

FATHER PAVLIN: My sincerest wishes for your good health. I'll pray to God for you.... (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV (*feeling his right side, goes over to the couch, grumbling*): The boar ... fattened on the blood and body of Christ.... Glaphira! Heh!

(*Enter* VARVARA.)

VARVARA: What is it?

BULYCHOV: Nothing I was just calling Glaphira. Oh, my, don't you look smart! Where are you going?

VARVARA: To a benefit for the convalescent soldiers.

BULYCHOV: And specs on your nose too? I don't believe your eyes need them, you only wear them to be fashionable.

VARVARA: You ought to talk to Alexandra, father, her behaviour is abominable. She's becoming really unbearable.

(*Exit* VARVARA.)

BULYCHOV: You're a fine lot, all of you! Get along! (*Mutters to himself.*) Unbearable. Wait till I get better, I'll show you what's bearable!

(*Enter* GLAPHIRA.)

GLAPHIRA: Did you call me?

BULYCHOV: Yes. Ah, Glakha, what a beauty you are! Fit! As sound as a bell! And Varvara—she's a proper scarecrow!

GLAPHIRA (*glancing up at the stairs*): Good for her she is. If she'd been good-looking, you'd have dragged her into your bed, too.

BULYCHOV: What? My own daughter? Think what you're saying, fool!

GLAPHIRA: I know what I'm talking about! You go squeezing Shura as if she were a stranger—like a soldier!

BULYCHOV (*dumbfounded*): Have you gone plumb crazy, Glaphira! You're not jealous of my daughter, are you? Don't you dare to think of Shurka like that. Like a soldier . . . like a stranger! Have you ever been through a soldier's hands yourself? Eh?

GLAPHIRA: This isn't the place . . . nor the time, for that kind of talk. What did you call me for?

BULYCHOV: Send Donat here. Wait!—Give me your hand. You do love me though, don't you? Ailing and all as I am?

GLAPHIRA (*flinging her arms around his neck*): Oh, you're breaking my heart. . . . Don't be ill any more! Don't be ill. (*Tears herself away and runs out. Bulychov smiles, though his brows are knit in a frown. He licks his lips, then shakes his head. Lies down.*)

(*Enter* DONAT.)

DONAT: I hope I see you in good health, Yegor Vassilievich!

BULYCHOV: Thanks. What's the news?

DONAT: Good news: We've rounded up a bear.

BULYCHOV (*sighing*): Ah, that . . . that's a matter of envy, not of joy. A bear's no entertainment for me nowadays. Are they cutting down the trees?

DONAT: Not too lively. Can't get enough hands.

(XENIYA *comes in. She is smartly dressed and her fingers are loaded with rings*).

BULYCHOV: What is it?

XENIYA: Nothing. You oughtn't to let yourself be tempted by this bear business, Yegor, you're in no fit state for hunting.

BULYCHOV: Wait a minute! There are no hands, you say?

DONAT: Only old men and little kids left. They gave the prince fifty war prisoners, but they're no good at lumbering.

BULYCHOV: I bet they're good with the women, though.

DONAT: Yes, there's a bit of that going on.

BULYCHOV: Yes. . . . Women are hungry nowadays.

XENIYA: I hear there's a lot of immorality in the villages now....

DONAT: Why call it immorality, Axiniya Yakovlevna? The menfolks have been killed off, children have got to be born, haven't they? It works out that those who did the killing are to do the begetting.—

BULYCHOV: Looks like it.

XENIYA: Pooh, what sort of children would the women have by war prisoners? Although, of course, if the man's a strong, healthy fellow....

BULYCHOV: And the woman's a fool—he won't want any children from her.

XENIYA: Our women are clever. The trouble is all the strong men have been driven to the war, and there's no one left at home but ... deputies!

BULYCHOV: A terrible lot of folks done for....

XENIYA: Well, the rest will be better off, then.

BULYCHOV: Just the sort of silly thing you would say!

DONAT: Tsars never have their fill of people.

BULYCHOV: What's that you said?

DONAT: Tsars, I say, never have their fill of people. We've got nothing to feed our own with, and still we want to conquer strange folks.

BULYCHOV: That's true. That's quite true!

DONAT: There's no other way to explain the sense of this hero fighting. That's why we're getting it in the neck now, for being greedy.

BULYCHOV: You're quite right, Donat! There's Yakov now—my godson—he says the same: greed is at the bottom of all the evil. How's he getting on there?

DONAT: He's all right. He's a clever chap.

XENIYA: Umph! Clever indeed! He's just impudent, that's what he is, not clever at all.

DONAT: It's his cleverness makes him impudent, Axiniya Yakovlevna. He's got hold of a dozen deserters or so, Yegor Vassilievich, and set them to work, and they're working like good 'uns. Otherwise they'd still be thieving.

BULYCHOV: Well—that's ... but if Mokroussov hears of this—he'll kick up a row.

DONAT: Mokroussov knows. He's even pleased. It's all the easier for him.

BULYCHOV: Well, now, be careful....

(ZVONTZOV *comes downstairs.*)

DONAT: Well, as I was saying—what about the bear....

BULYCHOV: The bear—that's your good luck.

ZVONTZOV: Perhaps you'd let me offer the bear to General Bettling? You know, he's useful to....

BULYCHOV: Yes, I know, I know. Offer it to him. Or to the bishop, if you like!

XENIYA (*laughing*): I'd love to see the bishop shooting a bear.

BULYCHOV: Well, I'm tired. Good-day, Donat. Things are going badly somehow, aren't they, old chap? Since I've been ill things have gone wrong. (*Donat bows in silence and goes out.*) Axiniya, send Shurka to me. Now, Andrei, what is it you want? Out with it, man!

ZVONTZOV: It's about Laptev.

BULYCHOV: Well?

ZVONTZOV: I've heard he's got himself mixed up with ... political suspects, and at Kopossovo Fair he made speeches to the peasants against the government.

BULYCHOV: Nonsense! What fairs could there be nowadays? What peasants? And why are you always complaining about Yakov?

ZVONTZOV: He's a sort of member of the family, after all.

(SHURA *runs in.*)

BULYCHOV: Sort of!... You don't consider him much one of the family. That's why he doesn't even come to dinner on Sundays.... Go along now, Andrei, you'll tell me about it afterwards.

(*Exit* ZVONTZOV.)

SHURA: Been telling tales on Yakov?

BULYCHOV: That's not your business. Sit down here. Everybody's complaining about you, too.

SHURA: Who's everybody?

BULYCHOV: Axiniya, Varvara....

SHURA: Oh, they aren't everybody, by any means.

BULYCHOV: I'm talking seriously, Shura girl.

SHURA: No, you don't talk like that when you're serious.

BULYCHOV: You're very impudent to them all, and you don't do anything....

SHURA: Well, if I don't do anything, where does my impudence come in?

BULYCHOV: You won't listen to anyone.

SHURA: I listen to everyone. I'm sick of listening to them, Ginger.

BULYCHOV: Ginger yourself—you're a lot more ginger than I am. And you don't talk properly to me, either! I ought to give you a good talking-to, but I don't want to.

SHURA: If you don't want to, then you needn't.

BULYCHOV: I like that! If you don't want to—you needn't, indeed! Life would be quite easy that way, wouldn't it? But it can't be done!

SHURA: Who prevents you?

BULYCHOV: Everybody ... everybody prevents me. But that's more than you can understand.

SHURA: Well, teach me, so's I will understand, so's they won't prevent me....

BULYCHOV: That's not a thing that can be taught! Is that you again, Axiniya? What are you wandering up and down for? What are you looking for?

XENIYA: The doctor's come. And Bashkin's waiting to see you. 'Lexandra, pull your skirt down. What a way to sit!

BULYCHOV (*getting up*): All right, call the doctor in. Lying down is bad for me, it's painful. A-aye! ... Run off, Shurka! See you don't sprain your ankle.

DOCTOR: Good morning! How are you feeling today?

BULYCHOV: Pretty low. You're making rather a poor job of curing me, Nifont Grigorievich.

DOCTOR: Well, well, now, come along and let's have a look at you.

BULYCHOV (*going out with him*): Give me the vilest, the most expensive medicines you know of; I've simply got to get better. If you cure me, I'll build a hospital and make you head of it and then you can do what you like.... (*They go out.*)

(*Enter* BASHKIN.)

XENIYA: What did the doctor say?

BASHKIN: It's cancer, he says, cancer of the liver.

XENIYA: God save us! The things they think of!

BASHKIN: A dangerous disease, he says.

XENIYA: Oh, he would, of course. Everyone thinks his job's the hardest.

BASHKIN: Fancy falling sick at such a time! Money's dropping around all over the place like out of a torn pocket: yesterday's beggars are making thousands, and here he's....

XENIYA: That's just it! Many people are getting so rich, so rich....

BASHKIN: Dostigayev's grown that stout he goes about all unbuttoned, and all he does is talk in thousands. Yegor Vassilievich, if you ask me—it looks as if his mind's a bit clouded. The other day he says: "I've been living," he says, "and missing the real thing all the time." What could he have meant?

XENIYA: Oh, and I've noticed, too, the things he says—they're no good.

BASHKIN: And he started life on your and your sister's money. He ought to have increased it.

XENIYA: I made a mistake, Mokei. I've known it for a long time—yes, I made a mistake. I married an assistant in my father's shop—but not the right one. If I'd only married you—how peaceably we'd have lived together. While he.... My goodness! The things he's up to! The things I've had to stand from him! Brought a bastard daughter into the house and burdened me with her. The son-in-law he picked out—the worst of a bad lot, I'm afraid, Mokei Petroyich, that they'll get round me somehow and cheat me, this son-in-law and Varvara, turn me out a beggar....

BASHKIN: I shouldn't be surprised. It's wartime. In war there's neither shame nor pity.

XENIYA: You—you're an old servant of ours, my father put you on your feet—think about me....

BASHKIN: That's just what I am doing.... (*Zvontzov appears.*)

ZVONTZOV: Has the doctor gone?

XENIYA: No, he's still in there.

ZVONTZOV: Well, Mokei Petrovich, how about the cloth?

BASHKIN: Bettling won't have it.

ZVONTZOV: How much must we give him to bring him round?

BASHKIN: About five thousand or so—no less.

XENIYA: The robber! An old man, too.

ZVONTZOV: And it's to be handed to him through Jeanne?

BASHKIN: Yes—in the usual way.

XENIYA: Five thousand rubles! What for? Eh?

ZVONTZOV: Money's cheap these days.

XENIYA: Yes, when it's in someone else's pocket....

ZVONTZOV: Does my father-in-law agree?

BASHKIN: That's what I've come to find out—whether he agrees or not....

DOCTOR (*coming out at that moment and taking Zvontzov by the arm*): Well, it's like this....

XENIYA: Oh, do tell us something to cheer us up....

DOCTOR: The patient should lie down as much as possible. All business, excitement and annoyance are very bad for him. He must have complete peace and quiet. Then ... (*whispers something to Zvontzov.*)

XENIYA: Why can't you tell me? I'm his wife.

DOCTOR: There are some things one doesn't speak of to ladies. (*Whispers to Zvontzov again.*) We'll arrange it for this evening, then.

XENIYA: What's that you're arranging?

DOCTOR: A consultation with several other doctors.

XENIYA: Goo-ood heavens!

DOCTOR: Oh, it's nothing very terrible. Well, good-bye. (*Goes out.*)

XENIYA: What a stern fellow.... Five rubles for five minutes he takes. Sixty rubles an hour—how do you like that!

ZVONTZOV: He says an operation will be necessary.

XENIYA: What, cut him up? Nothing of the kind! I won't allow anyone to cut him up....

ZVONTZOV: Look here—this is downright ignorance. Surgery and science....

XENIYA: Pooh! I don't care a rap for your science. So there! You're very uncivil to me, too.

ZVONTZOV: I'm not talking about the decencies now—I'm talking about the dark depths of ignorance you....

XENIYA: You're none too bright yourself!

(ZVONTZOV *throws up his arms in exasperation and walks away. At this moment* GLAPHIRA *dashes through the room.*)

XENIYA: Where are you going?

GLAPHIRA: The bedroom bell!

(XENIYA *follows her into* BULYCHOV'S *room.*)

ZVONTZOV: My father-in-law's been taken ill at the wrong time.

BASHKIN: Yes. Makes things awkward. At a time like this—clever folks are making money out of the air, like conjurers.

ZVONTZOV: M—yes. And then there's a revolution coming.

BASHKIN: That I don't approve of. There was one in nineteen hundred and five. A senseless business.

ZVONTZOV: In nineteen hundred and five there was a mutiny—not a revolution. At that time the peasants and the workers were all at home, now—they're all at the front. This time the revolution will be against the officials, the governors and the ministers.

BASHKIN: If that's the case, then God bless it! The officials are worse than ticks: once they get into your skin there's no tearing 'em off....

ZVONTZOV: The tsar's obviously unfit to rule.

BASHKIN: There's talk about that among the tradespeople too. They say some muzhik or other has got round the tsarina.

(VARVARA *appears on the staircase and pauses to listen.*)

ZVONTZOV: Yes, Grigori Rasputin.

BASHKIN: Somehow I don't believe in sorcery.

ZVONTZOV: Don't you believe in lovers, either?

BASHKIN: Sounds like a yarn to me. She's got hundreds of generals to choose from.

VARVARA: What rubbish you're talking!

BASHKIN: Everybody's saying that, Varvara Yegorovna. For my part, I think we can't do without a tsar.

ZVONTZOV: We need a tsar—not in Petrograd—but in our heads. (*To Varvara.*) Is the show over?

VARVARA: No, it's been put off. An inspector came; a new batch of wounded, about five hundred, are expected tonight, and there isn't room enough for them.

(GLAPHIRA *comes in.*)

GLAPHIRA: Mokei Petrovich, he's asking for you.

(BASHKIN *leaves his cap on the table and goes out.*)

VARVARA: Why do you confide in him? You know he spies on us for mother. He's been wearing that same cap for the last ten years, the miser! It's all greasy and filthy. I can't understand why you should take up with this crook and....

ZVONTZOV: Oh, stop it! I want to borrow money from him to bribe Bettling....

VARVARA: But I told you that Liza Dostigayeva would arrange all this through Jeanne! And it'll be cheaper....

ZVONTZOV: Lizaveta will cheat you.

XENIYA (*from her husband's bedroom*): Do come and get him to lie down! He keeps walking about and swearing at Mokei.... Goodness me!

ZVONTZOV: You go, Varya....

BULYCHOV (*in a dressing gown and felt slippers*): Well, and what else? This unfortunate war?

BASHKIN (*following him*): Who'd dispute it?

BULYCHOV: Unfortunate for whom?

BASHKIN: For us.

BULYCHOV: Whom do you mean by—us? You say people are making millions out of this war? Well?

BASHKIN: For the people, I mean....

BULYCHOV: The people's a muzhik, it's all the same to him whether he lives or dies. That's what your truth sounds like!

XENIYA: Now don't get excited. It's bad for you....

BASHKIN: What do you mean? What sort of truth do you call that?

BULYCHOV: The real, genuine thing. That's the truth. I say straight: my business is to make money, and the muzhik's business—to grow grain, and buy goods. And what other truth is there besides this, I'd like to know?

BASHKIN: That's so, of course, but still....

BULYCHOV: Well, what do you mean "but still?" What are you thinking about when you're robbing me?

BASHKIN: How can you insult me like that?

XENIYA: Varya, what are you thinking about? Talk to him, won't you? He's been told he must lie down.

BULYCHOV: Is it about the people you're thinking?

BASHKIN: Insulting me right in front of everybody! I rob you, indeed! That's got to be proved.

BULYCHOV: There's nothing to prove. Everybody knows that thieving is a lawful business. And there's no reason to insult you. Insult won't make you any better, it'll only make you worse. And it isn't you who robs, it's the ruble. The ruble is the greatest thief of all....

BASHKIN: No one but Yakov Laptev could say that.

BULYCHOV: That's just what he does say. Well, you can go now. Bettling's not to be given any bribes. We've given him enough, enough for his coffin and his winding sheet, the old devil. (*Bashkin exits.*) What you all doing here? What are you waiting for?

VARVARA: We're not waiting for anything....

BULYCHOV: H'mph—not waiting for anything ... want me to believe you. Well, if you're not, then go about your business. Haven't you got anything to do? Axiniya, tell someone to air that room of mine. It's stuffy—smells of sour medicine. Yes, and tell Glaphira to fetch me some cranberry kvass.

XENIYA: You mustn't have kvass.

BULYCHOV: Be off, be off with you! I know myself what I may and what I mayn't have.

XENIYA (*going out*): If you only did know.... (*Everyone leaves the room.*)

BULYCHOV (*walks round the table, holding on to it with one hand. Looks in the mirror and says, almost at the top of his voice*): Things are in a bad way with you, Yegor. And that mug doesn't look like yours, either!

GLAPHIRA (*enters with a glass of milk on a tray*): Here's some milk for you.

BULYCHOV: Give it to the cat. And bring me some kvass—cranberry kvass.

GLAPHIRA: They told me not to give you kvass.

BULYCHOV: Never mind what they told you—you bring it. Stop! What do you think—will I die?

GLAPHIRA: It can't be.

BULYCHOV: Why?

GLAPHIRA: I don't believe it!

BULYCHOV: You don't believe it? Well, my dear, things look bad for me! Very bad. I know.

GLAPHIRA: I don't believe it.

BULYCHOV: Stubborn, that's what you are. Well fetch me that kvass. And I'll have a drop of orange vodka.... It does me good. (*Goes over to the sideboard.*) They've locked it, damn them. The dirty swine. Keeping an eye on me. You'd think I was a prisoner.

(CURTAIN.)

Act II

(*The* BULYCHOVS' *drawing room.* ZVONTZOV *and* TYATIN *are sitting in a corner at a small round table, on which stands a bottle of wine.*)

ZVONTZOV (*lighting a cigarette*): Get me?

TYATIN: Honestly, Andrei, I don't like it....

ZVONTZOV: But—you like the money, don't you?

TYATIN: I'm sorry to say I do.

ZVONTZOV: Who are you sorry for?

TYATIN: Myself, of course.

ZVONTZOV: Not worth it.

TYATIN: Still, you know, I'm the only friend I have.

ZVONTZOV: You'd better philosophize less and think more.

TYATIN: I am thinking. She's a spoilt young thing; it'll be no easy job with her.

ZVONTZOV: You can get a divorce.

TYATIN: And she'll keep the money....

ZVONTZOV: We'll manage so that you'll get it. As to Shura. I'll tame her.

TYATIN: Honestly I....

ZVONTZOV: I'll manage things so that they'll be in a hurry to marry her off and her dowry will be increased.

TYATIN: That's a good idea! And what'll the dowry be?

ZVONTZOV: Fifty.

TYATIN: Thousand?

ZVONTZOV: No. Buttons.

TYATIN: Really?

ZVONTZOV: But you'll write me an I.O.U. for ten.

TYATIN: Thousand?

ZVONTZOV: No. Rubles! Ass!

TYATIN: That's rather a l-lot....

ZVONTZOV: Let's drop the subject, then.

TYATIN: Are you—serious about all this?

ZVONTZOV: It's only fools who aren't serious about money.

TYATIN (*chuckling*): Damn it all.... It's a splendid idea.

(DOSTIGAYEV *comes in.*)

ZVONTZOV: I'm glad you seem to be able to grasp something. A proletarian intellectual like you, can't in wild days like these....

TYATIN: Yes, oh yes, of course. Well, I must be off for the court now.

DOSTIGAYEV: What are you upset about, Stepasha?

ZVONTZOV: We ... we've been talking about Rasputin.

DOSTIGAYEV: What a fate, eh? A common, Siberian muzhik—and he played draughts with bishops and ministers. Hundreds of thousands of rubles must have passed through his hands. Never took a bribe of less than ten thousand! I've had it from reliable sources—he never took a kopeck less! What are you drinking? Burgundy? That's a heavy wine, it ought only be drunk at dinnertime, you ignorant people.

ZVONTZOV: How did you find my father-in-law?

DOSTIGAYEV: Found him quite easily, he wasn't hiding. You might bring me a glass, Stepasha. (*Tyatin goes out unhurriedly.*) Bulychov—let me tell you frankly—looks bad. His condition's dangerous....

ZVONTZOV: It seems to me, too, that....

DOSTIGAYEV: Yes. Yes. Exactly. And then he's afraid to die, and so he's absolutely certain to. You must keep that in mind. Days like these you can't lounge about—gaping, with your hands in your pockets. It won't do. The pigs are rooting up the state fence everywhere, and that there'll be a revolution is clear even to the local governor.

TYATIN (*re-enters with a glass*): Yegor Vassilievich is up and in the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV (*taking the glass*): Thanks, Stepasha. He's come out, you say? Well, let's go there, then.

ZVONTZOV: The manufacturers, it seems, know what they have to do....

(VARVARA *and* ELIZAVETA *come in.*)

DOSTIGAYEV: You mean those in Moscow? You bet they do

ELIZAVETA: They sit here drinking like a bunch of sparrows while Bulychov there, is bellowing something awful!

DOSTIGAYEV: Why is America prospering? Because there the bosses themselves are in power....

VARVARA: Bettling's Jeanne believes quite seriously that in America cooks go shopping in motor cars.

DOSTIGAYEV: Quite possible. Although it's all lies, likely enough. And you, Varyusha, you're about with the military as usual, I suppose? Want to get a job under a colonel?

VARVARA: Ugh, that's an old one! What are you dreaming about, Tyatin?

TYATIN: Oh—er—nothing much....

ELIZAVETA (*before the mirror*): Yesterday Jeanne told me a marvellous joke! It was a peach!

DOSTIGAYEV: Well, come on, tell it to us.

ELIZAVETA: Not in front of men, I couldn't.

DOSTIGAYEV: Must be some peach!

(VARVARA *whispers something to* ELIZAVETA.)

ELIZAVETA: Well, husband! Are you going to sit here till you've finished the bottle?

DOSTIGAYEV: I'm not in anybody's way, am I?

ELIZAVETA (*to Tyatin*): Styopochka, you know what the psalm says: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners!"

TYATIN: Yes, I seem to remember something like that....

ELIZAVETA (*taking him by the arm*): Well, all these here are ungodly sinners and you're a gentle youth made for moonlight, love, and all the rest of it, aren't you? (*Leads him away.*)

DOSTIGAYEV: What a chatterbox the woman is!

VARVARA: Vassili Yefimovich, mother and Bashkin have sent for Aunt Melaniya.

DOSTIGAYEV: The Abbess? O—o—oh, that's big game! She'll be against the firm of Dostigayev and Zvontzov, she will. She's out for a signboard: "Xeniya Bulychova and Dostigayev."

ZVONTZOV: She may withdraw her share from the business.

DOSTIGAYEV: How much of Melaniya's money is in it? Seventy thousand?

ZVONTZOV: Ninety.

DOSTIGAYEV: A tidy bit! Is that her own money or the convent's?

VARVARA: How would you ever find that out?

DOSTIGAYEV: Oh, you can find out, all right. You can find out anything. The Germans, for instance, they know not only the number of soldiers we've got at the front, but even the number of lice on each of them.

VARVARA: Couldn't you say something serious for a change? ...

DOSTIGAYEV: My dear Varyusha, you can't carry on trade or war unless you know how to count the money in your pocket. We can find out about Melaniya's money this way: there's a certain lady called Secletia Poluboyarinova who helps the Right Reverend Nikander to keep his nightly vigils, and Nikander knows everything there is to know about everybody's money. Besides, there's a man on the diocesan council—we'll keep him in mind, too. You must talk to this, Poluboyarinova, Varyusha, and if it turns out that the cash belongs to the convent—well, you can guess yourself!—Where's my lovely spouse slipped off to?

GLAPHIRA: (*at the door*): They sent me to ask you into the dining room.

DOSTIGAYEV: We'll be there in a second. Come along, all of you.

VARVARA (*pretending the hem of her dress has caught in the armchair*): Andrei, help me to get this out! ... Do you believe him?

ZVONTZOV: Do I look like a fool?

VARVARA: Oh, what a crook he is. It wasn't bad, my plan about auntie, was it? And what about Tyatin?

ZVONTZOV: I'll coax him into it yet.

VARVARA: You'll have to hurry up with that. ...

ZVONTZOV: Why?

VARVARA: Why, because after the funeral, you have to wait a long time. And father has a weak heart as well. ... Besides, I have other reasons.

(*They go out, encountering* GLAPHIRA *on the way. She follows them with a look of hatred and begins to clear away the glasses, etc., from the small table,* LAPTEV *enters.*)

GLAPHIRA: There was a rumour yesterday that you were arrested.

LAPTEV: You don't say so? Can't be true, surely.

GLAPHIRA: Always joking, you are!

LAPTEV: Nothing to eat—but plenty of fun.

GLAPHIRA: You'll break your neck yet over that fun of yours.

LAPTEV: A good joke earns a good word, its a bad one that lands you in a mess.

GLAPHIRA: Carry on. Do you know who's in there with Shura? Tonka Dostigayeva.

LAPTEV: Br-r—not for me!

GLAPHIRA: Shall I call Shura out?

LAPTEV: That's a good idea. And how's Bulychov?

GLAPHIRA (*indignantly*): He's not Bulychov to you? He's your godfather.

LAPTEV: Don't get mad, Aunt Glasha.

GLAPHIRA: He's in a bad way.

LAPTEV: In a bad way, is he? Wait a minute! My pals are starving, Aunt Glasha, couldn't you get them a couple of poods of flour or maybe a sack?

GLAPHIRA: D'you expect me to steal from my employers for your sake?

LAPTEV: As if it's the first time! Anyhow, you've sinned before—and the sins are on my head. The lads are badly in want of something to eat, honest to God. Considering the work you've done in the house, you've a right to more in it than your employers.

GLAPHIRA: Yes, I've heard these tales of yours before. Tomorrow morning they are going to send off the flour to Donat: you can take a sack from him. (*Goes out.*)

LAPTEV: Thanks awfully! (*Sits down on the couch, yawns till the tears come into his eyes, wipes them away and looks about him.*)

XENIYA (*comes in, grumbling*): Running away like devils from incense....

LAPTEV: How do you do?

XENIYA: Oh! What are you sitting here for?

LAPTEV: Had I better walk about, then?

XENIYA: Either he's nowhere to be found or he pops up suddenly! Like a game of hide-and-seek. There's your godfather lying sick and you don't care a pin....

LAPTEV: What should I do? Get sick myself?

XENIYA: You've all gone crazy, and you're trying to drive other people crazy. Really, one can't understand a thing! Did you hear they're wanting to put the tsar in a cage like Emelyan Pugachev? Now, you're a scholar—tell me, are they lying or what?

LAPTEV: Everything's possible, everything.

GLAPHIRA (*calling from off stage*): Axiniya Yakovlevna, just a minute.

XENIYA: Well, what now? I haven't a minute's peace.... God help me! (*Goes out.*)

SHURA (*running in*): Hello!

LAPTEV: Shura, dear, I'm off to Moscow and haven't a kopeck—help me out!

SHURA: I've got thirty rubles....

LAPTEV: Couldn't make it fifty, could you?

SHURA: I'll get it for you.

LAPTEV: For the night train? Could you manage it?

SHURA: Yes. Listen: is there going to be a revolution?

LAPTEV: Why, it's started already! Don't you read the papers?

SHURA: I can't understand them.

LAPTEV: Well, ask Tyatin.

SHURA: Yakov, tell me honestly, what sort of a fellow is Tyatin?

LAPTEV: I like that! You've been seeing him every day for nearly six months.

SHURA: Is he honest?

LAPTEV: Yes ... he's all right.

SHURA: You don't seem very sure about it?

LAPTEV: Oh, he's a wishy-washy sort of chap. Kind of foggy. Nursing a wrong, or something.

SHURA: Who wronged him?

LAPTEV: He was kicked out of the university in his second year. Works for his cousin as a clerk, and his cousin....

SHURA: Is Zvontzov a crook?

LAPTEV: He's a liberal, a Constitutional-Democrat, and they're pretty crooked, on the whole. You hand the money to Glaphira and she'll pass it on to me.

SHURA: Do Glaphira and Tyatin help you?

LAPTEV: In what way?

SHURA: Don't pretend, Yashka! You understand quite well. I want to help, too, do you hear!

LAPTEV (*astonished*): What's the matter with you, girl? You're acting as if you woke up only today.

SHURA (*indignantly*): Don't dare to make fun of me! You're a fool!

LAPTEV: Maybe I am a fool, but still I'd like to understand....

SHURA: Varvara's coming!

LAPTEV: Oh, I don't want to see her.

SHURA: Come on, then, quick!

LAPTEV (*putting his arms round her shoulders*): What's got into you anyhow? (*They go out, shutting the door behind them.*)

VARVARA (*hearing the click of the lock, goes up to it, and turns the handle*): Is that you, Glaphira? (*A pause.*) Is anyone there? Very mysterious.... (*Goes away quickly.*)

(SHURA *appears, dragging* DONAT *by the hand.*)

DONAT: Where are you dragging me, Shura?

SHURA: Stop! Now tell me: is father respected in town?

DONAT: Rich folks are always respected. What a wild one you are!

SHURA: Do they respect him or are they just afraid of him?

DONAT: If they weren't afraid of him, they wouldn't respect him.

SHURA: And what do they like him for?

DONAT: Like him? I don't know.

SHURA: But do they like him?

DONAT: Him? Well—er—the cabbies seem to like him: he never haggles with 'em, pays whatever fare they ask. And a cabby, of course, he'd tell another fellow, well—and....

SHURA (*stamping her foot*): Are you making fun of me?

DONAT: Why should I? I'm telling you the truth.

SHURA: You've grown very ill-natured. You're quite different from what you used to be.

DONAT: Now how could I grow different! It's a bit late for that.

SHURA: You used to praise father to me.

DONAT: I'm not running him down now either. Every fish has its own kind o' scales.

SHURA: You're all liars.

DONAT (*sighing*): Don't be angry, you can't prove anything by getting into a temper.

(GLAPHIRA *enters.*)

SHURA: Go away! (*Donat exits.*) Listen, Glaphira.... Oh, someone's coming! (*Hides behind the curtain.*)

(ALEXEI DOSTIGAYEV *comes in. He is a foppish young man in riding-breeches, a Swedish tunic with innumerable belts, straps and pockets.*)

ALEXEI: You're looking prettier every day, Glasha.

GLAPHIRA (*sulkily*): Glad to hear it.

ALEXEI: But I'm not glad. (*Blocks Glaphira's way.*) I don't like anything nice unless it's mine.

GLAPHIRA: Let me pass, please.

ALEXEI: By all means. (*Yawns and looks at his watch. Antonina comes in and a little later Tyatin.*)

SHURA (*coming out from behind curtain*): You run after housemaids as well, it seems?

ANTONINA: He doesn't care even if it's a fish.

ALEXEI: Housemaids are no worse than ladies when they're undressed.

ANTONINA: Hear that! He talks now as if he'd been living in a pothouse instead of at the front.

SHURA: Yes. He was just as lazy before, but not so brave with his tongue.

ALEXEI: I'm brave in deeds, too.

ANTONINA: Oh, what a lie! He's a coward, and what a coward! He's simply terrified his stepmother will seduce him.

ALEXEI: What are you making up stories for? Idiot!

ANTONINA: And he's horribly greedy. Do you know, I pay him a ruble twenty kopecks for every day that he doesn't say something nasty to me. And he takes it!

ALEXEI: Tyatin, do you like Antonina?

TYATIN: Yes, very much.

SHURA: And me?

TYATIN: To tell the truth....

SHURA: Yes, of course, the truth!

TYATIN: Well, not much.

SHURA: So? That's the truth, is it?

TYATIN: Yes.

ANTONINA: Don't believe him. he's just echoing somebody else.

ALEXEI: Tyatin, I wish you'd marry Antonina. I'm fed up with her.

ANTONINA: You silly ass. Clear out! You look like a pregnant washerwoman.

ALEXEI (*putting his arm round her waist*): And what an aristocrat you are. *Ne munchez pas les* sunflower seeds, dearest. *C'est mauvais ton.*

ANTONINA: Leave me alone.

ALEXEI: With pleasure! (*He begins to dance with her.*)

SHURA: Perhaps you don't like me at all, Tyatin?

TYATIN: Why do you want to know?

SHURA: I must. It's interesting.

ALEXEI: Why are you beating about the bush, Tyatin! The girl's trying to get you to propose to her. can't you see? All the girls are in a hurry now to become heroes' widows. Good rations, a halo, a pension and what not.

ANTONINA: He believes he's being witty.

ALEXEI: Well, I'll be toddling along now. Tonka, see me to the hall, will you?

ANTONINA: I won't!

ALEXEI: But I want to tell you something. Seriously. come on.

ANTONINA: Something silly, I suppose.

(ALEXEI *and* ANTONINA *go out.*)

SHURA: Tyatin. are you a truthful man?

TYATIN: No.

SHURA: Why?

TYATIN: Doesn't pay.

SHURA: If you say that, you must be truthful. Now tell me, without stopping to think—have they advised you to marry me?

TYATIN (*after a pause, during which he lights a cigarette*): Yes.

SHURA: And you realize that it's bad advice?

TYATIN: I do.

SHURA: *So you.... Well, I never expected this. I thought* you....

TYATIN: You must have thought badly.

SHURA: No, you're ... splendid! But perhaps you're sly, eh? Perhaps you're only pretending to be straightforward so as to make a fool of me?

TYATIN: That's too much for me. You're clever, bad-tempered and wayward—just like your father. Honestly, I'm afraid of you. And then you've got red hair like Yegor Vassilievich. It's like a fireman's torch.

SHURA: Tyatin, you're fine! Or else you're a terribly crafty fellow....

TYATIN: And your face is very striking....

SHURA: That about the face is just trying to soften the blow, isn't it? Oh, you're crafty, after all!

TYATIN: Think what you like. My opinion is that you're bound to commit some crime. While I—I'm accustomed to living with my paws up—you know, like guilty puppies.

SHURA: Guilty of what?

TYATIN: I don't know. Of being puppies and having no teeth to bite with.

ANTONINA (*coming in*): That idiot Alyoshka gave my ear such a painful tweak. And took all my money—like a common crook. You know, he'll drink himself to death—that's certain. We're just a couple of good-for-nothing merchant's children. You find it funny?

SHURA: Tonya—forget everything bad I ever said about him.

ANTONINA: About Tyatin? What did you say about him? I don't remember.

SHURA: Well, that he wanted to marry me....

ANTONINA: What's bad in that?

SHURA: For the sake of my money.

ANTONINA: Oh, yes! That's pretty filthy of you, Tyatin!

SHURA: It's a pity you didn't hear how he answered my questions.

ANTONINA: You're *Warums*? Do you remember Schubert's "*Warum*"?

TYATIN: Is it Schubert?

ANTONINA: *Warum* sounds very much like marabou, that gloomy kind of bird, you know, in Africa.

SHURA: The things you make up!

ANTONINA: I love terrifying things best of all. When one's terrified, one isn't bored. I got to like sitting in the dark and waiting for a huge serpent to crawl up....

TYATIN (*with a chuckle*): The one that was in the Garden of Eden, you mean!

ANTONINA: No, much more horrible.

SHURA: You're very amusing. You always invent something new, while everyone else talks of the same things: the war, Rasputin, the tsarina and the Germans, or war, revolution....

ANTONINA: You'll be an actress or a nun.

SHURA: A nun? What rubbish!

ANTONINA: It must be very difficult to be a nun—you always have the same part to play.

SHURA: I want to be a *cocotte* like Zola's *Nana*.

TYATIN: Goodness! What a thing to say!

SHURA: I want to corrupt people, take revenge.

TYATIN: On whom? What for?

SHURA: For being ginger, for father's being sick.... For everything! Wait till the revolution begins ... I'll show you! You'll see!

ANTONINA: Do you believe there'll be a revolution?

SHURA: Yes, I do! I do!

TYATIN: Yes, there's going to be a revolution.

(CLAPHIRA *enters.*)

CLAPHIRA: Shura, Mother Melaniya's come and Yegor Vassilievich wants to speak to her in here.

SHURA: Ugh—Aunt Melaniya! Come on into my room, children! Tyatin, do you think much of Zvontzov?

TYATIN: He's—my cousin.

SHURA: That's no answer.

TYATIN: It seems to me that relatives think very little of one another on the whole.

SHURA: Now, that's an answer!

ANTONINA: Stop talking about boring things.

SHURA: You're awfully funny, Tyatin.

TYATIN: Well, what can I do about it?

SHURA: And you dress in a funny way, too.

(They go out. GLAPHIRA *opens a door concealed behind a heavy curtain. At the same moment* BULYCHOV *appears in the doorway through which the young people have gone out. The* ABBESS MELANIYA *comes in with slow, majestic steps. She carries a crosier in her hand.* GLAPHIRA *stands with bent head, holding back the curtain.)*

ABBESS MELANIYA: So you're still traipsing about here, you adulteress? They haven't thrown you out yet? Well, they will soon.

BULYCHOV: Then you'll take her into the convent and make a nun of her—she has money.

ABBESS MELANIYA: A—ah, you're—here? Oh, Yegor, what a wreck you look. God have mercy on you!

BULYCHOV: Glakha, shut the door, and tell them not to come barging in here. Sit down, your holiness! What business are we going to talk about?

ABBESS MELANIYA: The doctors haven't helped you much, eh? You see: the Lord stays His hand for a day, for a year, for a generation. . . .

BULYCHOV: We'll talk about the Lord afterwards—let's have business first. I know you've come to talk about your money.

ABBESS MELANIYA: The money isn't mine, it belongs to the nunnery.

BULYCHOV: It's all the same, the nunnery, mummery, robbery. Why does the money worry you? Are you afraid I'll die and it'll get lost?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Lost it can't be, but I don't want it to fall into strange hands.

BULYCHOV: You want to draw it out of the business then? It's all the same to me—take it out if you want it. But mind you—you'll lose by it. Rubles are breeding now like lice on soldiers. And I'm not going to die—I'm not as sick as all that.

ABBESS MELANIYA: You know not the day nor the hour when death shall come! Have you made your will?

BULYCHOV: No!

ABBESS MELANIYA: It's high time! Make it! Supposing the Lord was to call you suddenly?

BULYCHOV: What's He want me for?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Stop this impudence of yours! I don't care to listen to it, as you know—and my holy rank does not....

BULYCHOV: Oh, drop it, Malasha! We know each other inside out. You can take the money if you want to—Bulychov has plenty of it.

ABBESS MELANIYA: I don't want to draw my capital out of the business but I want the bills to me made over to Axiniya's name. That's why I came to you.

BULYCHOV: I see. Well, that's your business. Only, if I should die, Zvontzov will cheat Axiniya. And Varvara will help him do it....

ABBESS MELANIYA: So this is the way you talk? Something new for you. No spite in your tone, either.

BULYCHOV: No, my spite's turned in another direction now. Well, let's talk about God, the Lord, and the soul.

When youth has been spent in plunder and sin,
In old age it behoves one to save one's soul.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Well then, speak.

BULYCHOV: Take yourself now, you serve the Lord day and night, as, for instance, Glaphira serves me....

ABBESS MELANIYA: Don't blaspheme, man! Have you taken leave of your senses? How does Glaphira serve you at night?

BULYCHOV: Shall I tell you?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Don't blaspheme, I'm telling you! Bethink yourself!

BULYCHOV: Don't snarl! I'm talking plain, just human words, not official prayers. You told Glaphira she'd be thrown out soon. You believe then I'm going to die soon. But why should you? Vaska Dostigayev is nine years older than me and a good deal more crooked, but he's healthy and he'll live a long time yet. His wife's a first-rate woman. Of course, I'm a sinner, I've wronged people and—in general—anyway I'm a sinner. But then, we all wrong each other. Life's like that, you can't help it.

ABBESS MELANIYA: It's not before me, not before people, you must repent, but before God! People won't forgive you, but God is merciful. You know yourself how robbers sinned in the old days, but if they rendered unto God what was God's they were saved!...

BULYCHOV: To be sure, if you stole but gave something to the church, then you weren't a thief, but a righteous man.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Yeg-o-o-o-r! If you utter blasphemy, I won't listen! You're not a fool, you must understand—the Devil won't tempt you, if the Lord doesn't allow it.

BULYCHOV: Well, thanks for that.

ABBESS MELANIYA: What's that mean?

BULYCHOV: *You've set my mind at rest. It turns out—the Lord* gives the Devil a free hand to tempt us, and that means the Lord's a partner in sin with the Devil and me....

ABBESS MELANIYA (*rising*): Words like these ... words like these of yours ... if I were to tell the Right Reverend Nikander about them....

BULYCHOV: Why, what's wrong with them?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Heretic! What thoughts come into that unhealthy head of yours! Surely you understand that if God permits the Devil to tempt you—that means God has forsaken you?

BULYCHOV: Forsaken me, has he? But why? Because I've been fond of money and I'm still fond of women, and married that fool sister of yours for her money, and have been your lover! Is that why he's forsaken me? ... You great gaping crow, stands and croaks, and not a scrap of sense in it!

ABBESS MELANIYA (*dumbfounded*): Why, Yegor, have you lost your wits? Lord have mercy....

BULYCHOV: Praying day and night beneath convent bells, and who're you praying to—you haven't the slightest idea!

ABBESS MELANIYA: Yegor! You're heading straight for the bottomless pit! Into the jaws of hell.... In days like these.... Everything's toppling to ruin ... the royal throne is shaken by the powers of evil.... It's the day of Antichrist ... maybe the Day of Judgment is even now drawing nigh....

BULYCHOV: You've just remembered it, have you? The Day of Judgment. The Second Coming of Christ. Aye, you—you crow! Flaps in here and croaks! Now, be off with you, go to your den and make love to your choirgirls! And instead of money, this is all you'll get from me—see! (*Shows her a fico.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA (*stunned, almost drops into the armchair*): Oh, the scoundrel!

BULYCHOV: Glaphira's an adulteress—is she? And you? What are you? Eh?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Liar ... you liar! (*Springs to her feet.*) You swindler! You'll peg out soon! You worm!

BULYCHOV: Be off! Out of sin's way!

ABBESS MELANIYA: Viper ... devil.... (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV (*alone, growls, rubs his right side and shouts*): Glaphira! Heigh!

(XENIYA *enters.*)

XENIYA: What's the matter? Where's Melaniya?

BULYCHOV: Flown away.

XENIYA: You haven't gone and quarrelled with her again?

BULYCHOV: D'you intend to sit here long?

XENIYA: Yegor, give me a chance to say a word. You've stopped talking to me altogether lately, just as if I were a piece of furniture. Well, what are you looking at me like that for?

BULYCHOV: Get on with it, talk away!

XENIYA: What's all this going on in the house? The end of the world or what? That son-in-law of yours has turned his room into a regular bar; people sit around and talk and carry on till all hours. Yesterday they drank off seven bottles of red wine, not to mention the vodka.... Our janitor, Ismail, is complaining that the police give him no peace—asking who comes to our house. And up there they are forever talking about the tsar and his ministers. And every day it's the same—a regular bar. What are you hanging your head for?

BULYCHOV: Carry on, carry on! When I was young I used to like sitting in a bar, while the music played.

XENIYA: What did Malasha come for?

BULYCHOV: You're no good at lying, Axiniya! You're much too stupid for that.

XENIYA: What lies have I told? When?

BULYCHOV: Just this minute. Melaniya came here by arrangement with you to talk about her money.

XENIYA: I never made any arrangement—what are you talking about?

BULYCHOV: Oh—all right. Shut up, then!

(DOSTIGAYEV, ZVONTZOV *and* FATHER PAVLIN *come in, looking excited.*)

DOSTIGAYEV: Yegor, listen to the news Father Pavlin's [illegible] from Moscow....

ZVONTZOV: You ought to go and lie down, Yegor!

BULYCHOV: I'm listening to you, Father Pavlin.

FATHER PAVLIN: I've little enough good news to tell, and in my opinion, the good is pretty bad, too, for so far no one has been able to think of anything better than the way we lived before the war.

DOSTIGAYEV: No, no, I beg to differ. No-o!

(ZVONTZOV *whispers something to his mother-in-law.*)

XENIYA: Crying?

DOSTIGAYEV: Who's crying?

XENIYA: The Abbess.

DOSTIGAYEV: What's wrong with her?

BULYCHOV: Go and see what's frightened her. And you, Father, sit down here and tell us the news.

(*Exit* ZVONTZOV, XENIYA *and* DOSTIGAYEV.)

DOSTIGAYEV (*as he leaves*): I wonder what grief could have made Melaniya cry.

FATHER PAVLIN: Great confusion reigns in Moscow. Even mature minds assert that the tsar must be deposed, on account of his incompetence.

BULYCHOV: He's been good enough for over twenty years.

FATHER PAVLIN: Human powers become exhausted with the passing of time.

BULYCHOV: In 1913, when the Romanovs celebrated their three hundredth year, Nicholas shook hands with me. The whole nation rejoiced at that time. All Kostroma.

FATHER PAVLIN: Yes, it was so. It's a fact ... the people rejoiced.

BULYCHOV: Then what's happened? We've got the Duma too.... No, it's not the tsar—it's something at the very root....

FATHER PAVLIN: That is the root—the autocratic power.

BULYCHOV: Everyone maintaining himself—by his own power.... Yes, but where is it—this power? When it came to the war—there was none of it.

FATHER PAVLIN: The Duma is responsible for the sapping of our power.

ELIZAVETA (*at the door*): Are you confessing him, Father Pavlin?

FATHER PAVLIN: What sort of a question is that?

ELIZAVETA: Where's my husband?

FATHER PAVLIN: He was here.

ELIZAVETA: How severe you are today, Father Pavlin. (*Disappears.*)

BULYCHOV: Father....

FATHER PAVLIN: What were you about to say?

BULYCHOV: We're all fathers. God's a father, the tsar's a father, you're a father, and I'm a father. Yet none of us have any strength, and we all live to die. I'm not talking about myself, I'm talking about the war, about the big death. Like a circus where a wild tiger is let loose on people.

FATHER PAVLIN: Calm yourself, Yegor Vassilievich....

BULYCHOV: What shall I calm myself with? Who'll calm me? How? Well, calm me then ... Father! Show your strength!

FATHER PAVLIN: Read the Holy Scriptures. Read the Old Testament—the Book of Joshua, it's a good thing to remember.... War is lawful....

BULYCHOV: Drop it. What sort of law is that? It's all a yarn. You can't stop the sun's moving. You're lying....

FATHER PAVLIN: To murmur against the Lord is a cardinal sin. We must try to submit humbly and with a meek and penitent heart to the judgment visited upon us for our sinful life.

BULYCHOV: Did you submit when the elder, Alexei Gubin, offended you? No, you brought him up before the court, you asked Zvontzov to be your lawyer, and the bishop took your side, wasn't that so? And I—what court shall I complain to about my disease? And about dying before my time? Will you die in humble submission? With a meek and quiet spirit? Eh? No, you'll roar and groan, too.

FATHER PAVLIN: My calling forbids me to listen to such talk. For such talk....

BULYCHOV: Drop it, Pavlin! You're a man. Your cassock is only your protective colouring—but underneath you're a man the same as I am. By the way, the doctor says your heart's no good, fatty degeneration....

FATHER PAVLIN: What will this talk lead to? Think, and be smitten with fear! It has been established from time immemorial....

BULYCHOV: Established, yes, but not very firmly, it appears.

FATHER PAVLIN: Leo Tolstoy was a heretic, he was as good as banned by the Church because of his irreligion, and he fled from death into the woods, even as a wild beast....

(XENIYA *enters.*)

XENIYA: Yegor Vassilievich, Mokei's here and he says Yakov was arrested by the gendarmes last night, so he wants to know....

BULYCHOV: Well, thanks, Father Pavlin ... for your sermon! I'll trouble you another time, I think. Call Bashkin here, Xeniya. Tell Glaphira she can bring me my gruel. Yes, and the orange vodka.

XENIYA: You're not to have vodka....

BULYCHOV: I can have—everything! Go along with you.

(*Exit* XENIYA *and* FATHER PAVLIN. *Left alone, he glances around, chuckles and mutters.*)

Father ... Pavlin.... Maudlin.... You should have taken to tobacco. Yegor. It's easier when you're wrapped in smoke, things are not so plain....

(BASHKIN *enters.*)

BULYCHOV: Well. Mokei?

BASHKIN: How's your health, Yegor Vassilievich?

BULYCHOV: Getting better all the time. So Yakov's been arrested?

BASHKIN: Yes, last night. What a scandal!

BULYCHOV: Only he?

BASHKIN: They say some watchmaker fellow and Kalmykova, the schoolteacher who used to give Alexandra Yegorovna lessons, and Yerikhonov the stoker, who's known to be a downright rebel. About ten altogether, it's said.

BULYCHOV: And they're all of the "Down with the Tsar" kind?

BASHKIN: There's some for one thing and some for another, some against the tsar some against all the rich and wanting the workers to run the state....

BULYCHOV: Nonsense!

BASHKIN: Of course.

BULYCHOV: They'll sell the state for drink.

BASHKIN: For certain.

BULYCHOV: Yes.... But supposing they don't?

BASHKIN: What else will they do without the bosses?

BULYCHOV: You're right. They'd never be able to get along without you and Vaska Dostigayev.

BASHKIN: You're boss too....

BULYCHOV: Sure! So I am. What is it they sing, you say?

BASHKIN (*sighing*): "We renounce the old world...."

BULYCHOV: And then?

BASHKIN: "Shake its dust from our feet...."

BULYCHOV: Sounds like a prayer....

BASHKIN: What kind of prayer's that? We hate the tsar, they say, and the palace.

BULYCHOV: Aha, is that so! M—yes ... hell's devils! (*Thinks a while.*) Well, and what did you want?

(GLAPHIRA *brings in some gruel and vodka.*)

BASHKIN: Me? Oh, nothing.

BULYCHOV: What did you come for, then?

BASHKIN: To ask whom I should put in Yakov's place.

BULYCHOV: Sergei Potapov.

BASHKIN: He's got the same kind of notions wants neither God nor tsar....

BULYCHOV: Oh, he's like that too?

BASHKIN: Might I suggest—Mokroussov. He's very keen to work for you. He's got an education and knows how to handle things.

GLAPHIRA: Your gruel'll get cold.

BULYCHOV: A policeman? A thief? What's he after?

BASHKIN: It's getting dangerous in the police force, many are leaving it.

BULYCHOV: Is that so? Dangerous, is it? Leaving it like rats.... All right, send Potapov here tomorrow morning. You can go.... Glakha, has the trumpeter come?

GLAPHIRA: He's sitting in the kitchen.

BULYCHOV: When I've had my gruel, you can send him in. Why is the house so still?

GLAPHIRA: They're all upstairs.

BULYCHOV (*taking some vodka*): Well—all right. Why do you look so down-in-the-mouth?

GLAPHIRA: Don't drink, don't do yourself harm, don't be sick! Give it all up and go away from them. They'll eat you alive—like worms—they'll gnaw the life out of you. Let's go away ... to Siberia....

BULYCHOV: Let go ... it hurts....

GLAPHIRA: We'll go to Siberia, I'll work.... Why should you stay here? What for? No one cares for you—they're just waiting for you to die....

BULYCHOV: Stop it, Glakha.... Don't upset me ... I know it all ... I see everything.... I know that you ... you and Shurka ... are all I've got out of life, the rest has got me.... But perhaps I'll get better yet ... well, call the trumpeter in.

GLAPHIRA: Finish your gruel first.

BULYCHOV: Oh, devil take the gruel! Call Shurka in....

(*Left alone, he tosses off glass after glass of vodka greedily. The* TRUMPETER *comes in. He is a comical, gaunt, pitiful figure with a big trumpet in a sack slung across his shoulders.*)

TRUMPETER: I wish Your Honour the best of health.

BULYCHOV (*taken aback*): How do you do. Sit down. (*Shouts.*) Glakha! Shut the door! So that's you....

TRUMPETER: Right, Your Honour.

BULYCHOV: Well, you're not much to look at! Tell us, how do you cure folks?

TRUMPETER: My cure, Your Honour, is quite simple, only people are in the habit of dosing themselves with medicines from the chemist's and they don't believe me, so I always ask to be paid in advance.

BULYCHOV: It's not a bad idea, either. But do you cure people?

TRUMPETER: I've cured hundreds.

BULYCHOV: You don't seem to have got rich on it, somehow.

TRUMPETER: No one gets rich on good deeds.

BULYCHOV: Aha, listen to him, now! What illnesses do you cure?

TRUMPETER: All illnesses come from the same cause—bad air in the belly, so my cure is good for all of 'em....

BULYCHOV (*laughing*): Bravo! Well, now, show us that trumpet of yours....

TRUMPETER: Could you pay a ruble?

BULYCHOV: A ruble? I daresay I'll find one. Glakha, have you got a ruble? Here you are. You're cheap.

TRUMPETER: That's just for the beginning. (*Unties the sack and drags out a brass trumpet. Shura runs in.*)

BULYCHOV: Look at that machine, Shurka—what do you think of this for a healer? Well, give us a blow on it.

(TRUMPETER *clears his throat, blows a blast—but not very loudly, then coughs.*)

BULYCHOV: And is that all?

TRUMPETER: Four times a day for five minutes—and the trick's done.

BULYCHOV: And the patient goes to pieces?—Pops off?

TRUMPETER: Never! I've cured hundreds.

BULYCHOV: Go on! Well, now tell me the truth: what do you consider yourself, a fool or a rogue?

TRUMPETER (*sighing*): So you don't believe in it either, like the rest of 'em.

BULYCHOV (*laughing*): Don't put the trumpet away yet. Tell me straight: are you a fool or a rogue? I'll give you money.

SHURA: Don't offend him, father.

BULYCHOV: I'm not going to offend him, Shurka. What's your name, doctor?

TRUMPETER: Gabriel Uvekov....

BULYCHOV: Gabriel? (*Laughing heartily.*) Oh, but damn it all!... Are you sure it's Gabriel?

TRUMPETER: It's an ordinary name ... never struck anyone as funny before.

BULYCHOV: Well ... what are you: stupid or crooked?

TRUMPETER: Would you give me sixteen rubles?

BULYCHOV: Glakha—bring the money here! It's in the bedroom.... Why, sixteen, Gabriel?

TRUMPETER: I made a mistake! I should have asked for more.

BULYCHOV: So you're stupid?

TRUMPETER: No, I'm no fool.

BULYCHOV: A rogue then?

TRUMPETER: I'm not a rogue either. You know yourself—you can't live without fooling people.

BULYCHOV: That's true! It's not very nice, my lad, but it's true.

SHURA: But isn't it a shame to fool people?

TRUMPETER: Why should I be ashamed, if they believe in it?

BULYCHOV (*excitedly*): And that's right, too! Do you understand, Shurka? He's absolutely right! That priest Pavlin would never say that. He wouldn't dare!

TRUMPETER: You ought to give me a bit extra for telling the truth. And—cross my heart—my trumpet does help some folks.

BULYCHOV: That's right—give him twenty-five rubles, Glakha. Give him more. Give him the whole lot. (*Glaphira gives him the money.*)

TRUMPETER: Much obliged.... Maybe you'd try the trumpet? Devil knows how it does it, but it does it!

BULYCHOV: No, thanks. Eh, Gabriel, Gabriel! (*Laughs.*) Now let's see, show us how it works.... Come on, fire away! Louder!

(TRUMPETER *blows a deafening blast.* GLAPHIRA *looks at* BULYCHOV *in alarm.* SHURA *puts her fingers in her ears and laughs.*)

BULYCHOV: Blow with all your might!

(*The* DOSTIGAYEVS, ZVONTZOVS, BASHKIN *and* XENIYA *rush in.*)

VARVARA: What's all this, father?

XENIYA: Yegor, what are you up to this time?

ZVONTZOV (*to the Trumpeter*): Are you drunk?

BULYCHOV: Don't touch him! Don't dare! That's right, crack their ear-drums, Gabriel! This is Archangel Gabriel trumpeting the end of the world!

XENIYA: A—ah! He's gone crazy!

BASHKIN (*to Zvontzov*): You see for yourself!

SHURA: Father, do you hear? They're saying you've gone crazy! Go away, trumpeter, go away!

BULYCHOV: No, don't go. Blow away, Gabriel, blow! It's the Day of Judgment! The end of the world! Blow your trumpet, blo-o—ow! (*The trumpeting continues as the curtain falls.*)

(CURTAIN.)

Act III

The dining room. Everything in it appears to have been moved out of its place. The table has not been cleared; it is littered with dirty dishes, parcels and bottles. The samovar stands at one end. In a corner of the room lie several portmanteaus. TAISSYA, *a young novice, in a tall, pointed hood, is unpacking one of them.* GLAPHIRA *lingers near her with a tray in her hand. The room is lit by a lamp hanging over the table.)*

GLAPHIRA: Has Mother Melaniya come to stay for long?

TAISSYA: I don't know.

GLAPHIRA: Why didn't she put up at the church hostel?

TAISSYA: I don't know.

GLAPHIRA: How old are you?

TAISSYA: Nineteen.

(ZVONTZOV *appears on the stairs.*)

GLAPHIRA: And you don't know anything? What's the matter with you? Are you a savage, or something?

TAISSYA: We're forbidden to talk to lay people.

ZVONTZOV: Has the Abbess had her tea yet?

GLAPHIRA: No.

ZVONTZOV: Then better warm up the samovar, in case....

(GLAPHIRA *picks up the samovar, and goes out.*)

ZVONTZOV: Did the soldiers frighten you—up at the Abbey?

TAISSYA: Yes.

ZVONTZOV: What did they do that frightened you?

TAISSYA: They killed one of the cows, and threatened to burn down the Abbey. Excuse me. (*She goes out with a pile of linen in her arms.*)

VARVARA (*from the hall*): What mud and slush! Having a chat with the novice?

ZVONTZOV: You know, it's rather awkward having an abbess in our house....

VARVARA: The house isn't ours yet.... What about Tyatin—did he agree?

ZVONTZOV: Tyatin's an ass, or else he's pretending to be honest.

VARVARA: Wait.... That sounds like father calling....

(*Listens at the door of her father's room.*)

ZVONTZOV: Though the doctors say your father's all right in the head, but after that idiotic scene with the trumpet....

VARVARA: He's made worse scenes than that in his time. Alexandra and Tyatin seem to be quite on good terms with each other....

ZVONTZOV: Yes, but I don't see anything good about that. That young sister of yours is a sly thing.... One may expect—well, quite serious trouble from her yet.

VARVARA: It's a pity you didn't think of that when she was flirting with you. You seemed to find it rather pleasant though.

ZVONTZOV: She was only flirting with me to annoy you.

VARVARA: Are you sorry? Here comes Pavlin, poking his nose in again. It's getting to be a habit with him.

ZVONTZOV: We've a surplus of clergy here, in my opinion.

(ELIZAVETA *and* FATHER PAVLIN *come in, arguing. They are followed by* MOKEI BASHKIN.)

FATHER PAVLIN: The papers are lying as usual. Good evening.

ELIZAVETA: I'm telling you, it's not true.

FATHER PAVLIN: It is established beyond doubt: the tsar has abdicated, not of his own free will, but under pressure of violence, having been detained on the road to Petrograd by members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party.... M—yes!

ZVONTZOV: What conclusions do you draw from this?

ELIZAVETA: Father Pavlin is against the revolution and all for going on with the war, and I'm against the war. I want to go to Paris.... Enough of fighting. Don't you agree with me, Varya? You remember what *Henri Quatre* said: Paris is better than war. Yes, I know he didn't say exactly that, but that was his mistake.

FATHER PAVLIN: I don't insist on anything, because everything is unstable.

VARVARA: Peace is what's needed, Father Pavlin—peace! Don't you see how the rabble is behaving?

FATHER PAVLIN: Ah yes, I see! Well, and how's our patient getting on? How is he here? (*Pressing his finger to his brow.*)

ZVONTZOV: The doctors found no symptoms of derangement.

FATHER PAVLIN: Well, it's nice to hear that. Though as a rule the doctors make no mistakes only when it comes to finding their fees.

ELIZAVETA: How malicious of you! Varya, Jeanne's invited us to supper.

BASHKIN: The prisoners have been released and the police are having a bad time of it.

FATHER PAVLIN: Yes, that's so. A most surprising thing. What good do you expect from events, Andrei Petrovich, eh?

ZVONTZOV: The social forces are developing consistently and will soon have their say. By social forces I mean people who have a sound economic. . . .

VARVARA: Listen, Jeanne's invited us. (*Leads him aside and whispers.*)

ZVONTZOV: Look here, this is a bit awkward for me. An abbess on the one hand, and a *cocotte* on the other.

VARVARA: Ssh, will you!

BASHKIN: Andrei Petrovich—Mokroussov's here—you know—the Police Inspector.

ZVONTZOV: Yes? What does he want?

BASHKIN: He's throwing up his job because it's getting too dangerous and he wants to work for us, in the woods.

ZVONTZOV: Will that be quite convenient for us, though?

VARVARA: Wait, Andrei. . . .

BASHKIN: Very convenient. Now Laptev'll begin to turn up his nose at everything and make trouble. Donat—you know yourself—is not a suitable fellow and he's a dissenter too, always mumbling about the law of truth, and what kind of truth could you expect when . . . well, you can see for yourself!

ZVONTZOV: Oh, this is all nonsense. It's truth beginning to triumph that we are witnessing now. . . .

VARVARA: Oh, wait Andrei, can't you?

ZVONTZOV: And justice too.

VARVARA: What is it you want, Mokei?

BASHKIN: I'm for engaging Mokroussov. I suggested it to Yegor Vassilievich.

VARVARA: And what did he say? (*Zvontzov frowns and leaves them.*)

BASHKIN: He didn't say anything definite.

VARVARA: Take on Mokroussov, then.

BASHKIN: Maybe you'd like to have a look at him?

VARVARA: What for?

BASHKIN: Oh, just so's you'd know him. He's—here.

VARVARA: Very well, then.

(BASHKIN *goes into the hall.* VARVARA *writes something in her notebook.* BASHKIN *returns with* MOKROUSSOV. *The latter is a round-faced little man with eyebrows raised in perpetual astonishment and, though he wears a little smile, looks as if he is ready to do some hard swearing. He is in police uniform, with a revolver at his hip. He clicks his heels and draws himself up smartly at attention.*)

MOKROUSSOV: Permit me to present myself—Mokroussov—at your service. Very grateful to have the honour.

VARVARA: Delighted, I'm sure. So you're in uniform? I heard the police were being disarmed.

MOKROUSSOV: Quite true. It's dangerous for us to appear in the streets in our uniforms these days, so I wear an ordinary overcoat, although I'm armed. But just now, in view of the fact that unfounded expectations have been aroused, the mob has quieted down—that's why I'm not wearing my sword.

VARVARA: When do you expect to start working for us?

MOKROUSSOV: I have long been your obedient servant in thought, if not in deed. I'm ready to go to the woods tomorrow if you like. I'm single and....

VARVARA: Do you think it's likely to last long—this rebellion?

MOKROUSSOV: All summer, I should think. Then the rains and frost will set in and it'll be unpleasant to loiter in the streets.

VARVARA (*with a little smile*): Only for the summer? A revolution hardly depends on the weather, does it?

MOKROUSSOV: But—pardon me—of course it does! Winter has a cooling effect.

VARVARA (*still smiling*): You're an optimist.

MOKROUSSOV: The police are optimistic, as a rule.

VARVARA: Oh really?

MOKROUSSOV: Exactly. It's because they're conscious of their strength.

VARVARA: Have you served in the army?

MOKROUSSOV: Yes, I have. In the Buzuluk Reserve Battalion. I was a Sublieutenant.

VARVARA (*holding out her hand*): Well, good-bye, good luck.

MOKROUSSOV (*kissing her hand*): I'm deeply touched.

(*Backs out of the room, clicking his heels.*)

VARVARA (*to Bashkin*): Looks a fool, doesn't he?

BASHKIN: No harm in that. Look at the clever folks—give them the chance and they'll turn the world inside out . . . as they would your pocket.

FATHER PAVLIN (*to Bashkin and Elizaveta*): Decidedly the clergy must be given the right to preach freely, otherwise nothing will come of it.

(GLAPHIRA *and* SHURA *come in, supporting* YEGOR BULYCHOV. *Silence falls in the room. They all watch him. He frowns.*)

BULYCHOV: Well? What have you shut up for all of a sudden? You've been jabbering and muttering. . . .

FATHER PAVLIN: We're astounded by the unexpected sight. . . .

BULYCHOV: Of what?

FATHER PAVLIN: At the spectacle of a man being led. . . .

BULYCHOV: Being led? When a man's legs give way, he's got to be led, hasn't he? Being led, indeed! . . . Has Yashka Laptev been released, Mokei?

BASHKIN: Yes, all the prisoners have been released.

ZVONTZOV: The political prisoners, that is.

BULYCHOV: So Yakov Laptev's at liberty and the tsar's a prisoner? What do you say to that, Father Pavlin, eh?

FATHER PAVLIN: I am unversed in these matters, but in my humble opinion it would be well to ascertain first what precisely these persons intend to say and do....

BULYCHOV: Choose a new tsar, of course. You'll be at each other's throats if you don't have a tsar....

FATHER PAVLIN: Your face looks animated today; apparently you're overcoming your indisposition?

BULYCHOV: That's it—I'm overcoming it.... You, married couple, and you, Mokei, leave Pavlin and me alone for a while. You needn't go, Shurka.

(BASHKIN *goes into the hall. The* ZVONTZOVS *and* DOSTIGAYEVS *go upstairs. A minute or two later* VARVARA *comes halfway downstairs and listens.*)

SHURA: Lie down, father.

BULYCHOV: I don't want to. Well, Father Pavlin, you've come about the bell for the church, I suppose?

FATHER PAVLIN: No. I just called in the hope of seeing you in a better condition, and in this I was not mistaken. But, remembering your lavish and generous gifts in the past, devoted to the beautifying of the town and its temple....

BULYCHOV: You don't pray for me properly. You see—I'm getting worse. I don't feel like paying any more money to God. What am I paying for, anyway? I've paid a lot already and what have I got for it?

FATHER PAVLIN: Your donations....

BULYCHOV: Wait! I've a question to ask you: oughtn't God to be ashamed of Himself? What's he send death for?

SHURA: Oh, don't talk about death—please!

BULYCHOV: You keep quiet! You just listen. I'm not talking about myself.

FATHER PAVLIN: You should not distress yourself with thoughts like these. What does death matter, when the soul is immortal?

BULYCHOV: Then why is it squeezed into a dirty, cramping flesh?

FATHER PAVLIN: The Church considers this question not only vain and idle, but ... er....

(VARVARA, *on the stairs, presses her handkerchief to her lips to stifle her laughter.*)

BULYCHOV: Don't hum and haw! Tell us straight out. Shura, d'you remember the trumpeter, eh?

FATHER PAVLIN: In the presence of Alexandra Yegorovna....

BULYCHOV: Oh, never mind that! If she's got to live, she's got to know. I've lived a pretty long time and now I'm asking you: what do you live for?

FATHER PAVLIN: I'm in the service of the Church....

BULYCHOV: I know that, I know you're in the service of the Church! But you'll have to die sooner or later, won't you? What does it mean? What is it—this death of ours, Pavlin?

FATHER PAVLIN: Your questions are illogical and fruitless. And forgive me—but it's not of earthly things you should be thinking now....

SHURA: How dare you say that!

BULYCHOV: I'm of the earth—I'm earthly through and through.

FATHER PAVLIN (*rising*): The earth is but dust and ashes....

BULYCHOV: Dust and ashes! Then you're a da ... then you yourself must realize that the earth is only dust and ashes. Dust and ashes—yet you're wearing a silk cassock. Dust and ashes—and a gilded cross! Dust and ashes—and yet you're greedy and grasping....

FATHER PAVLIN: You are perpetrating evil in the presence of this young maiden....

BULYCHOV: Maiden, maiden—who made her.... (*Varvara runs quickly upstairs.*) They train fools like you same as they train dogs to chase hares.... You've grown rich on Christ the beggar.

FATHER PAVLIN: Your disease spoils your temper and, being enraged, you bellow like a wild boar....

BULYCHOV: So you're going, eh? Aha....

(*Exit* FATHER PAVLIN.)

SHURA: You shouldn't upset yourself, father, it only makes you worse. How restless you are!

BULYCHOV: Never mind! I've nothing to regret! Ugh, I can't stand that priest! You keep your ears and eyes open. I'm doing this on purpose....

SHURA: I can see it all myself.... I'm not a child ... or a fool!

(ZVONTZOV *appears on the stairs.*)

BULYCHOV: After that trumpeter, they've decided I've gone crazy, but the doctors gave 'em the lie! You believe the doctors, Shura, don't you?

SHURA: I believe you ... only you....

BULYCHOV: Good girl! No fear, my mind's all right. The doctors know. It's true, I've come up against something sharp. But everyone would like to know what death means.... Or, for instance, life? See?

SHURA: I don't believe you're seriously ill. You ought to go away from home. Glaphira's right! You should take a cure in earnest. You won't listen to anyone.

BULYCHOV: I listen to everyone. Now we'll try the witch doctor. What if she were to do me good? It's about time she was here. The pain's gnawing at me ... like ... an awful yearning!

SHURA: Stop, dear! Oh don't—my own dear, dear father! Lie down, do....

BULYCHOV: It's worse when I lie down. That means giving in. Same as in boxing. And—I want to talk. I've got to tell you something. You see—it's like this—I'm living in the wrong street! I fell in among a lot of strangers ... thirty years now I've been among strangers. And I don't want this to happen to you! My father used to float rafts. And I—look at me.... I can't explain it to you.

SHURA: Take your time, talk quietly.... Talk like you did when you used to tell me stories.

BULYCHOV: They weren't stories—I always told you the truth. D'you see.... These priests and tsars and governors ... what the devil do I want with them? I don't believe in God. How can there be a God? You see yourself.... And there are no good people either. They're as scarce as ... as false coin! You see what people are like? Now they've got themselves into a mess with the blessed war—gone clean crazy! But what have I to do with them? What does Yegor Bulychov want with them? And you ... now, how are you going to live with them?

SHURA: Don't you worry about me....

XENIYA (*coming in at this moment*): 'Lexandra, Tonya and her brother have come to see you, with that other fellow....

SHURA: Let 'em wait.

XENIYA: You go along. I've got to talk to your father.

BULYCHOV: Have I got to?

SHURA: See that you don't talk much then....

XENIYA: Teaching me! The idea! Yegor Vassilievich, Zobunova's come....

BULYCHOV: Shurka, bring the young folks in here afterwards—will you? (*Exit Shura.*) Well, fetch your Zobunova!

XENIYA: In a minute. I want to tell you that 'Lexandra's got very friendly with that good-for-nothing cousin of Andrei's. You must see yourself he's no match for her. We took in one beggar, and now look at the way he orders everyone about.

BULYCHOV: Do you know, Axiniya, you're like a bad dream—you really are!

XENIYA: Go on, insult me if you want to! But you ought to forbid her carrying on with that Tyatin.

BULYCHOV: Anything else?

XENIYA: Melaniya's staying here....

BULYCHOV: What for?

XENIYA: She's in trouble. Deserters attacked the nunnery, killed a cow, stole two axes, a spade and a coil of rope.... Terrible goings-on, I declare! And Donat, that forester of ours—he's sheltering some queer characters. They're living in a lumber barrack....

BULYCHOV: It seems when anyone is agreeable to me, he's sure to be disagreeable to everyone else.

XENIYA: You ought to make your peace with her....

BULYCHOV: With Melaniya? What for?

XENIYA: Why, of course you should.... Your health you know....

BULYCHOV: All right.... I'll make it up then.... "And forgive us our debts"—I'll say to her....

XENIYA: Be kind to her.... (*Goes out.*)

BULYCHOV (*mutters*): "And forgive us our debts—as we forgive our debtors." Lies all around.... What devils.... (*Varvara comes in.*)

VARVARA: Father, I heard mother talking to you about Stepan Tyatin....

BULYCHOV: Yes.... You hear everything, you know everything....

VARVARA: Tyatin's a modest fellow, he wouldn't demand a big dowry with Alexandra and he's a good match for her.

BULYCHOV: Considerate, aren't you....

VARVARA: I've had my eye on him....

BULYCHOV: Who is it you're so anxious about? Ugh, what a crew!

(ABBESS MELANIYA *and* XENIYA *come in, followed by* TAISSYA, *who remains in the doorway.*)

Well, Malasha. Let's make up, what?

ABBESS MELANIYA: That's better. A real firebrand! Insulting everybody without rhyme or reason....

BULYCHOV: "And forgive us our debts".... Malasha!

ABBESS MELANIYA: We aren't discussing debts. No more of your mischief! Look at what's going on in the world! The tsar— the Lord's Anointed —cast down from his throne. D'you know what that means? The Lord has plunged His flock into darkness and confusion; they have gone mad, they are digging pits beneath their own feet. The rabble is in revolt. The peasant women at Kopossovo screamed in my face that they, forsooth, were the people: "Our husbands, the soldiers, are the people!" How do you like that? Did you ever hear of soldiers being regarded as people?

XENIYA: That's what that Yakov Laptev keeps saying....

ABBESS MELANIYA: The provincial governor has been divested of his power and Osmolovsky, the notary, set up in his place.

BULYCHOV: Another fat belly.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Yesterday Bishop Nikander said: "We're on the eve of calamitous events: can it be," he said, "that the temporal powers shall rule? From Biblical times the peoples have been ruled by the hand armed with the sword and the cross...."

VARVARA: They didn't worship the cross in Biblical times.

ABBESS MELANIYA: You hold your tongue, Miss Clever.... The New Testament and the Old are both in one binding, aren't they? And the cross is the sword! So there you are! The Bishop knows better than you, I hope, when and what was worshipped. You're an ambitious lot and you rejoice at the downfall of the throne. Mind your joy does not turn to bitter tears. I'd like to have a word with you in private, Yegorushka....

BULYCHOV: Won't we come to loggerheads again? Very well, we can have a chat, but afterwards. The healer woman's coming in now. I want to get well, Malasha.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Zobunova's a famous healer. The doctors are nowhere near as clever as she is. And after that you might talk to the Blessed Prokopii....

BULYCHOV: What, the fellow the urchins call Propottei? He's a rogue, I've heard say.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Now, now, that'll do! How can you say such things? You have him come in here....

BULYCHOV: Well, let's have Propottei, too. I feel a bit better today, except for my legs.... More cheerful, sort of. Everything seems kind of funny to me.... Call in the witch doctor. Axiniya.

(XENIYA *goes out.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: Ah, Yegori, there's a lot ... left in you yet!

BULYCHOV: That's just the point ... quite a lot....

XENIYA (*returns*): She says everyone must leave the room.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Well, let us go, then.

(*They all leave the room.* BULYCHOV *sits chuckling, stroking his chest and side.* ZOBUNOVA *comes in. She twists her mouth—not very noticeably but just enough to be detected—and blows to the right side, while her right hand is pressed against her heart and she flaps her left hand like the fin of a fish. Then she stands still and passes her right hand over her face.*)

BULYCHOV: What you doing—praying to the devils?

ZOBUNOVA (*in a singsong voice*): Oi, all ye evil humours, and bodily ills! Begone, begone and leave the servant of God in peace! From this very day and from this very hour. I'm driving you away with my hard words forever and ever and aye! Good evening to your worshipful honour, by name Yegori!

BULYCHOV: Good evening, auntie.... Were you chasing the devil away?

ZOBUNOVA: Goodness dear, no—how can anyone have anything to do with them?

BULYCHOV: You can if you've got to. The priests pray to God, but you're not a priest, so you must pray to the devils.

ZOBUNOVA: Oh, what awful things you say! It's only silly folks as say I've any dealings with the Evil One.

BULYCHOV: If you haven't you won't be able to do anything for me, auntie. The priests have prayed to God for me, and God has refused to help me.

ZOBUNOVA: You must be joking, dear man, you're saying this because you don't believe me.

BULYCHOV: I might have believed you if you'd come straight from the devils. But you're sure to have heard, of course, that I'm a rake, that I'm harsh with people and greedy about money....

ZOBUNOVA: I've heard it, but I don't believe you'd grudge giving me a little bit o'your good money.

BULYCHOV: I'm a great sinner, auntie, and God won't have anything to do with me. God's forsaken Yegor Bulychov. So, if you're not friendly with the devils you'd better go and do abortions for the country wenches. That's your trade, isn't it?

ZOBUNOVA: Aye, it's true words they speak that says you're an aggressive, turbulent man!

BULYCHOV: Well, what lies were you going to tell? Out with them!

ZOBUNOVA: I've never been taught to lie. You tell me what pains have you got, and where.

BULYCHOV: It's my belly. It hurts hard. Just here.

ZOBUNOVA: Well, you see it's like this ... only don't you breathe a word to anyone of what I say....

BULYCHOV: I won't. Don't be afraid.

ZOBUNOVA: There are yellow sicknesses and black sicknesses. A yellow sickness can be cured even by a doctor, but the black sickness neither priest nor monk can pray away! The black sickness comes from the powers of evil and there's only one remedy for it....

BULYCHOV: Ah?—A case of either kill or cure, is that it?

ZOBUNOVA: It's a very expensive remedy.

BULYCHOV: Of course! I guessed that.

ZOBUNOVA: This is a case where you have to have dealings with the Evil One.

BULYCHOV: With Satan himself?

ZOBUNOVA: Well, not directly with him, but still....

BULYCHOV: And can you do it?

ZOBUNOVA: Only—you mustn't breathe a word of it to anyone.

BULYCHOV: Oh, get the hell out of here!

ZOBUNOVA: Wait a minute. . . .

BULYCHOV: Clear out, else I'll give you one. . . .

ZOBUNOVA: Listen to me. . . .

GLAPHIRA (*from the hall*): You've been told to go, haven't you?

ZOBUNOVA: What's the matter with you people? . . .

BULYCHOV: Kick her out!

GLAPHIRA: Clear out you—pretending you're a witch!

ZOBUNOVA: Witch yourself! Look at that mug o' yours. . . . Oh, you. . . . May the two of you have neither sleep nor rest! (*The two women go out.*)

BULYCHOV (*glancing about, gives a sigh of relief*): Phe-ew!

(ABBESS MELANIYA *and* XENIYA *come in.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: Didn't you like Zobunova—didn't she suit you?

(BULYCHOV *stares at her in silence.*)

XENIYA: She's a quick-tempered one herself! She's been over-praised, and has grown conceited.

BULYCHOV: Malasha—what do you think—does God ever have bellyaches?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Don't act the fool, you. . . .

BULYCHOV: I'm sure Christ often had bellyaches—he lived on fish. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: Stop it, Yegor. Are you trying to provoke me?

(GLAPHIRA *returns.*)

GLAPHIRA: Zobunova wants to be paid for her trouble.

BULYCHOV: Give her something, Axiniya! Excuse me, Malasha, but I'm tired—I'll go to my room. Nothing makes you so tired as talking to fools. Now then, Glakha, lend a hand here. . . .

(XENIYA *exits.*)

(GLAPHIRA *leads him away.* XENIYA *returns and looks enquiringly at her sister.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: He's pretending to be mad. It's all pretence.

XENIYA: You think so? I have my doubts. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: It doesn't matter. Let him amuse himself. It'll turn against him afterwards, if his will has to be contested in court,

Taissya will be a witness, and then there's Zobunova, Father Pavlin and that trumpeter—any number of people. We can prove that the man was not in his right mind when he made the will.

XENIYA: Oh . . . I really don't know what to do. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: Well, I'm teaching you what to do. Umph, you . . . you were in such a hurry to get married! I told you to marry Bashkin.

XENIYA: But that was ages ago! And Yegor was like an eagle—you envied me yourself.

ABBESS MELANIYA: I? Are you cracked, woman?

XENIYA: Ah well, what's the use of casting things up at each other now. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: Mercy on us! I envied her, she says! I?

XENIYA: How about Prokopii? Perhaps we shouldn't call him in?

ABBESS MELANIYA: Why not? We sent for him, we agreed on it and then all of a sudden—you don't want him! Don't you interfere. Go and get him ready and bring him in. Taissya! (*Taissya comes in from the hall.*) Well?

TAISSYA: I couldn't find out anything. (*Xeniya leaves the room.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: Why?

TAISSYA: She won't say anything.

ABBESS MELANIYA: What do you mean, she won't say anything? You ought to have got it out of her.

TAISSYA: I tried to, but she only splutters like a cat—swears at everybody.

ABBESS MELANIYA: What does she say?

TAISSYA: Calls them all crooks.

ABBESS MELANIYA: Why?

TAISSYA: She says you only want to drive the man crazy.

ABBESS MELANIYA: She said that to you?

TAISSYA: No, to Propottei the Blessed.

ABBESS MELANIYA: And what does he say?

TAISSYA: He just sat there, saying funny things. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: Funny things? You ninny, you! The holy man was soothsaying, you fool! Sit down in the hall and don't stir from there. . . . Was there anyone else in the kitchen?

TAISSYA: Mokei was there. . . .

ABBESS MELANIYA: Well, go along now.... (*Goes up to Bulychov's door and knocks*). Yegori, the Blessed Prokopii's here.

(XENIYA *and* BASHKIN *conduct the* BLESSED PROPOTTEI *into the room. He wears bast sandals, a long unbleached linen shirt that reaches to his ankles, and numerous brass crosses and small icons on his chest. His appearance is rather awe-inspiring: his hair is thick and matted, his beard long, narrow and straggling. his movements are convulsive and jerky.*)

PROPOTTEI: Ugh, what a stink of tobacco smoke! It'd smother your very soul....

XENIYA: Nobody smokes here, father....

(PROPOTTEI *imitates the howling of a winter's wind.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: Here, wait till he comes out....

BULYCHOV (*led out of his bedroom by Glaphira*): Look at him.... So here he is!

PROPOTTEI: Be not afraid! Fear not! (*Gives an imitation of the wind.*) All is ashes, all must pass! Grisha climbed the ladder, climbed and came a cropper and was dragged away by Lucifer.

BULYCHOV: He means Rasputin, I suppose?

PROPOTTEI: The tsar is dethroned, and the kingdom is perishing, for sin, death and stinking foulness now reign! Oo-oh! the blizzard howls, the tempest roars. (*Imitates the wind. Points to Glaphira with his staff.*) The Devil in the shape of a woman is close beside you. Drive her away!

BULYCHOV: I'll drive you away! Don't let your tongue run away with you. Was it you, Melaniya, put him up to this?

ABBESS MELANIYA: What will you be saying next? Can the mad be taught?

BULYCHOV: Looks as if they can....

(SHURA *comes running downstairs followed by* ANTONINA *and* TYATIN. *Then the* ZVONTZOVS *and the* DOSTIGAYEVS *come down.* PROPOTTEI *draws signs on the floor and in the air with his staff, but says nothing. Stands thoughtfully with bent head.*)

SHURA (*running up to her father*): What's all this about? What kind of a show is it?

ABBESS MELANIYA: You hold your tongue!

PROPOTTEI (*as if speaking with difficulty*): No sleep for the heretic, and the clock goes, tick, tick-tock! If but God ... and I a clod... 'twere right he trod... aye, aye! An evil choice, Satan rejoice, thou hast full voice! Midnight strikes, the cock crows, cock-a-doodle-doo!... Tick, tock, tock—tick... here's the end of a heretic!

BULYCHOV: Not bad! They've put you through your paces nicely....

ABBESS MELANIYA: Don't interrupt, Yegor, don't interrupt!

PROPOTTEI: What shall we do? What shall we tell people?

ANTONINA (*regretfully*): Oh, but he isn't a bit terrible!

PROPOTTEI: They've killed a nit and buried it.... But maybe we ought to dance? Come on then, let's dance, here goes the high jinks! (*Stamps his feet, humming softly at first, then louder and cuts capers.*) Astaroth, Sabatan, Askafat, Idumize, Neverwise.... If you can't you're done, Kara tilli—boom, boom, knock your head against the tomb! Heigh... piff, biff—what do you sniff? Hokey pokey, ain't it smoky! Satan's a-playing with his prey, oh yea, oh aye, he's all on his own, in the world all alone! Zakatama the witch got him in her loins, the bitch! He can't get away from sin and lechery! Yegorro it's plain was born for pain....

SHURA (*screaming*): Oh! Drive him away!

BULYCHOV: So you—want to frighten me, damn you!

ZVONTZOV: This disgusting scene ought to be stopped....

(GLAPHIRA *runs up to* PROPOTTEI, *whereupon he, without pausing in his gyrations, brandishes his stick at her.*)

PROPOTTEI: Hic, heck, hoc, hack! Evil spirit, turn your back!

(TYATIN *snatches the stick from* PROPOTTEI.)

ABBESS MELANIYA: What are you doing? Who d'you think you are?

SHURA: Father, send them all away.... Why do you sit and say nothing?

BULYCHOV (*with an impatient gesture*): Wait ... wait.

(PROPOTTEI *sits down on the floor, howling and screeching.*)

ABBESS MELANIYA: You mustn't touch him! He's in a trance, in an ecstasy!

DOSTIGAYEV: For going into ecstasies like that, Mother Melaniya, he should get it in the neck.

ZVONTZOV: Get up! Clear out—quick now!

PROPOTTEI: Eh ... where? (*Imitates a howling wind.*)

(XENIYA *begins to cry.*)

ELIZAVETA: Doesn't he do that well ... sounds like a duet!

BULYCHOV: Get out of here, all of you.... You've done enough gaping here....

SHURA (*stamping her foot at the half-wit*): Go away, you monster! Styopa, chase him out!

TYATIN (*taking Propottei by the scruff of his neck*): Come along, holy man, get up! (*Both exit.*)

TAISSYA: He wasn't so dreadful today. He's much more terrifying than that—if he'd been given a drop of vodka....

ABBESS MELANIYA: Who asked you to speak? (*Gives the girl a smack in the face.*)

ZVONTZOV: You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

ABBESS MELANIYA: What? Before you?

VARVARA: Calm yourself, auntie....

XENIYA: Heavens above! ... Goodness gracious!

(SHURA *and* GLAPHIRA *assist* BULYCHOV *to the couch.* DOSTIGAYEV *stands looking at him closely. The* ZVONTZOVS *lead away* XENIYA *and* ABBESS MELANIYA.)

DOSTIGAYEV (*to his wife*): Let's go home, Liza, let's go home. Bulychov's in a bad way. Very bad. And there's the demonstration.... We ought to join it.

ELIZAVETA: Wasn't it wonderful, the way he imitated the wind? I could never have imagined it....

BULYCHOV (*to Shura*): That's all the Abbess' doings....

SHURA: Are you feeling bad?

BULYCHOV: She ... a sort of burial service ... over a living man....

SHURA: Tell me ... are you feeling worse? Shall I send for the doctor?

BULYCHOV: No, you needn't. He put that in himself—the clown—that bit about the kingdom.... "If but God, and I a clod"... you heard him?

SHURA: You must forget all this....

BULYCHOV: We'll forget it, all right! Go and have a look what they're doing.... See they don't do Glaphira any harm.... What's all that singing in the street?

SHURA: You mustn't get up!

BULYCHOV: And it'll perish—the kingdom where everything's foul ...I can't see anything.... (*Rises, and clinging to the table with one hand, rubs his eyes.*) "Thy kingdom come!"... What kingdom? Beasts! Kingdom.... "Our Father, which art...." No... that's no good. What sort of a father are you to me, if you've condemned me to death? What for? Everyone dies? But why? Well, let them—but why should I? (*Sways.*) Well? What is it, Yegor? (*Shouts hoarsely.*) Shura ... Glakha ... the doctor! Hey, somebody—devils! Yegor ... Bulychov ... Yegor!

(SHURA, GLAPHIRA, TYATIN *and* TAISSYA *run to* BULYCHOV *who sways and almost falls as he tries to reach them. The singing outside grows louder.* GLAPHIRA *and* TYATIN *support* BULYCHOV. SHURA *darts over to the window and throws it open. The singing bursts into the room.*)

BULYCHOV: What's that? The burial service—again—singing me out of the world! Shura! Who is it?

SHURA: Come over here, come on and look!

BULYCHOV: Ah, Shura....

(CURTAIN.)

ERRATA.

Page	Line	Reads	Should Read
111	first line from top omitted	..	"So you want to work here, you say?" said Malva, breaking the silence.
334	8 line from top	At midnight on...	At midnight an...
354	10 line from bottom	ever go the the...	ever go to the...

М. ГОРЬКИЙ

ИЗБРАННЫЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ

Том I

На английском языке

№ 9113. Подписано к печати 11/I 1948 года
Тираж 10.000. Формат 60×92¼16 Объем
13¾ п. л. Уч.-изд. л. 42,14. Заказ 830.
Цена 30 руб.

Типография «Искра революции». Москва.

लाल बहादुर शास्त्री राष्ट्रीय प्रशासन अकादमी, पुस्तकालय
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Library
मसूरी
MUSSOORIE.

यह पुस्तक निम्नांकित तारीख तक वापिस करनी है।
This book is to be returned on the date last stamped.

दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.	दिनांक Date	उधारकर्ता की संख्या Borrower's No.

112776

391.7
Gor
वर्ग संख्या
Class No.

प्रवाप्ति संख्या 17090
Acc. No.
पुस्तक संख्या
Book No.

लेखक Gorky, M
Author

शीर्षक Selected works.
Title

891.7
Gor

17090

LIBRARY
LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI
National Academy of Administration
MUSSOORIE

Accession No. 112776

1. Books are issued for 15 days only but may have to be recalled earlier if urgently required.
2. An over-due charge of 25 Paise per day per volume will be charged.
3. Books may be renewed on request, at the discretion of the Librarian.
4. Periodicals, Rare and Refrence books may not be issued and may be consulted only in the Library.
5. Books lost, defaced or injured in any way shall have to be replaced or its